

# UKRAINE IS NOT SILENT:

CHRONICLES  
OF FIGHTING AGAINST  
WAR-RELATED SEXUAL  
VIOLENCE  
(2022–2024)

When we are together,  
it is easier for us to understand  
and help each other.

Each the global community and our society  
must be aware of what the Russian  
occupiers have been doing on our land  
since 2014.

We are ready  
to support other  
CRSV survivors.

If a person fell into those conditions  
of captivity for just one day,  
she/he will remember that day for  
the rest of her/his life.

Ukraine  
cannot afford  
to stay silent.

to break  
...psychologically.

...to overcome  
...of distrust.

**ФРОНТИР**

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**UKRAINE  
IS NOT SILENT:**

**CHRONICLES  
OF FIGHTING AGAINST  
WAR-RELATED SEXUAL  
VIOLENCE  
(2022–2024)**

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## FOREWORD

Since the beginning of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, the entire world witnessed Russia's unprecedented cruelty and complete disregard for international law. Russian troops destroy entire cities and villages, kill entire families, abuse and torture Ukrainian civilians and prisoners of war. Among the most terrible crimes of this genocidal war is war-related gender-based and sexual violence, which Russia has been using since the very beginning of the armed aggression against our country—since 2014.

Crimes of gender-based and sexual violence are part of Russia's military strategy aimed at demoralizing Ukrainians. They try to break our spirit and our will to fight. Among the survivors are women and men of various ages and even children. We still do not know the exact number of survivors—both due to fear of stigma and unwillingness to talk about these experiences, and because many of them remain under Russian occupation.

It is important to remember that acts of war-related gender-based and sexual violence constitute international crimes that do not have a statute of limitations. This means that survivors can report what they experienced

at any point when they are ready. However, we are also aware that survivors already need help. Our joint duty is to provide timely, necessary, and comprehensive support and work for the restoration of justice and the establishment of peace.

That is why Ukraine, together with international partners, has created a comprehensive coordination mechanism to combat war-related gender-based and sexual violence. The response mechanism combines work on effective investigation and documentation of crimes and comprehensive assistance to survivors, including interim immediate reparations. An important step towards this goal was the signing of the Framework on Cooperation between the Government of Ukraine and the United Nations on prevention and response to conflict-related sexual violence and the development of the relevant Implementation Plan.

Action must be taken immediately.

Were we ready for this kind of work from the very start of the full-scale Russian invasion? I would say, yes and no. On the one hand, Ukraine already had quite a lot of experience with effective response to gender-based violence, including sexual violence. A lot has been accomplished to overcome the issue of domestic violence: we have developed laws that provide for accountability for violence and for its prevention as well as assistance to survivors; there are mechanisms for interaction with international and non-governmental organizations. However, war-related gender-based and sexual violence is a special kind of violence that is not only directed at one person, but that affects entire communities and society as a whole.

A significant point in this context is that on July 18, 2022, the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence (the Istanbul Convention) was ratified in Ukraine. It was the first time in history that a state undertook obligations under such an important Convention in wartime. This step was part of our fight for the same values for which we are fighting on the frontline, claiming our independence.

In order to provide comprehensive assistance to survivors, a network of relief centers was established with the support of international partners. These centers provide a full range of services, including psychological, social, and legal aid. In order to guarantee access to services to everyone who needs support, we also established a Platform for Assistance to Survivors—the first and only online platform in Ukraine with full information on all the main services assisting people affected by the war.

An equally important question is the restoration of justice through the punishment of all perpetrators of war-related gender-based and sexual violence and ensuring reparations to survivors. Every perpetrator must clearly understand that he or she will inevitably be held accountable under international law, whatever form such accountability takes. Inevitable punishment for crimes of gender-based violence should become one of the basic and inherent elements of international security and maintaining peace. Ukraine is actively working with partners to ensure that all those who issued criminal orders or committed these terrible crimes receives appropriate punishment. As for reparations, while this is the primary responsibility of

the Russian Federation, Ukraine also has an obligation to provide survivors with access to reparations. Therefore, the Government, together with international and civil society partners, is also working to implement an interim reparations mechanism for survivors of war-related sexual violence, which will serve as the first step to provide full reparations and remedy mechanisms.

This book is about all these steps taken and experience acquired. Of course, this work continues, expands and improves. For instance, already when the book was nearing completion, the implementation of the Pilot Project on urgent interim reparations for survivors of war-related sexual violence began, which is implemented with the support of the Global Fund for Survivors of Violence. The international Register of Damage is already functioning in The Hague, working on the development of an international compensation mechanism. We hope that in the future, the Compensation Fund, which will manage the payment of reparations, will be filled with the money of the aggressor country, Russia, required to fulfill its international obligations. We understand perfectly that this can take years. And the survivors need reparations now. Therefore, through the Pilot Project, we focused on creating a national registration system for survivors of war-related sexual violence. Our goal is to create a system that will consider both the experience of other countries and the position of the survivors and will be adapted to the Ukrainian context. This project also already serves as an example of successful cooperation among various stakeholders for rapid response to the needs of survivors.

All our efforts are aimed at creating conditions under which survivors will have faith in justice. If Russia, its political and military leadership, as well as “regular people” who committed heinous crimes are not held liable for their actions, it is impossible to achieve justice. We are obliged to ensure that such crimes do not happen again, and to set an example for others.

*Deputy Prime Minister  
for European and Euro-Atlantic  
Integration  
Olha STEFANISHYNA*

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For more than ten years, Ukraine has been undergoing a war begun by Russia, a country that seeks to bring our country back into the shackles of its empire and to destroy our identity. This is a cruel war with two worlds facing off—a democratic one that our country is building, and a totalitarian one maintained by the aggressor country. This is a fight between two worldviews, two civilizations. This war is part of the strategic plans of Russia's insane leaders and satellite countries about a new world order built on principles of force, fear, humiliation, deceit, bribery, manipulations, and violence. A war that can end only when Russia is defeated. Otherwise, there can be no peace either in our part of the world, or globally. Yet the war continues ... and we must fight and live, defend ourselves and restore that which was destroyed, learn to live with pain and overcome traumas caused by aggression. Not only houses and cities are damaged, also human bodies and souls.

In this book, we collected 25 interviews about crimes of conflict-related gender-based and sexual violence (CRSV) that were and still are committed by the Russian military on the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine, not unlike the devastating actions of militants and armed

groups in Colombia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Cambodia, Syria, Mali, and other countries. In these interviews, we speak with various professionals about their experiences in meeting and overcoming difficulties and challenges in this context. We share these experiences to show how Ukrainian men and women survive, how they fight the most terrible challenges of the armed conflict begun by Russia, how they work under extreme conditions and help survivors of violence.

Ukraine is able to fight against CRSV thanks to its state policy, the efforts of civil society organizations, and cooperation with international structures on our side.

The interviews cover these subjects:

- The Deputy Prime Minister Olha STEFANISHYNA spoke about the formation of a state policy on countering CRSV and helping survivors of these crimes.

- The Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the United Nations Serhii Kyslytsia explained the role of this major international structure in combating sexual violence as a weapon of war that the Russian aggressor is using *en masse* against the Ukrainian population to subjugate it, and about the role of Ukrainian diplomacy that is effectively using the capabilities of the United Nations both to provide humanitarian aid and to ensure monitoring of the situation with violations of human rights and international humanitarian law.

- The Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs of Ukraine, Kateryna Pavlichenko, shared the facts regarding the investigation of criminal proceedings in cases involving CRSV crimes by the Russian occupiers.

- The head of the National Police of Ukraine, Ivan Vyhivskyy, introduced the work of special police mobile groups to identify criminal offenses against sexual integrity committed by Russian military personnel.

- The Representative of the Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights Mykhailo Spasov, who works on equal rights and freedoms, the rights of national minorities, freedom of political and religious views, spoke about the work of the Ukrainian Ombudsman aimed at restoring the rights of the affected, particularly by CRSV, restoring justice, and payment of interim reparations.

- The Head of the National Social Service of Ukraine Vasyl Lutsyk drew attention to social services provided to CRSV survivors and to the need to maintain their quality and alignment with international standards.

- Representatives of the Prosecutor General's Office—Head of the Department for Combating Crimes Committed in the Conditions of Armed Conflict Yurii Bielousov and Iryna Didenko, Head (in 2022–2023) of the Office for Procedural Support of Pre-Trial Investigation and Public Prosecution in Criminal Proceedings on Sexual Violence within this Department—commented on the nature of investigating war crimes, including CRSV.

- MP Maryna Bardina and Deputy Minister of Social Policy of Ukraine Uliana Tokarieva focused on draft laws developed for the legislative regulation of combating CRSV issues in Ukraine and the provisions they propose to establish the status of CRSV survivors and ensure payment of reparations.

- The Head of the National Agency of Ukraine for Civil Service Nataliia Aliushyna and the Director of the

Higher School of Public Administration Yuliia Lykhach detailed the specifics of instructing public servants how to respond to the challenges of the Russia-Ukraine war, particularly CRSV, how to contact and assist survivors; they also mentioned the new requirements to civil servants and local officials during wartime.

- UN Women in Ukraine representative Sabine Gunes Frazier, the Executive Director of the Global Survivors Fund Esther Dingemans, the Executive Director of the Dr. Denis Mukwege Fund Kathrin Coppens focused on humanitarian aid provided to Ukraine by international structures.

- Country Representative of the UN Population Fund (in 2019–2023) Jaime Nadal and his deputies Mustafa Elkanzi and Pavlo Zamostian, as well as the Fund’s project coordinator Nina Lompart drew attention to the work of Relief Funds for Survivors and the Aurora online platform.

- A joint representative of the Dr. Denis Mukwege Foundation and the Global Survivors Fund in Ukraine Fedir Dunebabin shared his vision of how the modern system of assistance to survivors should function.

- The Director for Strategic Development of the Ukrainian Women’s Fund Nataliia Karbowska, representatives of La Strada-Ukraine NGO—President Kateryna Cherepakha, Vice President Maryna Lehenka—as well as founder of the Information and Advisory Women’s Center Olena Suslova presented the activity of non-governmental structures aimed at supporting CRSV survivors, and the Director of the National Hotlines and Social Assistance Department of La Strada-Ukraine Aliona Kryvuliak shared her experience of working with CRSV survivors.

- The Head of the Association of Women Lawyers of Ukraine JurFem Khrystyna Kit and the advisor to the Deputy Prime Minister on European and Euro-Atlantic Integration, Olena Sotnyk, shared the prospects of work on providing compensation and reparations to CRSV survivors. Following up on this, Deputy Minister of Justice (and now Deputy Head of the Office of the President of Ukraine) Iryna Mudra spoke about the concept of establishing an international compensation mechanism and reported the start of operation of the international Register of Damage caused by the Russian aggression to Ukraine, its citizens, and business.

- Iryna Dovhan, Liudmyla Huseynova, Oleksii Sivak and Andrii, who suffered from violence by the Russian occupiers, explained how they returned to their lives and how they became public activists.

The participants of the interviews did not disregard the difficulties that confronted us. Most often, the obstacles were objective, but there were also those that were caused by certain circumstances and people. We had to learn how to help the survivors properly. It is one thing to work with specific cases of brutality and violence, including sexual violence, and an entirely different matter to overcome the consequences of the horrible phenomenon of CRSV.

During the more than two years of Russia's full-scale aggression, Ukraine gained a great deal of experience with combating CRSV and helping survivors. We are ready to share this experience with interested individuals, as well as with countries who underwent or are still undergoing conflicts and encounter these

crimes. We are ready to put our experience towards the establishment of an updated system of global security, its modernization and development. Therefore, we decided to compile these interviews into a book.

We are convinced that this book will have practical value for those who are helping CRSV survivors to receive due compensations and have access to justice, for those who develop public policies, draft and adopt new laws on these issues. But first and foremost, this collection is important for survivors themselves, for their validation! While this book does not answer every question, it offers an idea of who can provide support and how to find a way out of seemingly untenable situations.

The book will be indispensable for Ukrainian society in the formation of its understanding of CRSV and how to support survivors. This book is also oriented towards the international community, which must be made aware of the crimes committed by Putin's Russia on occupied Ukrainian lands, with disregard for internationally recognized laws, for the laws and customs of war, and for the rules of treatment of civilians and prisoners of war.

We know that the issues that we undertook are difficult and will require much time and effort. However, we are ready.

*Government Commissioner of Ukraine  
for Gender Policy  
Kateryna LEVCHENKO*

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**Resilient Together!** This is not only the name of the project, but also the project philosophy. War-related sexual violence is a weapon that the Russians are using against us. Support for CRSV survivors is a major component of the fight against the Russian aggressor. We can only fight together: NGOs, government agencies, the media, loved ones of the survivors.

At the start of Russia's full-scale aggression against Ukraine, society rallied to undertake the serious challenges and issues posed by the war. We understood that we are all working towards a common goal, and our energy determines whether we will succeed.

Understanding this challenge, Ukrainian Women's Fund launched the project "Resilient Together. Improving the system of response to the conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV)."

This was the logical step. We started receiving information about widespread cases of CRSV committed by the Russian military on the temporarily occupied territories, and we had to act. Survivors turned to women's NGOs, shared their stories, and asked for help. We looked for ways to help them. And we found support in the EU,

where partners quickly responded to the idea of creating the project and provided an opportunity to implement it on flexible terms: make changes, adjust our approaches, and adopt them to the current Ukrainian context.

The main task of the project is to create a system of cooperation between civil society, government bodies of various levels and international organizations and to propose systemic solutions to effectively respond to CRSV. In our work, we immediately received significant support from the Government of Ukraine, in particular from the Deputy Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration Olha STEFANISHYNA, as well as Government Commissioner for Gender Policy Kateryna LEVCHENKO, and this support tremendously helped us with project implementation.

We implemented the project together with two other NGOs that work on the issues of gender-based violence overall and particularly conflict-related sexual violence. These organizations are La Strada-Ukraine and the Association of Women Lawyers of Ukraine JurFem. Each has its own knowledge, experience, and focus.

JurFem professionally works on the development of public policies, conducts information campaigns with lawyers to train them to work with CRSV cases.

La Strada-Ukraine has developed methodologies for training representatives of authorities at various levels who work with cases of war-related sexual violence and gender-based violence in general. They integrated their course into the training program of the School of Judges—that is superb! They also developed training courses for social workers, police officers, medical workers, that is, those who encounter CRSV survivors first in the regions.

This training groundwork was then continued by the Ukrainian Women’s Fund—we work a great deal with the regions, we have broad partner networks there, and we used them to localize the CRSV response mechanisms. Such mechanisms cannot and should not be identical for everyone. Local civil society organizations, together with government agencies, develop response mechanisms that are aligned to their context.

The educational component of our project is crucial. The subject of CRSV is a major taboo, the survivors are reluctant to speak about their experiences and rarely turn to government agencies. However, small NGOs in the regions enjoy more trust—they are like neighbors with whom you can share your problems and ask for advice. That is why these structures should know more about the subject of CRSV, its peculiarities, and what government systems already work in this sector so that they can better refer women.

The advocacy component of the project is equally significant. JurFem actively participates in the development of laws related to war-related sexual violence, particularly the one about interim immediate reparations. We focus on the implementation of policies so that government decisions regarding due response to CRSV and its consequences work more quickly and more effectively.

Another component is providing grants. Models of responding to CRSV cases in the regions should be not only developed, but also implemented. For this purpose, we provide grants to small NGOs and develop certain opportunities for them to become stronger. For example, we provided a grant for SEMA Ukraine, which unites

women who are CRSV survivors. This is a young structure that has yet to gain experience in practical work. But they are already doing highly necessary work, maintaining contact with survivors, consulting with them, assist them, turn to the authorities for help. In turn, we try to support SEMA, so survivors have more of a chance to be heard.

We should mention another vector of our work, which is studying international experience with combating CRSV and assisting survivors. As part of the project, we organized educational trips to the Balkans, where they also faced the issue of CRSV back in the day. We gathered representatives of public authorities and NGOs, both of national and regional levels. It was a very effective model. People not only studied the approaches of foreign colleagues to CRSV, but also got to know each other and established new partnerships.

The information component of the project is also of utmost importance. This concerns primarily the interviews with CRSV experts who were prepared within the project and then disseminated in national and local media. Every day, we hear that there is a catastrophic need for information and materials on CRSV for various groups—for those trying to manage their pain and for those who are helping the former go through their pain. These experts will also be in demand on the de-occupied territories—we are already preparing for such work in the future.

Collecting these interviews into one book is a very good idea. I believe that the book will serve as a good motivation for many people. For some, to support CRSV survivors better and more professionally. For others, to vote for the necessary laws. And maybe it will encourage someone to

tell their story, not only to receive help, but also to motivate other women and men who are staying silent so far.

We felt that during the project, people started learning more about CRSV and speaking out more. This is a positive outcome. My colleagues and I often remember that a growing number of identified cases of gender-based violence is not necessarily a bad result, as it means that the system started working better. There are a lot of hidden cases in this area. I think the situation with CRSV is the same: if we have more identified cases, it means that the system started identifying them. Because we know many remain hidden to this day.

The global security system is not working fully as of now. The system is outdated, ineffective for women, for men, and for countries in general. Time that it was updated. The subject of conflict-related sexual violence, Ukraine's experience with this issue should be a good impetus to start updating the global security system. And we can do it all together!

*Director for Strategic Development  
of the International Charitable Foundation  
"Ukrainian Women's Fund"*  
Nataliia KARBOWSKA

# INTERVIEWS



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Olha Stefanishyna

**SEXUAL VIOLENCE DURING  
CONFLICT IS A WAR CRIME  
THAT DOES NOT HAVE  
A STATUTE OF LIMITATION**

*The Russian aggressors are not only waging war against the Armed Forces of Ukraine, but also target the civilians of our country. In disregard of international humanitarian law, they actively employ heinous tactics that include sexual assault, incorporating such acts into their strategy to demoralize and humiliate Ukrainian society. Olha STEFANISHYNA, the Deputy Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration, discusses specific actions by the aggressor that have become widespread, the international community's response to such actions, and the assistance available for survivors of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV).*

**—Since the beginning of the large-scale war in late February 2022, Russia has been actively employing various instruments of hybrid warfare, including sexual violence against our fellow citizens. How significant is the problem now, and who is most affected?**

—With the commencement of the full-scale war, Ukraine and the entire world have witnessed unprecedented cruelty and disregard for international law by Russia. Over 68,000 war crimes by the Russian military have been documented already, with 171 cases of sexual violence

currently under investigation by the Prosecutor General's Office. These are cases where victims have been willing to testify, and we understand that the actual scale of these crimes is likely much larger, as hostilities continue, and we lack data on the situation in temporarily occupied territories. It is crucial to note that conflict-related sexual violence is a war crime without a statute of limitation, which allows survivors to report this crime at any time, whenever they are ready. Based on the experience of other countries, such a crime can be reported even 10 or 30 years later.

*“This marks a significant step for Ukraine in establishing a comprehensive coordination mechanism to address sexual violence. Our key focus areas include effective investigation and documentation of crimes, provision of comprehensive assistance to survivors, including reparations, strengthening capacity of professionals, and raising public awareness.”*

Despite the majority of violence, especially sexual violence, being committed against women and girls, there are no gender or age restrictions for Russian criminals. Women and men of all ages, as well as minors have all been affected. Immediately after the first incidents of such crimes committed by Russians were revealed, we initiated a unified response to violence together with our international partners, signing the Framework of Cooperation between the Government of Ukraine and the United Nations on the Prevention and Response to Conflict-Related Sexual Violence and developing an Implementation Plan. This

marks a significant step for Ukraine in establishing a comprehensive coordination mechanism to address sexual violence. Our key focus areas include effective investigation and documentation of crimes, provision of comprehensive assistance to survivors, including reparations, strengthening capacity of professionals, and raising public awareness.

*“Violence [against civilians] is an element of Russia’s military strategy to demoralize Ukrainians and break our spirit. From the first days of the invasion, they unleashed terror against the defenseless. We are actively collaborating with partners to ensure that everyone responsible for criminal orders or committed these horrific crimes faces due punishment.”*

**—During his speech in Warsaw, U.S. President Joe Biden stated that the Russian military is using rape as a weapon of war against Ukraine. Why do Russians resort to this? What are they trying to achieve?**

—I agree with President Biden. Violence [against civilians] is an element of Russia’s military strategy to demoralize Ukrainians and break our spirit. From the first days of the invasion, they unleashed terror against the defenseless. We are actively collaborating with partners to ensure that everyone responsible for criminal orders or committed these horrific crimes faces due punishment. This involves documenting crimes and engaging international instruments.

Ukraine recently co-chaired the newly created International Alliance on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict. Among the 13 countries that already joined

are Australia, Japan, the US and UAE; we expect more countries to join. The Alliance will strengthen cooperation and ultimately ensure Russia's accountability for all war crimes committed crimes, sexual violence.

**—How is Ukraine responding to sexual violence perpetrated by Russian aggressors? Who is documenting these instances, and tracking these grim statistics? Will the documented cases be considered by international organizations and courts? What response are we expecting?**

—Once Ukrainian armed forces liberate occupied territories, law enforcement agencies, including police officers as part of specialized mobile groups, document cases of sexual violence and other crimes. The information is then submitted to the Prosecutor's Office. Documented cases of violence are also presented to the International Criminal Court. In early March 2022, the International Criminal Court set up a joint investigative group involving several European judicial bodies to facilitate its own investigations. To enhance efforts, the Government of Ukraine has adopted a draft bilateral agreement to establish the International Criminal Court Office in Ukraine. International organizations, including the UN, also document these cases. During the recent meeting with Pramila PATTEN, Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, we agreed to enhance cooperation in information exchange and conduct a comprehensive analysis of Ukrainian legislation to improve the regulatory framework to prosecute crimes of sexual violence. Our legislation must be comprehensive so that offenders cannot escape responsibility in one year,

or in ten. Punishment for committed crimes remains the only path for genuine justice.

**—Providing effective assistance to survivors of conflict-related sexual violence poses significant challenges during war, especially in active combat zones or adjacent areas. Does the existing system of comprehensive assistance to survivors, including those of sexual violence, established in Ukraine prior to the large-scale war, effectively address the current challenges?**

—Indeed, before February 24, 2022, we were developing a network to prevent and respond to domestic and gender-based violence. The government allocated state subsidies to set up shelters and crisis rooms for survivors of domestic violence. In collaboration with UNFPA, we launched hotlines and set up mobile teams to provide psychological support. These services continued operations even after the large-scale aggression and adopted their practices to assist those affected by conflict-related violence.

Furthermore, in the first months of the invasion, our shelters provided temporary refuge for people forced to flee armed conflict and occupation. However, we recognized that existing aid services were insufficient during the war. It was necessary to create a place where survivors would feel safe, secure and supported, and then, after receiving assistance, would be willing to share their testimony. This is how the idea of Survivor Assistance Centers emerged. Currently, seven Survivor Assistance Centers are operating in Ukraine: in the cities of Kyiv, Lviv, Zaporizhzhia, Dnipro, Chernivtsi, Mukachevo, and Poltava. We plan to expand online assistance services, such as the Aurora psychotherapy support platform for survivors, that are being developed

for survivors even in temporarily occupied areas, to access psychological, legal, and information support by mobile phone.

*“When survivors from temporarily occupied and de-occupied areas feel relatively safe, they often do not know where to seek professional assistance. Information about available services is scattered all over the place. Therefore, we wanted to create an all-in-one platform that would simplify the search for necessary services. This is how the idea of creating the Assistance Platform for Survivors was born.”*

**—On March 15, 2023, the comprehensive online Assistance Platform for Survivors (Platform) was introduced, and you played a direct role in the establishment. What prompted the creation of the Platform, and how will it benefit Ukrainians affected by Russian aggression?**

—When survivors from temporarily occupied and de-occupied areas feel relatively safe, they often do not know where to seek professional assistance. Information about available services is scattered all over the place. Therefore, we wanted to create an all-in-one platform that would simplify the search for necessary services. This is how the idea of creating the Assistance Platform for Survivors was born. This Platform provides access to key government hotlines, Help Centers for Survivors, contacts for psychological, social, and legal support services. All services on the Platform are verified, confidential, and free. Advice and information on how to recognize the health effects of violence, actions for survivors of violence to take,

and advice for friends and family of survivors. Professionals working with survivors can find guidance based on the best international standards and protocols.

**—Is the Platform considered a crucial instrument in shaping modern state policies to address violence, ensuring guaranteed protection for survivors and enforcing penalties for perpetrators?**

—Establishment of this Platform adds an additional layer to the groundwork of an effective response mechanism for violence, ensuring that every used receives unequivocal and professional support. Once individuals achieve a state of balanced psycho-emotional health and process their trauma, they become ready to provide testimony against those accountable. In this manner, the Assistance Platform for Survivors significantly contributes to restoring justice and punishing those who must be held accountable.

*April 2023*

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**Nataliia Karbowska**

**WE MUST BECOME A SUPPORT  
FOR THOSE AFFECTED  
BY CONFLICT-RELATED SEXUAL  
VIOLENCE**

*Today, Ukraine is working on establishing an effective system to address conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV). We are here today with Nataliia KARBOWSKA, Director of Strategic Development at the Ukrainian Women's Fund, to discuss such efforts.*

—The first time I learned about a specific case of such violence was not from official channels, social media, or television, Nataliia KARBOWSKA began. A colleague from a partner organization reached out, informing us that a neighbor of an individual who had suffered violence from Russian military during the occupation of the Kyiv region had sought help. The victim was hesitant to speak out, and the neighbor was looking for ways to assist.

At that time, handling such cases was uncharted territory. Ukraine lacked experience in addressing the complexities of hybrid warfare, particularly in responding to sexual violence committed by aggressors. Women's groups and civil organizations, including we at the Ukrainian Women's Fund, were among the first to respond to such cases. We delved into discussions, studied the experiences of countries such as Croatia, Bosnia, and Herzegovina that underwent similar experiences, and we increased collaboration with

government agencies, local authorities, and international organizations to find common solutions.

Out of this effort, the project “Resilient Together: Improving the system of response to the conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV)” emerged and is currently being implemented by our organization.

**—Why has conflict-related sexual violence become such a significant challenge?**

—Russian aggressors use this weapon to subdue occupied communities. They employ both modern technologies and medieval methods in this war. Unfortunately, experience shows that these methods work effectively for the aggressor, causing people to close off and live in fear. These are not isolated incidents; this is a widespread issue. Until we establish a system to address and combat CRSV, we cannot fully resist this weapon.

*“It is crucial to hear the voices of those affected by sexual violence committed by the Russian military, accurately document their stories and ensure all responsible parties are held accountable.”*

**—What does an effective response system to conflict-related sexual violence involve?**

—This is a complex issue, and our project contributes to resolving it. It is crucial to hear the voices of those affected by sexual violence committed by the Russian military, accurately document their stories and ensure all responsible parties are held accountable.

Public institutions and civil society must provide support for those affected by conflict-related sexual violence. An effective response system would encompass medical,

psychological, and social support, while also holding the guilty accountable and compensating victims for the harm caused. I hope Ukraine won't face delays in reparations, similar to that which occurred in Balkan countries where reparations began to be paid 25 years after the war ended.

One of our project goals is to assist professionals in learning from international experiences. Currently, with our support, two groups of specialists are gaining practical insights—one group has just returned from Switzerland, where they studied urgent interim reparations, and another group, including Ukrainian judges, visited Croatia to discuss pre-trial investigations of conflict-related sexual violence crimes. Education and information dissemination are crucial aspects of our work.

**—Crimes committed by Russian aggressors are meticulously documented. How does the project contribute to this work?**

—Documenting crimes and providing assistance to survivors are interconnected. Law enforcement agencies are primarily responsible for documenting crimes. Essential to this effort is that the affected individuals themselves come forward and are willing to testify. Conflict-related sexual violence is uniquely deep-seated, often causing victims to remain silent. Civil society organizations, particularly women's groups, work with these individuals, providing support to help them find comfort and share their experiences. At a national level, La Strada-Ukraine and the Ukrainian Women Lawyers Association JurFem, our partners in this project, are actively engaged. Moreover, numerous regional organizations directly offer services to the victims at the local level. Civil society organizations such as SEMA-Ukraine

bring together people who have experienced conflict-related sexual violence, contributing valuable insights.

My involvement with individuals who first came to help survivors traces back to the Kyiv region, and currently, there is a growing awareness of cases in the Kherson region. Local civil society organizations report numerous instances where individuals, including men, have not only suffered sexual assault but other forms of sexual violence by the occupiers. However, severe trauma makes it difficult for survivors to share their pain with official institutions, government officials, and even law enforcement. In this context, informal communication with civic organizations proves to be more effective. Our assistance to survivors ultimately contributes to the continuous documentation of crimes committed by Russian aggressors.

**—Do civil society organizations have sufficient experience and resources to handle this work? How does the media come into play?**

—For the Ukrainian Women’s Fund, civil society organizations play a crucial role. They are often the first to identify cases of conflict-related sexual violence and provide initial assistance to the survivors. Strengthening their work, especially at the local level, is a key priority. While national policies and systems may exist, we believe they are successful only if proved effective on the local level.

*“Public institutions and civil society must provide support for those affected by conflict-related sexual violence. An effective response system would encompass medical, psychological, and social support, while also holding the guilty accountable and compensating victims for the harm caused.”*

We also collaborate with the media. The media plays a significant role in documenting cases of sexual violence and raising public awareness of this issue. We rely on the media to inform people about available assistance for survivors and how to access it. However, it is crucial that news stories are sensitive and do not harm the survivors.

We will conduct interdisciplinary training for civil organizations, representatives of local authorities, healthcare institutions, and law enforcement agencies. Additionally, we'll extend invitations to media professionals to join these training sessions.

—**Who else is involved in implementing this project?**

—This project is based on the Coalition 1325 network, established in 14 regions of Ukraine, bringing together representatives of local authorities and non-governmental organizations. These regions include Kyiv, Kherson, Zaporizhzhia, Donetsk, Luhansk, Kharkiv, Sumy, Chernihiv, Dnipropetrovsk, Kirovohrad, Odesa, Khmelnytskyi, Rivne, and Lviv.

Coalition 1325 refers to the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on “Women, Peace, and Security”, recognizing the increasing role of women in conflict resolution. Often, it is their voices that can be decisive in achieving peace and post-war recovery. Coalitions 1325 actively promotes this agenda.

Conflict-related sexual violence is one of the five strategic goals of the Ukrainian National Action Plan 1325. This plan has institutional support from the state, which significantly aids our partners at the local level. Some regions may not fully comprehend the relevance and importance of the issue, particularly those unaffected by occupation or located at a considerable distance from ongoing combat. Sometimes,

local officials claim that the issue doesn't concern them, as it is not relevant to their area. We must remind them that the problem doesn't concern them because they are not paying attention. Many women and men affected by conflict-related sexual violence have moved to western and northern regions of Ukraine. However, since there is no proper support system in place there, they often do not seek assistance.

Hence, another objective of the project is to help establish such systems in different regions of Ukraine.

The government helps address issues requiring systematic solutions and political backing. We collaborate with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration, led by Olha STEFANISHYNA, and consistently receive support from the Office of the Government Commissioner for Gender Policy, headed by Kateryna LEVCHENKO. Our collaborative efforts extend to include the Ministry of Social Policy, the Office of the Prosecutor General of Ukraine, the National Police, others.

Furthermore, we have initiated a partnership with the National School of Judges, aiming for systemic solutions. Our goal is to integrate the training module developed in collaboration with La Strada-Ukraine into the judicial education system. We also actively engage with the broader legal community, including both male and female lawyers. Notably, our partnership extends to the Association of Women Lawyers JurFem, with whom we work directly to assist survivors.

The Ukrainian Women's Fund primarily contributes by coordinating and supporting civil society organizations working with survivors.

**—How do international donor organizations contribute to addressing conflict-related sexual violence?**

—The first instances of conflict-related sexual violence began emerging after the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2014, escalating significantly with the widespread Russian aggression in 2022. In response, the European Union promptly stepped in to address this issue, and our project is currently funded by the European Union.

We have maintained a productive and long-standing partnership with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). Through joint initiatives, we have established points of contact and offices within healthcare institutions where survivors of conflict-related sexual violence and domestic violence can seek medical assistance.

Our project is implemented in collaboration with the UNFPA, ensuring that information about essential assistance is readily available to the public. We often come across situations where well-equipped medical facilities are operational, but the victims are unaware of them and, therefore, cannot access the services.

*“I believe the focus on sexual violence during war-time, the Women, Peace, and Security agenda, and Ukraine’s unique experiences in this matter should serve as a catalyst to overhaul the global security system.”*

Additionally, our partnerships with the Dr. Denis Mukwege Foundation and the Global Survivors Fund, both of which have signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Government of Ukraine, contribute significantly to our network. Through this collaboration, we are able to

organize study tours that focus on reparations for survivors. Hence, these robust international organizations actively contribute to addressing the issue of conflict-related sexual violence in Ukraine.

**—Could the Ukrainian experience in addressing conflict-related sexual violence potentially serve as a basis for improving international documents related to this issue?**

—Ukraine adopted its first National Action Plan for the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 “Women, Peace, and Security” in 2016 during ongoing Russian aggression, and updated the plan after the full-scale Russian invasion started [in 2022]. Supported by the Ukrainian Women’s Fund, the corresponding regional action plans were also updated in the 14 regions of Ukraine where Coalitions 1325 operates.

During the 68th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women held in March 2024, the Ukrainian delegation emphasized that the experience of Ukraine, Afghanistan, and other countries has revealed that the global security system is outdated and ineffective for both women and men, as well as for states in general. Imperative to introduce change. I believe the focus on sexual violence during wartime, the Women, Peace, and Security agenda, and Ukraine’s unique experiences in this matter should serve as a catalyst to overhaul the global security system.

*May 2023*

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**Kateryna Levchenko**  
**EMPATHY AND SUPPORT ARE**  
**WHAT MAKE US HUMAN**  
**AND DISTINGUISHES US**  
**FROM RUSSIAN AGGRESSORS**

*Dr. Kateryna LEVCHENKO, the Government Commissioner for Gender Policy, as well as Honorary Doctorate of Law, and a professor, spoke about the development and implementation of state policies addressing conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) and assisting those affected by Russian aggression.*

**—The Russian aggression has caused profound sorrow, resulting in the loss of civilian and military lives, widespread destruction, and suffering for Ukraine and its people. Among the various war crimes committed by Russians, sexual violence has emerged as a weapon of war. What strategies can be implemented to address and overcome this issue?**

—The challenges posed by sexual violence perpetrated by Russians are vast and affect both individuals and the state as a whole. Swift responses, survivor assistance, crime documentation, and long-term support are imperative.

CRSV is currently relatively under-reported. This is due to both survivors' distrust in law enforcement and the trauma associated with revisiting these experiences. Identifying and self-identifying these crimes pose additional hurdles.

Refining interaction algorithms among entities that provide assistance at both national and local levels is essential. The Criminal Code should be amended to single out sexual violence among the spectrum of war crimes.

*“The distinctive aspect of the Ukrainian situation lies in the resilience of its government system during wartime, not only enduring but functioning fully throughout this period (excluding temporarily occupied territories). It is adept at responding to the current circumstances and formulating strategic decisions. This instils confidence in its capacity to address various issues, such as aiding those affected and holding criminals accountable.”*

There are other matters requiring attention. Indeed, the Government, in collaboration with its partners, has initiated information campaigns to raise awareness of this form of violence. Therefore, formulating state policy in this domain is a logical response to these challenges.

The distinctive aspect of the Ukrainian situation lies in the resilience of its government system during wartime, not only enduring but functioning fully throughout this period (excluding temporarily occupied territories). It is adept at responding to the current circumstances and formulating strategic decisions. This instils confidence in its capacity to address various issues, such as aiding those affected and holding criminals accountable.

The international community provides significant support in this endeavor. Notably, countries with firsthand experience of war and crimes against their citizens, including sexual violence—examples being the

geographically proximate Balkan countries like Bosnia, Croatia, and Kosovo.

*“Ukraine identifies itself as a part of the global system of relations founded on international law, documents, and principles primarily established during the creation of the UN. This is what sets up apart from Russia, the state that seeks to shape the global order according to its own flawed rules and interests, appropriating the achievements of other countries and nations. Ukraine aligns itself with the civilized world and garners its support.”*

This includes international organizations, among which the UN holds a prominent place.

**—Over the past years and currently, there have been several complaints raised in Ukraine and other countries regarding the bureaucratic UN system and its inefficiency in addressing security challenges. In fact, there has been a lack of response to the aggressive policies of the Russian Federation, impacting not only its immediate neighbors like Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine but also other regions, including Syria. Has this affected Ukraine’s ability to receive assistance?**

—Ukraine identifies itself as a part of the global system of relations founded on international law, documents, and principles primarily established during the creation of the UN. This is what sets up apart from Russia, the state that seeks to shape the global order according to its own flawed rules and interests, appropriating the achievements of other countries and nations. Ukraine aligns itself with the civilized world and garners its support.

Today, the UN remains the single platform uniting all countries. When communicating information about the situation in Ukraine, we should leverage this platform. Thus, we aim for fostering effective and constructive collaboration with this international institution, encompassing various agencies and units.

I can't disregard the position of Ukraine's Representative to the UN Serhii Kyslytsia who has emphasized on multiple occasions that if Ukraine turns back on the United Nations, the organization would not lose much. However, in such a scenario, Ukraine would lose a platform to communicate with 190 countries worldwide.

Let me quote him directly, "The UN is not just the building in New York, nor is it a secretariat hired to implement the decisions of member countries. The UN is a union of governments and peoples of practically every nation on Earth. Therefore, UN agencies are expected to implement decisions of these governments and consider the expectations of peoples, including Ukrainians."

Our government, along with civil society organizations, collaborate with UN agencies to ensure that decision-makers understand the actual situation in Ukraine, guiding their conclusions, documents, activities, and assistance based on current realities.

We also place a strong emphasis on engagement with regional organizations such as the European Union, the Council of Europe, the OSCE, etc. Effectively leveraging all available platforms, both multilateral and bilateral, is crucial to disseminate information about Ukraine, address the needs of our citizens, shed light on the crimes committed by Russia, and emphasize the need for comprehensive

support for our country. The more relevant information and advocacy the international community possesses, the more substantial assistance it can provide to us.

**—How does collaboration with the UN address the consequences of war crimes perpetrated by the Russian Federation in Ukraine, specifically with regard to sexual violence? How is this collaboration executed?**

—Towards the end of March and the beginning of April 2022, as liberated areas of the Kyiv, Chernihiv, and Sumy regions were reclaimed, distressing reports emerged about mass killings, torture, and rape by Russian military personnel against local residents. These reports were not only documented by law enforcement agencies but also warranted a response from the international community.

A systematic approach commenced with the swift development of doctrinal documents. On 3 May 2022, a jointly crafted Framework of Cooperation between the Government of Ukraine and the United Nations on the Prevention and Response to Conflict-Related Sexual Violence was signed. Deputy Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration Olha STEFANISHYNA signed on behalf of Ukraine, and Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict Pramila PATTEN signed on behalf of the UN.

This document encompasses 16 tasks consolidated into 5 areas:

- Monitoring conflict-related trafficking in persons for the purposes of sexual exploitation.
- Providing assistance to individuals affected by conflict-related sexual violence.
- Access to justice and accountability.

- Strengthening the capacity of the security and defense sector to prevent conflict-related sexual violence.

- Reparations and compensation.

Importantly, this roadmap serves not only the Government of Ukraine and the United Nations but also all our partners. Donors consult it when deciding where to allocate funds. The document is publicly available and can be accessed through the following link<sup>1</sup>.

**—What were the subsequent steps in implementing this Framework of Cooperation?**

—On 25 May 2022, the Interagency Working Group (IAWG) on Combating Sexual Violence Related to Russia's Armed Aggression against Ukraine and Assistance to the Survivors was established. I am directly involved in the efforts, serving as the chair of IAWG.

The IAWG includes MPs, representatives of the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, representatives of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration, the Office of the Government Commissioner for Gender Policy, central executive authorities, including the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the National Police, the State Emergency Service, the State Migration Service, the Ministry of Defense, the Office of the Prosecutor General, the Security Service of Ukraine, the Ministry of Health, as well as representatives from international and civil society organizations such as the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine, UNFPA, UN Women, International Organization

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.stoprapienow.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/20220503-FoC\\_Ukraine\\_SIGNED.pdf](https://www.stoprapienow.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/20220503-FoC_Ukraine_SIGNED.pdf).

for Migration, UNICEF, Council of Europe, European Union Advisory Mission, Dr Denis Mukwege Foundation, Global Survivors Fund, CSO “Women’s Information Consultative Center”, Ukrainian Women Lawyers Association JurFem, CSO La Strada-Ukraine, Ukrainian Women’s Fund, PACT Ukraine, Center for Economic Recovery, CSO “Innovative Social Solutions”, Women’s Network of Survivors of Sexual Violence “SEMA-Ukraine”, Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union, PROTECT Project, and others.

*“...Russian soldiers have resorted to sexual violence against Ukrainian citizens since the onset of the war in 2014. Violence, particularly against women, and domestic violence are fundamental features of the traditional spiritual bonds among Russians, referred to as the “Russian world.” Brutality constitutes an essential element of the Russian imperial mindset, permeating the entire population of the Russian Federation. The extreme manifestations of cruelty by this Russian ‘collective Chikatilo’ cannot be justified by any military imperatives.”*

This strong representation greatly contributes to the overall efforts.

I would like to specifically highlight the process of updating the second National Action Plan for the Implementation of UNSCR 1325 “Women, Peace, and Security”. Initially adopted by the government in 2020, the Action Plan required revision due to unprecedented security challenges arising from Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The Women, Peace, and Security agenda remains relevant for many countries. Through collaborative efforts

between the government and civil society, amendments to the Plan were formulated and approved on 16 December 2022 by the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine<sup>1</sup>.

In collaboration with the Office of Pramila PATTEN, a decision was made and implemented to develop the Implementation Plan for the Framework of Cooperation. The plan was approved by the Commission for Coordination of Interaction of Executive Authorities on Ensuring Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men<sup>2</sup>. It has been presented at the UN, is currently underway, and its first mid-year progress review has been prepared.

Such meticulous and timely planning facilitates more efficient utilization of resources, identifies gaps and shortcomings, and establishes coordination and interaction among various entities to assist survivors and hold perpetrators accountable.

**—Before Russia launched its large-scale aggression, Ukraine did not possess the knowledge and expertise to address CRSV. Have we since ensured that enough qualified professionals are now trained for this task?**

—This is an important question. Before I respond, I'd like to emphasize that Russian soldiers have resorted to sexual violence against Ukrainian citizens since the onset of the war in 2014. Violence, particularly against women, and domestic violence are fundamental features of the

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.kmu.gov.ua/npas/pro-vnesennia-zmin-do-rozporiadzhennia-kabinetu-ministriv-ukrainy-vid-28-zhovtnia-2020-r-s1150-161222>.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.kmu.gov.ua/news/vidbulasia-koordynatsiinarada-v-ramkakh-pidhotovky-uchasti-ofitsiinoi-delehatsii-uriadu-ukrainy-v-67-ii-sesii-komisii-zi-stanovyshcha-zhinok>.

traditional spiritual bonds among Russians, referred to as the “Russian world”. Brutality constitutes an essential element of the Russian imperial mindset, permeating the entire population of the Russian Federation. The extreme manifestations of cruelty by this Russian ‘collective Chikatilo’ cannot be justified by any military imperatives.

Let us acknowledge that many of our citizens, brainwashed by the false ideology of ‘friendship among brotherly nations,’ were not prepared to perceive Russian brutality as systematic, organized actions, not only approved and encouraged by the Russian military and political leaders but also supported by general public. They justified it as merely unintentional, subjective behavior of individual occupiers, which is evident in rhetorical questions such as ‘how can this be possible?’ and, “why are they acting in this way?” and similar. Recall the intercepted conversations between Russian soldiers in Ukraine and their loved ones back home, where they relish and tolerate atrocities and killings, revealing a deep-seated hatred for everything Ukrainian.

Therefore, in conducting information campaigns and training, we must consider these ideological principles inherent in Russian policy, mentality, and actions.

Personnel training is an integral part of the state policy we are implementing. I can say that we now have trained professionals—investigators, prosecutors, social workers, lawyers, and experts from local authorities and civil society organizations. For example, we collaborate with the team of experts from Pramila Patten’s office, among other efforts.

Numerous training programs were developed and implemented throughout the past year. Initially, they were

mostly introductory, focusing on raising awareness about the existence of such a problem, explaining its specifics, and teaching effective communication with those affected by war crimes. The Prosecutor Training Center, the National Academy of the Security Service of Ukraine, the National Academy of Internal Affairs, the National School of Judges of Ukraine, the National Agency of Ukraine on Civil Service, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and the National Social Service of Ukraine have been actively involved in these efforts. The training initiatives were carried out in collaboration with international and civil society organizations.

The Information and Advisory Women's Center, in partnership with the Office of the Government Commissioner for Gender Policy, organised and provided training sessions for nearly 2,000 representatives of liberated communities in the Kyiv, Chernihiv, Sumy, Kherson, and Kharkiv regions between September 2022 and January 2023.

The Ukrainian Women Lawyers Association JurFem, in collaboration with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration, provided training for over 300 lawyers, representatives of civil society organizations, and law enforcement officers.

UN Women, together with DCAF and the Information and Consultative Women's Center, provided training for police officers from all regions of Ukraine. There are many other examples.

It's important to note that law enforcement officers have demonstrated responsiveness to the CRSV issue. This sensitivity arises not only from the imperative to

solve crimes committed by Russian aggressors. It has been built up through previous training, which equipped them with substantial experience in championing human rights, promoting gender equality, and combating gender-based violence. During that period, a vital cohort of professionals was formed to include advisors, representatives of responsible units, and government officials, who understand the significance of incorporating gender perspectives into their work.

We now shift our focus to specialized training, incorporating accumulated experience, lessons learnt and feedback from survivors.

This approach is being implemented by all partners involved in the *RESILIENT TOGETHER: Improving the System of Response to the Conflict-Related Sexual Violence (CRSV) Project*, operating across 14 regions with the aim of localizing state policies.

Localization involves training local professionals, both men and women. It should be noted that many survivors of CRSV reside in towns and villages and require appropriate services.

As part of the project, we hold meetings with all partners on the local level, including regional military administrations, local authorities, civil society and international organizations, media, and educational institutions.

We operate both online and offline. Recent events were held in the cities of Kropyvnytskyi, Zaporizhzhia, and Dnipro, accommodating 50-60 people at physical venues, with an additional 20-30 representatives of local communities joining remotely each time. We have become accustomed to operating in this format.

**—Which global organizations were the initial responders to the widespread reports of CRSV from the liberated Ukrainian territories?**

—The first international organizations to visit the liberated territories of northern Ukraine were representatives of the Dr Denis Mukwege Foundation and the Global Survivors Fund, founded by Nobel Peace Prize Laureates Dr Denis Mukwege and Nadia Murad. I extend special gratitude to them for their partnership. The Dr Mukwege Foundation support survivors’ demands for a world where sexual violence as a weapon of war is no longer tolerated and bears consequences for individual perpetrators and states—a stance aligning with Ukraine’s position.

*“...being human means showing empathy and support. This is what sets us apart from Russian invaders who take pleasure from the suffering of others.”*

The Global Survivors Fund focuses on reparations for survivors of conflict-related sexual violence, including in Ukraine.

**—Survivors of war-related sexual violence need to know they are not alone in their pain. However, many find it challenging to share their experiences openly.**

—The state policy we are discussing aims to ensure survivors receive necessary assistance and know that they are not alone in their struggles. We believe that, with support and trust in themselves and those providing assistance, they can contribute to achieving justice. Engaging with law enforcement should follow once survivors receive all the necessary support and assistance, as restoring justice and

holding perpetrators accountable are crucial, and survivors play a significant role here. Reporting facts helps prevent impunity for criminals. However, assistance comes first and foremost.

An open society is emerging in Ukraine, marked by a compassionate focused approach to each person and their challenges. Every survivor has unique needs that require tailored assistance. To remain compassionate is crucial; being human means showing empathy and support. This is what sets us apart from Russian invaders who take pleasure from the suffering of others.

**—Ukraine is gaining significant experience in addressing diverse challenges brought about by the war instigated by Russia. Will this experience contribute to establishing Ukraine as a significant player on the international arena in the future?**

—Let's recall past discussions claiming that Ukraine was considered uninteresting, merely an object of politics exploited by others. However, Ukraine is now asserting itself as a political player. Through our experience and examples, we demonstrate today what is effective and what is not. Our legal professionals are actively advocating for amendments to various conventions, including the Geneva Conventions. Our women's organizations stress the importance of updating Resolution 1325 and international documents concerning sexual violence, offering a unique vision shaped by the unprecedented nature of the war Russia is waging in Ukraine—something unseen since World War II.

Global collective security is currently facing a crisis, which is widely discussed. I think part of this stems from the fact that no women participated in its formation, leading

to a lack of consideration for their interests, experiences, and needs. All population groups should be represented in this system.

Indeed, Ukraine makes a significant contribution through its active women's movement, women's participation, and female diplomacy. It's important to note that during the initial phase of the large-scale Russian aggression, Ukrainian delegations to the European Parliament and the Council of Europe were predominantly composed of women, because men of conscription age were banned from leaving the country under martial law in force at that time. Our women politicians played a crucial role in ensuring that all pro-Ukrainian resolutions were adopted there.

Olena Zelenska is actively engaged on the international arena, rallying countries and organizations in support of Ukraine. Our Deputy Prime Ministers, ministers, government officials, and ambassadors are also channeling their efforts towards this goal.

Leaders of civil society organizations such as La Strada-Ukraine and the Ukrainian Women's Fund spoke online at the UN Security Council last year, marking an unprecedented occurrence. I am honored to speak at the UN Security Council on 7 March this year.

Ukraine commands a significant presence on the global arena with a compelling voice. It is equally important to ensure that the voices of those affected are heard and recognized at the national level!

### **Additional Information**

Following the signing of the Framework of Cooperation on the Prevention and Response to Conflict-Related

Sexual Violence in May 2022, Pramila Patten's CRSV Office provides comprehensive and tangible support for promoting all areas of the Framework of Cooperation and its implementation plan. The UN Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict of the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General supports the work of the subcomponent on:

a) accountability and access to justice by launching a series of investigations and prosecutions focused on victims, deploying an international law expert and a psychologist to the CRSV unit in the Prosecutor General's Office, and supporting legislative reform efforts,

b) compensation by sending an international expert together with the IOM, facilitating consultations and advising on the development of legislation on this issue,

c) human trafficking, by initiating a study of the link between SRSV and human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation, to guide legal practitioners.

The UN Action Network, chaired by the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative, launched a coordinated multi-sectoral project in Ukraine in partnership with the Government, civil society, and victims' networks to prevent conflict-related sexual violence and empower victims, in accordance with all five main areas of implementation of the Framework of Cooperation. The project will, among other areas, strengthen the capacity of health systems and legal infrastructure to provide holistic support and services, such as mental health and psychosocial support, life-saving medical care, access to free legal support and temporary redress, and will expand the capabilities of Rescue Centers. Finally, the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative

acted as a leader in a project supported by the European Commission that strengthens the capacity of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration, the Government Commissioner for Gender Policy, the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Ministry of Social Policy, and as well as UN teams in Ukraine to ensure fulfillment of the obligations of the Framework of Cooperation.

*June 2023*

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**Khrystyna Kit, Olena Sotnyk**  
**REPARATIONS FOR SURVIVORS**  
**OF WARTIME SEXUAL VIOLENCE**

*On June 19 [2023], the International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict (CRSV), we had the opportunity to speak with Olena SOTNYK, Advisor to the Deputy Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration, and Khrystyna KIT, Head of the Ukrainian Women Lawyers Association JurFem, and explore potential implementation of a reparations system for survivors of CRSV, as well as other war crimes perpetrated by Russian occupiers.*

**Khrystyna Kit:**—The reparations system includes a wide range of measures aimed at aiding people in their recovery, allowing them to keep developing, living, working, and avoiding violence in the future.

Many people tend to think of reparations solely in terms of financial payments or reimbursements, but in reality, international practices include various forms of reparations beyond monetary compensation.

One such form is restitution that aims to restore the person and their belongings to their original pre-war situation before the traumatic events occurred. For instance, individuals might anticipate the return of confiscated or damaged property, among other forms.

Satisfaction is another form of reparations. Those who have experienced CRSV have consistently emphasized,

through numerous studies, the importance of the state officially acknowledging their status as survivors of this specific type of war crime, predominantly through legislative means. In countries such as Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Colombia, where armed conflicts and sexual violence took place, memorials are erected to honor victims of CRSV, and various public awareness campaigns enacted. This is done to draw attention to the extent of suffering, profound impact on individuals' lives, and to foster societal comprehension of the challenges encountered by these individuals.

Another important aspect of reparations is rehabilitation, which involves providing social, medical, and psychological care to help survivors regain their ability to learn and work. These initiatives assist individuals in reintegrating into society and resuming their lives prior to the war. In some cases, survivors of CRSV, including children or students, encounter barriers to continuing their education due to health issues, or struggle to find jobs. One survivor of sexual violence expressed difficulty in participating in group activities, explaining that because of psychological trauma she finds it challenging to communicate.

Certainly, monetary compensation is also available, which involves actual money. It is extremely important to mention both immediate and long-term compensation. We acknowledge that the war in Ukraine is not yet over, and those who have suffered sexual violence need financial assistance [now] to sustain their livelihoods. Many have lost homes, jobs, and, most importantly, their health, so they require support and interim payments. Currently, Ukraine

is working on developing mechanisms for these urgent compensations, determining payment processes, recipients, and funding sources.

Another crucial element of reparations is guarantees of non-recurrence. A study conducted by the Global Survival Fund (GSF) in 2014 and 2015 among Ukrainians affected by sexual violence during the armed conflict revealed that respondents, both men and women, were willing to testify if their children were assured of never experiencing similar crimes. The guarantees of non-recurrence rely partly on state mechanisms aimed at ensuring security, prevention, and the strengthening of the Ukrainian Armed Forces. They also depend on international institutions. NATO countries, the European Union, and other nations should take all necessary actions to stop future conflicts between countries.

**—Is this sufficient to ensure guarantees of non-recurrence?**

**Khrystyna Kit:**—Indeed, it is crucial to involve Ukrainian society in this effort. Guarantees of non-recurrence depend on acknowledging that any violence, especially sexual violence, cannot be tolerated. Society must refrain from victim-blaming, which entails blaming the victim for not leaving the area, escaping or hiding from CRSV. Regrettably, this mindset persists among some of our fellow citizens. We must undertake extensive efforts to foster a culture of understanding, awareness, and sexual education to break down the stereotypes and stigmas, that often stop survivors from speaking out. That is why we still have only a few reported cases today.

**—What is the difference between immediate reparations and the general reparations system?**

**Olena Sotnyk:**—Immediate reparations are paid to individuals who are currently showing signs of trauma resulting from a war crime, which can be physical, psychological, or both. Therefore, these individuals urgently need specific assistance, such as medical, psychological, emotional, and financial.

These reparations are different from the traditional system, where individuals and the invaded country have to wait for the aggressor nation to compensate for losses. International organizations play a vital role in this process. For instance, in Ukraine, we partner with organizations such as the Global Survival Fund and the Dr. Denis Mukwege Foundation to aid CRSV survivors. They have signed the Memorandum of Understanding with the Government of Ukraine and are ready to provide assistance with allocated funds. Ukraine has also been offering other forms of immediate reparations through Survivor Centers for several months now.

*“Besides holding the aggressor accountable for the war crimes, under international humanitarian law, they are also obligated to provide compensation and reparations.”*

These forms of reparations are temporary. Once a comprehensive reparations system is established, immediate reparations will no longer be used. Currently, their main benefit is that they enable us to provide immediate assistance in the toughest cases and to test the effectiveness of the reparations process overall. This assessment helps us understand what works, what does not, what supports

people effectively, and what does not. It enables us to better plan our future efforts and make efficient use of resources.

—**How do reparations differ from social support?**

**Olena Sotnyk:**—Social support and assistance typically are provided during times of peace and are the responsibility of the state. Reparations, however, are associated with extraordinary circumstances, as in our case with wartime, where individuals endure various forms of war crimes. In such cases, there is a responsibility to hold the aggressor accountable and to restore individuals and their belongings to their pre-war condition. Besides holding the aggressor accountable for the war crimes, under international humanitarian law, they are also obligated to provide compensation and reparations. I believe that in the context of the Russian war in Ukraine, reparations are expected to serve not only a financial and restorative purpose, but a moral one, as well, contributing to the restoration of justice. If global pressure mounts on Russia, it will have to acknowledge its wrongdoing, which is also an essential aspect of reparations.

**Khrystyna Kit:**—Social assistance and support are just a component, and they do not require a separate law or system for their provision. Ukraine has various social aid schemes for people in different situations. However, these programs are not enough for those affected by wartime sexual violence. Survivors require more comprehensive assistance, including tailored rehabilitation to address their individual needs.

*“We are talking here about people who suffer psychological trauma from explosions or prolonged shelter stays, and those who endure trauma from violation of their sexual autonomy and bodily integrity.”*

**—Why do we need to establish a reparations system for CRSV survivors? Why prioritize this group?**

**Olena Sotnyk:**—CRSV is a specific form of war crime with severe traumatic consequences. Survivors of sexual violence keep their suffering hidden, with the majority choosing not to disclose the crimes they have endured. Without a specific system for reparations and recognition, the true extent of the victims may never be known.

At present, approximately 200 CRSV cases have been registered officially. However, considering the efforts of psychologists in liberated territories, it is clear that only a small portion of these cases have come to light. These incidents were widespread during the Russian occupation. Taking into account the mindset prevalent in Ukrainian villages and small towns, survivors feel ashamed to speak about the abuse they endured.

Another factor to consider is that unlike victims of torture whose injuries are visible, CRSV survivors often do not exhibit obvious physical wounds, and their psychological trauma is difficult to identify without specialized assistance. Therefore, instances of sexual violence often are hidden and not readily recognizable.

Furthermore, the lack of public trust in judicial institutions discourages CRSV survivors from seeking help from the police or law enforcement. The only solution to support the victims is to set up a dedicated system for them. This should be done now, as failure to address sexual violence trauma in initial stages can lead to irreversible repercussions later.

**Khrystyna Kit:**—Certainly, the impact of the war extends to all Ukrainians today, with everyone needing

some form of assistance. The law was enacted to compensate for property damage, and discussions on related matters are ongoing. However, CRSV survivors require a different approach and additional rehabilitation programs due to the unique nature of their trauma and its consequences. We are talking here about people who suffer psychological trauma from explosions or prolonged shelter stays, and those who endure trauma from violation of their sexual autonomy and bodily integrity.

*“Under international law, the state where individuals have suffered from war crimes, such as CRSV, must establish mechanisms and legal framework to provide reparations.”*

The existing social stigma prevents CRSV survivors from sharing their experiences. I believe having a reparations system for these survivors will reassure them that the government is willing to hear their voices, the experts assisting them understand their trauma, and will provide confidential and high-quality support.

**—Who should provide reparations to CRSV survivors? What role do the government and non-governmental institutions play in this regard?**

**Khrystyna Kit:**—Under international law, the state where individuals have suffered from war crimes, such as CRSV, must establish mechanisms and legal framework to provide reparations. Currently, Ukraine is working on developing relevant legislation.

The Framework of Cooperation on the Prevention and Response to CRSV signed between the Government of Ukraine and the United Nations in early May 2022 has

significantly contributed to this effort. An Implementation Plan has been created, with a separate section focusing on reparations and compensation.

Moreover, the state plays a crucial role in creating a special fund and allocating resources to ensure interim payments to survivors.

Civil society organizations also contribute in various ways to achieving these goals, including by providing expertise and supporting government institutions. For example, in April, we organized a study trip to Geneva for our government officials to gain a better understanding of international practices in reparations and implement them in Ukraine.

Moreover, since Ukraine has not yet adopted specific laws for CRSV survivors or implemented specialized rehabilitation programs at the national level, civil society organizations step in to provide various social services, including psychological counselling, medical assistance, and legal aid.

**Olena Sotnyk:**—The government plays a crucial and defining role in setting up the framework for providing reparations. Ukraine is wisely moving forward by creating an International Registry of Survivors, establishing an international committee to assess eligibility of survivors to receive compensation, establishing an international fund for reparations. In the future, there might be a separate, internal system for reparations, however, this will require further deliberation, and relevant laws and regulations must be formulated.

Reparations should be paid by the aggressor country. We realize that it may take a long time to receive these

reparations. Therefore, Ukraine's task is to gather all its political, diplomatic, and legal efforts to convince our partners, using international pressure and diplomatic agreements, to seize Russian assets in other countries and redirect them to the Ukrainian reparations fund.

Additionally, international organizations and partner countries may partially cover these payments because the amounts are significant and are growing daily.

We are not just talking about CRSV survivors; we are also referring to people who have been subjected to torture, lost their homes, and suffered other damages caused by criminal actions of the Russian Federation in this war.

Ukraine currently faces economic challenges, struggling to fulfill basic needs and social requirements. Burdening the state with reparations could strain resources and lead to inflated expectations and disappointment among Ukrainians.

**—Does the international community support our ideas for creating a mechanism to collect reparations?**

**Olena Sotnyk:**—The European Union, European Commission, and EU member states clearly assert that Ukraine is entitled to reparations, with Russia obligated to provide them. This position is also backed up by the United States, Canada, and all our major partners.

Since Russia is denying its guilt in general, we must have an alternative plan for addressing this issue. Seizing Russian assets presents one viable option, as there are many such assets globally that could cover a substantial portion of the reparations needed.

Russian assets are being seized in Ukraine, with the money being allocated for various budgetary needs such

as security. However, our primary goal is to convince our allies, in particular the United States, Great Britain, and EU countries, to seize Russian assets for the benefit of Ukraine. The United States holds a substantial number of these assets, while Canada, having enacted necessary legislation long ago, possesses fewer assets from the Russian Federation. Great Britain and Austria, known for being safe havens for keeping and reinvesting Russian dirty money, could also make significant contributions.

The European Commission is working on this issue separately, laying the groundwork for all EU countries. It is important to establish a strong legal foundation to prevent Russia from claiming compensation from these countries through international courts later on. Therefore, ensuring the legal soundness of this mechanism is of utmost importance.

**—What practices of reparations are being implemented in other countries? Which ones could effectively work in Ukraine?**

**Olena Sotnyk:**—We are in the midst of an international conflict, a war between countries, and it is vital to acknowledge this fact. We cannot treat all countries' experiences equally; we must focus on those most relevant to our own situation. When considering CRSV survivors, we examine successful implementation practices from countries such as Colombia, Peru, Kosovo, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. While these models are not perfect, we learn from both their successes and failures. Nevertheless, these are functional reparations systems, benefiting tens of thousands of individuals, beyond just survivors of sexual violence.

To sum up existing practices and lessons learned, all these countries demonstrate that an administrative approach is effective. This involves establishing a Registry of Survivors and implementing minimal evidentiary standards. Instead of requiring extensive documentation to prove that a sexual assault occurred, survivors provide a detailed statement of their experience. Law enforcement and security agencies then verify the accuracy of these details against the actual events.

Certain countries also require additional testimonies from other individuals, such as neighbours or family members to support a claim. Once again, I emphasize that this process is not a criminal investigation, so the minimum standard of evidence needed. In fact, the key here is to trust the words of the victim and to be willing to help that person.

Therefore, I believe that Ukraine should move in this direction to establish the status of CRSV survivors. The more straightforward and confidential our system is, the more beneficial it will be for the survivors and the more efficiently it will operate.

*“...dealing with immediate reparations during wartime is quite unusual. Unlike in Kosovo, where it took 10 years post-conflict to address reparations for CRSV survivors, we are already addressing immediate reparations.”*

When it comes to providing monetary compensation as reparations, all countries employ different methods and approaches. Some countries focus on assessing the extent of moral damage to determine the appropriate compensation

amounts. For example, in Kosovo, survivors and assigned and paid monthly pensions. Our colleagues there noted that this is highly advantageous, as pensions raise the status of affected women by contributing financially to their families.

In Mexico, survivors were provided education as a form of reparation and received a monetary compensation to start over or address certain financial needs. In addition, they were offered medical assistance and counselling services to aid their recovery from CRSV.

**—What path is Ukraine leaning towards regarding the general reparations system?**

**Olena Sotnyk:**—Our country has not yet chosen a general reparations system. Instead, our priority now is on delivering immediate reparations to those most in need.

Ukraine has already taken measures to urgently rebuild houses destroyed during the war. This involves the submission of applications and assessment by relevant committees. Overall, this serves as a type of reparations. Ukraine could also ensure recourse against the aggressor state to secure future recovery of the expenses incurred by both Ukraine and our partners.

I would like to emphasize that dealing with immediate reparations during wartime is quite unusual. Unlike in Kosovo, where it took 10 years post-conflict to address reparations for CRSV survivors, we are already addressing immediate reparations. However, it is unlikely we will have a comprehensive reparations system in place within the next year due to the ongoing war. We are still unsure about the extend of our losses, the number of survivors, and the resources required to assist all people affected by the war. We also need to consider fairness and equity—we cannot

favor some over others. Therefore, discussions about the general reparations framework are still ongoing.

**—How can survivors of CRSV obtain assistance while the reparations system is still being formulated?**

**Olena Sotnyk:**—It is important to acknowledge that the government is already assisting survivors of CRSV. They receive assistance at the UNFPA- supported Survivor Relief Centers, which offer legal aid, medical care, and other forms of assistance, effectively serving many reparative functions despite not being formally labeled as a reparations system.

The government's next priority in helping CRSV survivors is to start providing immediate reparations, which could include financial aid, and then develop a more comprehensive reparations plan. We will have a better understanding of what this system will look like as the war unfolds and as we gain better insight into available resources, strategies for recovering damages from Russia, and international backing for these efforts.

*June 2023*

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**Jaime Nadal, Mustafa Elkanzi**  
**UNITED NATIONS POPULATION**  
**FUND (UNFPA) HELPS UKRAINE**  
**ADDRESS CONSEQUENCES**  
**OF CONFLICT-RELATED SEXUAL**  
**VIOLENCE**

*The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) is one of the key partners of the Government of Ukraine in aiding survivors of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV). Today, Jaime NADAL, UNFPA Representative in Ukraine joins us and Mustafa ELKANZI, Senior Emergency Coordinator, to discuss UNFPA's ongoing efforts and potential future cooperation.*

**—How does UNFPA support Ukraine in addressing the consequences of CRSV?**

**Jaime Nadal:**—Since the beginning of the Russian invasion, UNFPA has stayed in Ukraine and continued working here. Initially, our primary job involved maintaining the services initiated back in 2015, which include shelters, crisis rooms, hotlines, and day-care centers for all victims of gender-based and domestic violence. We realized that millions of internally displaced women and girls were more likely to face domestic and conflict-related sexual violence.

Since April of last year [2022], we have set up 100 mobile teams in 21 regions across Ukraine, providing psychological and social assistance, facilitating legal referrals, and focusing on aiding internally displaced

persons. The psychosocial support mobile teams work closely with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration and the Ministry of Social Policy of Ukraine. Since then, these mobile teams have assisted over 160,000 individuals, primarily women.

However, our efforts did not end there. In April and May, when Bucha and Irpin were liberated, disturbing stories from survivors of sexual violence surfaced. At first, we tried to support survivors using our existing services. Following discussions and consultations with the Government of Ukraine, we recognized the need for a broader approach to address this matter. As a result, we decided to establish Survivor Relief Centers, a unique social service that has no precedent in Ukraine, or elsewhere in the world.

The Survivor Relief Centres were started on the initiative of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration of Ukraine, with assistance from the Government Commissioner for Gender Policy and support from the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).

*“The issue of conflict-related violence is complicated, as is the issue of sexual violence. When these two are combined, they present a daunting challenge for survivors, society, and those who support survivors.”*

The first center was opened in Zaporizhzhia in July 2022. The centers currently operate in 11 cities of Ukraine, including Kyiv, Dnipro, Lviv, Poltava, Chernivtsi, Mukachevo, Odesa, and Kropyvnytskyi. We are also launching mobile Survivor Relief Centres in the cities

of Kherson and Kharkiv. I would like to note that our specialists have been engaged in providing aid to survivors during the floods in Kherson.

The centers have provided assistance to 16,000 survivors, with 85% of them being internally displaced persons. In terms of cases of sexual violence, we have documented a total of 108 CRSV instances to date. These are individuals who have reached out for help.

**—What challenges do you encounter in your work?**

**Jaime Nadal:**—The issue of conflict-related violence is complicated, as is the issue of sexual violence. When these two are combined, they present a daunting challenge for survivors, society, and those who support survivors.

Unfortunately, women still blame themselves and fear social stigma, which makes them hesitant to seek professional help. Conversations with psychologists at the Survivor Relief Centers revealed that both women and men survivors of conflict-related sexual violence did not start sharing their stories right away. It took some survivors until the 10th or 11th therapy session before they felt comfortable enough to share their experiences. At first, they need to feel trust, receive individually tailored help, feel comfortable, and be confident that everything is kept confidential and safe, ensuring they have no reason to be afraid.

**—You have received few reports from survivors of conflict-related sexual violence. Is this number consistent with the actual statistics?**

**Jaime Nadal:** —We have received 108 reports, which is considerably lower than the actual statistics. We cannot give precise numbers of existing cases, but we do know there are many more. Our strategy focuses on providing services

to survivors to ensure they get social and psychological support. Once they feel ready, they will open up about their experiences.

The services provided at the centers require in-person attendance. Understanding the stigma and the challenges faced by some people in accessing physical locations, we realized it was important to introduce online services for survivors. Therefore, we established the Aurora online platform, where individuals can access psychological support, psychotherapy, as well as referrals to local physical services, including the Survivor Relief Centers, as required or requested.

Aurora was implemented by UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund with the assistance of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration of Ukraine and the Government Commissioner for Gender Policy, and with the support of the Government of the United Kingdom.

Even though newly introduced, this service is already in great demand within society. Currently, we are managing 424 cases, with 25% involving conflict-related sexual violence. Given that consultations are conducted online, anonymity is maintained at a high level. Moreover, individuals from occupied areas, unable to access essential aid— either due to the absence of services or fear—can still use this online platform. Despite a relatively low number of inquiries, we acknowledge the significance of Aurora.

**—How well does UNFPA collaborate with the Government of Ukraine and NGOs?**

**Jaime Nadal:**—I view our collaboration as highly efficient. We receive support from Olha STEFANYSHYNA,

the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration, and Kateryna LEVCHENKO, the Government Commissioner for Gender Policy. The rapid launch of the Survivor Relief Centers demonstrates our strong partnership.

We have built strong partnership with La Strada-Ukraine, a prominent civil society organization with global influence. In the past, we collaborated on launching hotlines for victims of domestic and gender-based violence, and now these services have been extended to assist survivors of CRSV.

Establishing local services is a priority for UNFPA. Currently, we are engaged actively with 45 municipalities, cities, and communities across Ukraine. Our objective is to foster well-coordinated collaboration among the government, CSOs, and international partners at the regional level, ensuring clear pathways for individuals seeking support services.

**—Do you always have understanding and support at the local level??**

**Jaime Nadal:**—This understanding greatly varies by location. Certain areas showed more openness than others. For instance, when we initiated our efforts to address gender-based violence in Donbas in 2015, some mayors and communities welcomed our services, while others did not. However, as local authorities witnessed the positive impact of our work, even those initially resistant communities started seeking support from UNFPA.

We employ the following approach: we invest until the community is also willing and ready to invest. We evaluate the impact of our efforts and the extent to which

the services we develop in the regions meet international standards. We provide training to professionals to ensure the quality of assistance.

*“In Ukraine, the topic of conflict-related sexual violence remains intricate and very complex unexplored, hence not thoroughly studied. Here CRSV manifests as exceptionally brutal, aimed at undermining individual dignity, instilling fear, and grossly violating human rights.”*

Approximately 60% of the population of Ukraine resides in small communities and towns. Therefore, it was important for us to secure the support of the government and civil society organizations to meet their needs. However, I do not want to be overly optimistic because there are still people who, regrettably, remain unaware where to seek help. The recent study in rural areas showed that 60% of women lack this information, indicating there is still a lot to be done.

**—How effectively is the conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) addressed globally? What new aspects has Russian aggression against Ukraine brought to this issue?**

**Jaime Nadal:**—In fact, CRSV has been thoroughly studied worldwide. Consider the Balkan countries, such as Bosnia, where sexual violence was also employed as a weapon of war. Substantial evidence was collected, accounting for nearly 5,000 cases, and effective services were established, providing high quality assistance.

In Ukraine, the topic of conflict-related sexual violence remains intricate and very complex unexplored, hence not

thoroughly studied. Here CRSV manifests as exceptionally brutal, aimed at undermining individual dignity, instilling fear, and grossly violating human rights. Moving forward, extensive efforts will be required to thoroughly investigate this issue.

Currently, the main objective is to assist survivors in overcoming trauma. We collaborate closely with the government, civil society organizations, and local authorities to ensure that survivors feel supported and not isolated.

More than 50 specialists from different Survivor Relief Centers have received specialized training focused on aiding survivors of sexual violence. This training covers various aspects of assistance provision, such as how to identify people who need help, managing trauma, balancing therapy and support for mental health, dealing with crises.. Training specialists to offer therapy that avoids retraumatization is crucial, as survivors frequently face the risk of being retraumatized due to inadequate assistance.

We ensure lawyers, social workers, prosecutors, and government officials are well informed on this topic. Nobel Peace Prize laureate Nadia Murad, an Iraqi human rights activist, visited Kyiv and engaged with specialists from Survivor Relief Centers, exchanging experiences and learning about our assistance methods in Ukraine.

**—How can Ukraine’s experience in responding to CRSV be integrated into global approach?**

**Jaime Nadal:** –Gaining a thorough understanding of the situation in Ukraine is critical. Two key aspects are important: the speed of response to CRSV and the holistic approach to assistance. Our efficient case management system enables survivors to access various vital services

such as legal aid and social support all in one place. Online solutions show potential. Although they may not be suitable for all situations, they deserve attention.

**—Within the UN system, why is the United Nations Population Fund specifically responsible for aiding sexual violence survivors?**

**Mustafa Elkanzi:**—This UN agency focuses on promoting reproductive health and countering violence against women, including gender-based and conflict-related sexual violence. Alongside the trauma, survivors often face shame and self-blame, making it challenging to discuss and share their experiences. However, addressing CRSV requires a tailored approach that acknowledges all these risks—both shame and self-blame. UNFPA focuses on fully understanding the issue, offering comprehensive aid, and implementing global standards in Ukraine to ensure survivors receive quality support.

*“Sometimes, assistance is not sought for years. UNFPA is committed to providing ongoing support to survivors until their emotional, physical, and inner well-being is restored, regardless of the duration required.”*

Our response is comprehensive and focused solely on the survivors and their needs. We provide health care, legal aid, and various other forms of support, while prioritizing the survivors’ preferences and ensuring full confidentiality and safety for all individuals.

Our goal is to ensure that men, boys, women, and girls who have experienced conflict-related sexual violence receive support from the Government of Ukraine, society,

and international organizations, rather than feeling neglected or abandoned.

**—Do you plan to scale up assistance to Ukraine?**

**Mustafa Elkanzi:**—We currently observe an increase in the number of inquiries and the number of survivors, which means we need to grow our services, helplines, and online tools. This growth requires more investment, not just financially, but also effort from us and the government. We collaborate closely with Ukrainian authorities to integrate our services into the state aid framework, ensuring their sustainability in the long run.

Sometimes, assistance is not sought for years. UNFPA is committed to providing ongoing support to survivors until their emotional, physical, and inner well-being is restored, regardless of the duration required.

*July 2023*

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**Pavlo Zamostian, Nina Lompart**  
**UKRAINE PROVIDES EFFECTIVE**  
**SERVICES FOR SURVIVORS**  
**OF CRSV**

*UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund, provides aid to people of Ukraine who face numerous challenges caused by Russia's aggression, and among these challenges is the distressing issue of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV). Through collaborative efforts with the Government of Ukraine, UNFPA has established Survivor Relief Centers and the Aurora online platform to provide support to survivors. We are joined by Pavlo ZAMOSTIAN, UNFPA Assistant Representative in Ukraine, and Nina LOMPART, UNFPA Project Coordinator, to discuss the significance of these services.*

**—What were the reasons behind establishing services for survivors of CRSV?**

**Pavlo Zamostian:**—Together with the Government of Ukraine, we thought about expanding the existing services for survivors of domestic and gender-based violence to accommodate the emerging challenges arising from the war. One significant challenge was widespread sexual violence perpetrated by Russian combatants, that led to new needs among survivors, especially for long-term psychotherapy. Rather than just providing temporary psychological assistance over a few therapy sessions, survivors of sexual violence require sustained psychotherapy due to the profound nature of the trauma they experienced.

We realised that survivors of CRSV might not feel ready to talk in person, face to face, right away. They might also move, including abroad. At the same time, there was a big demand for psychotherapists in Ukraine, while their availability remained scarce. We determined that providing professional help online would be the best way to make it easier for survivors to get support from anywhere while keeping it confidential.

On May 31, 2022, we launched the Aurora online platform with the assistance of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration of Ukraine and the Government Commissioner for Gender Policy, and with the support of the Government of the United Kingdom. We began the effort with our existing resources to develop a temporary solution. However, our long-standing business partner, the leading Ukrainian company SoftServe, which is based in Lviv and is one of the world's largest IT companies, helped us develop the technical components. Now, the platform is fully up and running.

**—What are the features and advantages of the Aurora Platform?**

**Pavlo Zamostian:**— Anyone who feels that they need help from a psychotherapist, whether because of being held captive, living in occupied areas, experiencing sexual violence, or going through other traumatic events, can seek help through the platform. The platform design ensures complete confidentiality, enabling individuals to openly share their experiences with specialists without worrying about any negative consequences.

Another benefit of the platform is its extraterritoriality, of being accessible from anywhere via internet, even from occupied territories or abroad.

*“Sexual violence extends beyond rape; strip searches at checkpoints also qualify as sexual violence. However, not everyone who undergoes such experience realize that they are victims or recognize the need for assistance. The sooner they come to understand this, the greater their chances for recovery.”*

After completing a quick assessment to identify their required assistance, individuals are matched with a psychotherapist for one-on-one sessions throughout their rehabilitation without changing therapists. This ongoing support is important because this strategy avoids having survivors repeatedly share their experiences with different specialists, thereby avoiding additional trauma.

**—How popular is this service?**

**Pavlo Zamostian:**—Currently, we are handling approximately 300 requests, provide regular support to 192 clients, mostly women—approximately 180 individuals. About 25% of these cases involve various forms of sexual violence.

Sexual violence extends beyond rape; strip searches at checkpoints also qualify as sexual violence. However, not everyone who undergoes such experience realize that they are victims or recognize the need for assistance. The sooner they come to understand this, the greater their chances for recovery.

Indeed, individuals may initially focus on feeling happy for making it through the traumatic event. After enduring such difficult situations, they might focus more

on immediate needs and overlook the deeper psychological trauma. However, as time passes, the untreated trauma can lead to negative consequences. Therefore, it is part of Aurora specialists' job to guide individuals in recognizing the importance of psychotherapy.

**—Apart from the Aurora online platform, Survivor Relief Centers are being established in Ukraine. How quickly were they established?**

**Pavlo Zamostian:**—The events in Bucha shook the world with the extent of the crimes committed. Following that, many non-governmental and international organizations began to offer aid to survivors, including to survivors of conflict-related sexual violence. However, a coordinating hub was needed. It should be noted that there is not much positive international experience in this area, as discussions about conflict-related sexual crimes typically occur after the conflict has ended. Consequently, the response often arrives late, when much has already been lost.

Ukraine's success can be attributed to the Government of Ukraine's prompt response to the issue as soon as it arose. They initiated setting up survivor relief centers where survivors or victims could seek help. These centers not only offer various services but survivors of CRSV are also carefully identified and assistance is provided or they are referred to Aurora or other service providers. These centers act as support hubs. The government took the initiative on this project, and UNFPA is proud to have longstanding partnerships with the Office of Deputy Prime Minister Olha STEFANISHYNA. We were approached as experts capable of quickly developing their idea. That this Office has taken the lead on and coordination of this project is good.

The Survivor Relief Centers were started on the initiative of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration of Ukraine, with assistance from the Government Commissioner for Gender Policy and support from the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). This project is a pilot initiative, funded entirely by humanitarian aid resources entrusted to us by donors.

**Nina Lompert:**—This network was established in June 2022. The first center opened in Zaporizhzhia to respond to the occupation of Mariupol and neighboring towns, resulting in the displacement of Ukrainian citizens.

The center was set up in just three weeks. Our main approach to operating the centers is efficiency. We strive to respond quickly to events happening in the cities where the centers are located, ensuring prompt delivery of aid to affected areas during shelling. For instance, in Kherson, we distributed essential aid kits to residents within two days. We are actively involved in providing assistance directly at the scenes of shelled areas.

We maintain constant communication and close collaboration with relevant authorities, actively listening to local residents to identify their needs. Based on the identified needs, we proceed with our initiatives. We established centers in the cities that experienced the highest number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) relocating from elsewhere during the summer and fall seasons. So, centers opened in Dnipro, Lviv, and Kyiv, followed by Poltava, Kropyvnytskyi, and Odesa. In the western area, we gave priority to Mukacheve and Chernivtsi, which serve as major transit points for people relocating abroad.

Currently, we have nine centers operating in a stationary setup, equipped with premises and staff. Additionally, in Kharkiv and Kherson, we operate mobile centers. This summer we are establishing a Survivor Relief Center in Kharkiv.

Today, our coverage spans nearly every region of Ukraine. We are not discussing every local center right now as we do not feel it is necessary. However, if the need arises, we will expand our reach across the map of Ukraine.

**Pavlo Zamostian:**—The Center’s model was effective: people started coming, and we ensured they had accommodation. In Zaporizhzhia, the center operated as a humanitarian aid hub, serving as a refuge for all internally displaced persons arriving in the city via evacuation buses or by crossing the contact line independently. The aim was for individuals to access humanitarian aid and essential services there, while the Survivor Relief Center offered further help. Unfortunately, due to worsening security situation, we had to move as Zaporizhzhia came under heavier shelling.

**—What services are offered by the Survivor Relief Centers?**

**Pavlo Zamostian:**—The centers were created to respond to the violence stemming from the war. Their primary goal is to encourage survivors to acknowledge their need for aid and to offer them that support. Investigations into crimes, punishment for perpetrators, and compensation follow later. Those are all long-term goals, but right now, the priority should be helping individuals in overcoming the trauma they are experiencing.

The centers help identify various problems individuals encounter as a result of the war. These challenges often

involve mental health issues. But sometimes, people feel disoriented and do not know what to do next. This is where specialists at the centers can help by providing guidance about next steps and by asking about the person's experiences in a considerate manner.

Our experience suggests that people often return to the centers seeking assistance. They may not always feel comfortable opening up during their initial visit, and it might require a second, third, or even fourth consultation for them to feel ready to speak openly. Sometimes, individuals share their experiences from a third-person perspective rather than from first-person perspective, their own. However, our therapists are skilled at guiding individuals to share their own stories, as well as those of their children or parents. Some people come with a specific goal in mind, such as wanting to engage with law enforcement. In such cases, the therapist accompanies them during these conversations, ensuring they are conducted in a less traumatic manner.

We stress the critical importance of putting the needs of survivors first. We strongly believe that with the right support, individuals can move from being mere victims to empowered survivors, leading normal lives. It is all about adapting and carrying on with life.

**—Are there regional specifics in the work of the Survivor Relief Centers?**

**Nina Lompart:**—Certainly, we notice certain differences in how the Survivor Relief Center operate across different regions of Ukraine, whether in the central, western, or regions bordering the east or south. These differences are driven by the unique needs expressed by those seeking aid. In cities such as Zaporizhzhia and Dnipro, IDPs often

require immediate psychological support. Conversely, in areas such as Lviv or Mukacheve, requests typically revolve around temporary housing or accommodation. As a result, these differences shape the types of services sought by potential clients and guide where our staff members focus their attention.

*“Typically, people do not discuss war-related sexual violence during their first consultations. It could be brought up weeks, years, or even decades later. As a result, current statistics on the frequency or location of reports do not demonstrate any clear patterns.”*

At first, when someone is forced to leave their home, their primary concern is safety. Only later do they begin to think about their social wellbeing. Therefore, we pay close attention to the journey of internally displaced Ukrainians as they move, for instance, from the eastern to the western regions of the country. They may require crisis counseling from a psychologist somewhere near Zaporizhzhia or Dnipro. As they get closer to Lviv in the west, they are likely to shift their focus towards more strategic concerns about securing their future life.

**—How often do survivors of wartime sexual violence seek assistance from these centers?**

**Nina Lompart:**—This question does not have a straightforward answer because the issue emerged in Ukraine due to the war. We cannot simply replicate the experiences of other countries in addressing CRSV. Specialists in Ukraine are essentially starting from square one, creating their own methods and practices from scratch.

Typically, people do not discuss war-related sexual violence during their first consultations. It could be brought up weeks, years, or even decades later. As a result, current statistics on the frequency or location of reports do not demonstrate any clear patterns. It may take many years, or even decades, to collect sufficient data. Although we have reports available, discussing specific numbers is not practical at the moment.

**—Who are the main users of the Survivor Relief Centers' services?**

**Nina Lompert:**—Most of our clients are internally displaced persons. However, there have been changes in this distribution. While IDPs accounted for 95-98% of our clients a year ago, their proportion has now dropped. Currently, about 85% of requests come from IDPs, while the remaining 15% come from residents of the communities where our services are offered.

This is because the Survivor Relief Centers are not exclusively designed for the needs of IDPs. These centers are available to anyone who requires assistance due to the effects of the war.

The majority of requests come from women, constituting approximately 75% of the total requests. However, men also seek assistance, making up 25% of our clients.

In terms of age distribution, the largest group comprises individuals aged 18-59, though there is also representation from those over 60. We provide assistance to more than 10% of women [who come to us who are] aged 60 and older, and to the approximately 5% of men in this age bracket.

The Survivor Relief Centers have psychologists who specialize in aiding children and can assist young clients

with parental consent. Approximately 5-7% of our clients are individuals under 18 years old.

**Pavlo Zamostian:**—As of the end of May 2023, over 16,000 individuals had accessed the services offered by the Survivor Relief Centers, leading to the identification of more than 100 cases of CRSV.

*“Ukraine has demonstrated political readiness to respond and provide services to survivors of traumatic events, including CRSV, during an ongoing war, which was a unique initiative at the time.”*

**—Do the centers cooperate with law enforcement agencies?**

**Nina Lompart:**—The Survivor Relief Centers operate based on clear principles, which prioritize safety, confidentiality, free access, and non-conditionality. Individuals seeking assistance are not required to provide any proof of being survivors through documents, actions, photographs, or messages to receive help from our staff. Consequently, our non-conditionality principle guides our interactions with police and law enforcement agencies; we do not document these crimes or share such information.

However, we collaborate with law enforcement agencies when survivors express a willingness to do so. If someone seeking assistance from the Survivor Relief Center wishes to file a complaint or pursue legal action, we assist them in doing so.

**—Is the Ukrainian experience in these matters considered innovative?**

**Pavlo Zamostian:**—Ukraine has demonstrated political readiness to respond and provide services to survivors of

traumatic events, including CRSV, during an ongoing war, which was a unique initiative at the time. The effectiveness of this approach will be evaluated by post-war analysis. We hope that the efforts of Aurora and Survivor Relief Centers, as well as the leadership from the Government of Ukraine will prove successful.

Ukraine is leading the way in conducting legal proceedings for unlawful actions by Russian combatants even during the war, which differs from the typical practice observed in other countries, where such proceedings often take place decades later. Even if the perpetrator is no longer alive or present in the courtroom, this represents a significant legal progress. This determination, coupled with political leadership and the commitment to address CRSV during wartime, showcases innovation.

The network is up and running, but we are always looking to make it better. Our practices help us identify areas for improvement. For example, when new clients come to us, we requested additional therapists from Dnipro with expertise in child counseling to aid in investigations. Our goal is to address these issues promptly.

A Ukrainian delegation led by Kateryna LEVCHENKO, the Government Commissioner for Gender Policy, recently traveled to the Czech Republic. The discussions focused on the possibility of setting up the first international Ukrainian Survivor Relief Center in Prague. A similar center also may open in Germany.

**—Will the Survivor Relief Centers and the Aurora online platform remain in operation after the end of the Russian-Ukrainian war?**

**Pavlo Zamostian:**—This support is designed to be ongoing. Therefore, we will engage in discussions with

donors to ensure that both the centers and the Aurora platform become part of Ukraine's violence response system. Our collaboration with government entities, including the Ministry of Social Policy, is effective. We are currently developing the model regulations for the centers, which will allow us to gradually integrate them into the system.

We anticipate more territories will be liberated, where Ukrainian residents will have encountered similar challenges of war. There may be a new wave of survivors, particularly of CRSV, prompting the opening of new centers. Initially, these centers will be mobile, and then we will see.

New tasks may emerge, such as assisting veteran families in preventing [domestic] violence and providing tailored support to the families as they help reintegrate veterans into society.

Given the widespread trauma inflicted by the war on Ukrainian society, extensive rehabilitation efforts will be needed. And that will take time.

*July 2023*

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**Kateryna Cherepakha,  
Maryna Lehenka**  
**UKRAINE URGENTLY NEEDS  
A SPECIAL LAW TO ADDRESS  
CRSV**

*In a recent interview, Kateryna CHEREPAKHA, President, La Strada-Ukraine and Dr. Maryna LEHENKA, Vice President, La Strada-Ukraine emphasized the urgent need for legislation addressing conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV). The conversation focused on the specific legal support needed for survivors of CRSV, aligning with international standards, holding Russian perpetrators accountable for this war crime and the involvement of civil society organizations in the process.*

**—What are the characteristic features of conflict-related sexual violence?**

*“We assert that Russian soldiers use CRSV as a tactic of warfare, directly targeting the Ukrainian civilian population to intimidate and accomplish specific military objectives. Their goal is never sexual satisfaction; rather, it is mainly to humiliate, torture, and assert control over individuals.”*

**Maryna Lehenka:**—This is a type of gender-based sexual violence associated with armed conflict, or war, whether directly or indirectly. This association may be temporal, spatial, or causal in nature. Today, Ukraine demonstrates

all the indicators that define sexual violence during war as a war crime. We assert that Russian soldiers use CRSV as a tactic of warfare, directly targeting the Ukrainian civilian population to intimidate and accomplish specific military objectives. Their goal is never sexual satisfaction; rather, it is mainly to humiliate, torture, and assert control over individuals.

Perpetrators also engage in CRSV targeting prisoners of war, leaving them vulnerable, similar to civilians.

Typically, this kind of violence is committed by soldiers, but it can also be carried out by members of other militarized groups of the Russian Federation and representatives of the aggressor's authorities in temporarily controlled territories. Therefore, when talking about the person committing such actions, it is important to acknowledge war as the primary factor. If a civilian perpetrates an act of violence associated with armed conflict, for example, during a temporary occupation, this must be recognized and labeled as conflict-related sexual violence, as well.

**—Which international conventions do the Russians breach in this respect?**

**Maryna Lehenka:**—Speaking of international criminal law, the principal document in this domain is the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. Although Ukraine has not ratified this treaty, Ukraine has allowed all war crimes committed on its territory to be investigated under the Rome Statute. This document explicitly identifies CRSV as an international crime.

In the meantime, Russian aggressors have blatantly violated several other international agreements, including the Geneva Conventions and their additional protocols,

notably the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. Additionally, they've violated the European Convention on Human Rights, which explicitly prohibits torture in Article 3.

It's vital to draw attention to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Regrettably, children are also affected by sexual violence during the Russian-Ukrainian war. As we discuss CRSV as a form of gender-based violence, we emphasize the extensive breaches by the aggressor of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, ratified by Ukraine.

### **—Who documents cases of CRSV in Ukraine and how?**

**Maryna Lehenka:**—Several institutions in Ukraine are engaged in documenting cases of CRSV. Agencies within the criminal justice system are responsible for initiating criminal proceedings and documenting CRSV as a breach of laws and rules of war. These include the Prosecutor General's Office, the National Police, and the Security Service of Ukraine, along with other public authorities that become aware of such occurrences. To ensure proper compliance with the procedures for subsequent criminal prosecution of perpetrators, pertinent information needs to be submitted to the relevant agencies of criminal justice.

The Prosecutor General's Office of Ukraine and the National Police have set up special units to thoroughly investigate such crimes and collect evidence. One significant aspect of these crimes is that they do not always require mandatory forensic examination. Even if such an examination is carried out, it may not uncover any injuries

or viable biological evidence over time. Therefore, to prove guilt, prosecute the accused, even in absentia, and prepare documents for the International Criminal Court, a range of other evidence must be collected. This includes establishing a clear link to the war, identifying the specific territories with which the individual was associated, and correlating their presence with the timing of Russian Federation representatives in those areas.

**Kateryna Cherepakha:**—Similarly, CRSV cases are also documented by civil society and international organizations. Occasionally, journalists arriving early in liberated territories or individuals delivering humanitarian aid may come across, identify, and document such cases.

Civil initiatives are actively engaged in documenting cases and gathering evidence, ready to submit them to the relevant authorities. Among them are the Ukraine 5AM Coalition and Tribunal for Putin, a global human rights initiative.

**—How is La Strada-Ukraine engaged in documenting CRSV?**

**Kateryna Cherepakha:**—Mostly, we receive reports about CRSV through our hotlines—the National Hotline on prevention domestic violence, human trafficking, and gender-based discrimination (0 800 500 335 from mobile or landline, or 116 123 from mobile) and the National Children and Youth Hotline (0 800 500 225 from mobile or landline, or 116 111 from mobile). These reports are either made directly by the victims or by witnesses of such acts of violence, or referred from other institutions, including public authorities.

It should be noted that the main purpose of the calls is not reporting a crime but seeking assistance. This is why we focus on providing support. We consistently guide individuals on where to access support and how to report such crimes.

To provide more opportunities and ways for people to report CRSV crimes, our organization has created a chatbot (@survivors\_support\_bot). Here you can learn about what wartime sexual violence involves, the different forms to help identify CRSV and find information where survivors can access necessary assistance. The chatbot also allows individuals to forward concerns to the National Hotline for prevention of domestic violence, human trafficking and gender-based discrimination via Telegram @NHL116123. All calls are anonymous and confidential. Additionally, individuals can report their story or a CRSV case through an online form, even anonymously. This information will then be passed on to the Prosecutor General's Office, as the chatbot was developed in collaboration with them.

We do not pressure survivors seeking help from us to go to law enforcement and report their experiences. However, our consultants inform them of the choice and the importance of making such a report, as well as where to find support throughout the process. Ensuring survivors have all necessary information is vital for making a well-informed decision.

**—Does this encourage survivors to seek assistance from law enforcement?**

**Maryna Lehenka:**—Each survivor may have their own reasons for cooperating with law enforcement. The

key factor to consider is whether he or she is ready to go through the entire process. Despite a decrease in the number of interrogations for survivors, it is still stressful and significantly challenging, and may trigger a reactivation of trauma.

What motivates them? Some survivors may be driven by reparations, financial compensation for their experiences. When they realize that receiving compensation requires reporting to the law enforcement and having a well-documented case, they may choose to move forward.

Others are motivated by the desire to hold perpetrators to account, particularly on an international level, seeking justice or revenge. Each situation is unique.

**—Is a child born of CRSV classified as a victim?**

**Maryna Lehenka:**—A victim is someone, including a child, who has directly experienced or witnessed abuse. Ukrainian law doesn't recognize a child born of rape as a victim.

*“Contraceptives were not used in any of the known cases of CRSV, making subsequent pregnancies highly likely.”*

**Kateryna Cherepakha:**—Currently, in Ukraine, not enough attention is given to children born of CRSV, as highlighted by multiple civil society organizations, among other entities. Looking at the experiences of other countries, there are different initiatives in this area. Mostly, they focus on adult children who are aware of the circumstances of their birth. Some of these initiatives are started by the

children themselves, such as support groups. However, some children may not even know the circumstances of their birth story.

Certainly, these children already exist in Ukraine. Contraceptives were not used in any of the known cases of CRSV, making subsequent pregnancies highly likely.

It would be wrong to say that Ukraine is not preparing to address this issue. A number of organizations are actively engaged in tackling, researching, and highlighting the importance of including this category of people in different programs or initiatives. They also recommend considering this when designing support programs for women who become pregnant as a result of CRSV. However, we still lack a legal framework in this area.

**—What is the time limit on reporting CRSV to public authorities?**

**Maryna Lehenka:**—People who suffered CRSV can seek help from state authorities at any time. There is no time limit for reporting this crime. Our state treats CRSV seriously and will conduct an investigation regardless of when the survivor comes forward—whether it's 5, 10, 20, or even 30 years later.

For instance, in Croatia, there were cases where survivors reported CRSV incidents 30 years later. Regrettably, Ukraine also has numerous such cases, and we anticipate years of investigation ahead.

**—What mechanisms does Ukraine have in place to respond to cases of CRSV?**

**Maryna Lehenka:**—These crimes are investigated under Article 438 of the Criminal Code, as breaches of laws and customs of war. Ukraine does not consider CRSV

as a crime or contain a definition of it in domestic laws, including criminal legislation.

Despite the ongoing war on our soil since 2014, we still lack specific legislation addressing this issue. Since then, our hotlines have consistently received reports of CRSV cases.

The penalty outlined in Article 438 presents some challenges. The first part of this article stipulates imprisonment for a maximum of 12 years, while the second section, addressing the intentional killing of the victim, mandates life imprisonment. However, the issue arises from the fact that CRSV often leads to severe consequences not covered by the latter part. Additionally, the initial segment is less severe than, for instance, Article 152, which deals with rape in civilian settings. Nevertheless, all CRSV cases are presently investigated under Article 438 of the Criminal Code. This approach ensures that these cases are treated within a consistent legal framework and enables appropriate action at the International Criminal Court for such instances.

Does Ukraine need a specific law? Absolutely. It's essential. It is also crucial to determine the status of individuals affected by CRSV. Our country urgently requires guidelines for compensating damages, particularly when the perpetrator fails to pay compensation. How will the state provide compensation? A specific law that addresses all aspects, including providing comprehensive aid to survivors, is urgently needed at this time.

Is it essential for Ukraine to have a specific section in the Criminal Code? Yes, it's crucial. Work on drafting these regulations has been in progress for a while, even before the

full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation, but they are still incomplete. I know that there are ongoing efforts to develop draft laws with public involvement and relevant discussions taking place. Progress is being made in this area. However, given the increasing number of affected individuals, this work needs to be sped up.

**Kateryna Cherepakha:**—It is important to engage civil society organizations in drafting such legislation, particularly those focusing on responding to CRSV and aiding survivors. Their specialists often advocate for the perspectives of those directly affected by CRSV who may not be ready to engage actively in current initiatives. These organizations can effectively convey the experiences, challenges, viewpoints, and needs of survivors.

*“Currently in Ukraine, we encounter a unique situation, where addressing CRSV challenges requires the involvement of not only governmental agencies but also international donors and national civil society organizations. The success of these efforts greatly depends on their collaboration, as neither sector alone can adequately address this issue.”*

When it comes to drafting various laws, including amendments to the Criminal Code, La Strada is actively involved in this endeavour.

**—What helps Ukraine overcome challenges related to wartime sexual violence?**

**Kateryna Cherepakha:**—Currently in Ukraine, we encounter a unique situation, where addressing CRSV challenges requires the involvement of not only governmental agencies but also international donors and

national civil society organizations. The success of these efforts greatly depends on their collaboration, as neither sector alone can adequately address this issue.

The role of civil society organizations is significant. Survivors of CRSV often reach out to them and share their experiences. These organizations possess strong professional expertise and are highly trusted, especially when it comes to anonymity, confidentiality, and informal support.

Civil society organizations focused on addressing sexual, domestic, and gender-based violence are actively engaged in the efforts. Of particular significance are those with expertise and well-established networks, fostering collaboration with various organizations, both governmental and non-governmental. Women's NGOs consistently prioritize the needs of survivors.

On the other hand, many issues cannot be resolved without the involvement of the government. It is commendable that Ukraine not only recognizes these issues as relevant but also addresses them extensively, both domestically and internationally. This is made possible through initiatives led by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration, the Government Commissioner for Gender Policy, and other institutions. Their acknowledgment of the importance of supporting and promoting initiatives in this field positively impacts the development of effective support mechanisms, systems, and services. Furthermore, these systems must operate efficiently at national, regional, and local levels.

A good example of coordinated efforts among diverse institutions in tackling CRSV issues is the formation

and functioning of the Inter-Agency Working Group on Combating CRSV and Assistance to the Survivors. Led by Kateryna LEVCHENKO, the Government Commissioner for Gender Policy, this group includes representatives from key governmental authorities, international experts, and civil society organizations, including members of La Strada-Ukraine.

Support of international organizations, both in terms of resources and expertise, is crucial. Many projects and initiatives have valuable experience in addressing CRSV issues and have successfully tailored it to fit our country's circumstances.

*August 2023*

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**Aliona Kryvuliak**  
**LA STRADA HOTLINES ASSIST**  
**VICTIMS AND SURVIVORS**  
**OF CRSV**

*In Ukraine, robust resources have been set up to assist those affected by conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV), and the La Strada-Ukraine hotlines are an active element in this effort. Today, we are joined by Alyona KRYVULYAK, Director of the Department of National Hotlines and Social Assistance at the civic society organization (CSO) La Strada-Ukraine.*

**—How often do people reach out to your hotlines?**

—La Strada-Ukraine operates two hotlines. The National Hotline focuses on preventing domestic violence, human trafficking, and gender discrimination. Most inquiries are from adults, with 77% coming from women and 23% from men, according to our statistics.

In the past year, we received 38,472 inquiries; 19,393 inquiries were recorded in the first half of 2023 alone. While domestic violence is a prevalent issue, we also address cases of gender discrimination and non-domestic violence.

We also run a National Hotline for children and youth. As the name suggests, it is designed for children, teenagers, and university students. In 2022, this hotline received 178,637 inquiries, marking its highest engagement since 2013.

For the first half of 2023, we received just over 60,000 inquiries. These inquiries are different than from previous years, underscoring the importance of deep psychological consultations and mental health support for children, teenagers, and university students. For example, when they struggle with fear, anxiety, and loneliness, experience panic attacks, resort to self-harm, or have suicidal thoughts.

**—How often do survivors of CRSV contact you?**

—We've been tracking such statistics since 2014 when Russia began occupying our country's territories. The number of reports intensified after the large-scale aggression by the Russian Federation. Since February 24, 2022, we have received 69 reports of conflict-related sexual violence.

While this number may appear relatively small compared to overall hotline statistics, it is crucial to recognize that the topic of CRSV is more taboo and concealed than, for instance, domestic violence or sexual harassment in the workplace or harassment at educational institutions.

**—How do your consultants identify individuals affected by CRSV?**

—The situations vary significantly. For example, we have managed four cases involving boys who have experienced CRSV. They communicated independently and openly shared their experiences.

There were also two cases involving adult men. One openly shared the experience he had undergone, while the other, returning from occupation, initially requested only humanitarian aid and social benefits. However, he stressed the importance of obtaining medical assistance, particularly

in a confidential capacity. Further communication revealed that Russian occupiers had sexually assaulted him.

*“A woman called and said that she saw no purpose in her life anymore, was contemplating suicide. Only the thought of her three-year-old son prevented her from trying.. As we continued talking, she shared that she had been gang-raped by Russian soldiers, and her three-year-old son had witnessed that.”*

Throughout the full-scale war, we received requests for assistance from 19 girls who had experienced CRSV. Some were upfront about being victims or witnessing such abuse right from the start, while others took time to find the courage to talk about their experiences. They often showed an interest in psychological support, sharing their challenges, the difficulties of leaving the occupied areas, and even thoughts of suicide. In-depth conversations enabled us to recognize that these girls had been directly or indirectly affected by CRSV.

We received 44 CRSV-related inquiries from women aged 18 and above. Among them, only five openly shared their experiences, detailing incidents of rape, sexual humiliation, and harm to their genital organs. Other women approached the topic more subtly, hinting at their experiences indirectly.

A woman called and said that she saw no purpose in her life anymore, was contemplating suicide. Only the thought of her three-year-old son prevented her from trying.. As we continued talking, she shared that she had been gang-raped by Russian soldiers, and her three-year-old son had witnessed that.

**—From which areas do you typically receive CRSV-related calls?**

— The majority of calls come from liberated areas of Kyiv region, such as Bucha, Makariv, Borodianka, and Brovary districts. There were also calls from Kherson, when the city was under occupation and also later from the areas that were liberated afterwards. Women living in the occupied areas of Zaporizhzhia region, especially in Melitopol and Berdyansk, reach out to seek counselling and support. We also received calls and correspondence from liberated areas in Kharkiv region, mostly from the town of Izium. We were contacted by people from Chernihiv, Luhansk, and Donetsk regions. We had women who called from the occupied city of Mariupol to report that they experienced CRSV and express concern about the significant risk that this situation could persist.

**—What is the current trend: are more survivors seeking assistance through hotlines?**

—Currently, there has been a decrease in the number of inquiries. When Kyiv region was liberated, there were significantly more reports. However, it is worth noting that even now we continue to receive inquiries from women who experienced sexual violence during the occupation of specific areas in the capital region. Some have taken a year to be ready to talk about it, while others may take five years or even longer. Hence, we expect to continue receiving similar inquiries for an extended period.

Sometimes friends or acquaintances of survivors reach out to report cases of CRSV. For example, a woman shared her experience with a close friend, who then reached out to us for advice on how to help and communicate effectively

with the survivor. Some reports came from family members, including instances where teenage children shared their parents' experiences or, conversely, parents called to talk about their children who were sexually abused by Russian soldiers.

—**When survivors of CRSV reach out to hotlines, what types of assistance do they typically require?**

—The majority of individuals seek information on medical assistance, explore relocation possibilities to other regions or countries, inquire about financial benefits or housing.

*“When the Russian Federation invaded Ukraine, we were generally prepared to work with this category of survivors. Our prior experience with similar cases dating back to 2014 enabled us to foresee the probability of war crimes, including CRSV, that would be committed by Russian soldiers.”*

Both female and male survivors of CRSV inquire about relocation, as their present surroundings serve as a constant reminder of the experiences they endured. Neighbors or fellow villagers often gossip, occasionally even blaming survivors, implying that louder protests or stronger resistance could have prevented mistreatment. Instances have been reported where civilians impose a sense of guilt on the survivor. Any reasonable person should understand that in such circumstances, as in any other violent situation, sexual assault is never the fault of the survivor.

—**How challenging is it for hotline consultants to communicate with individuals affected by CRSV?**

—When the Russian Federation invaded Ukraine, we were generally prepared to work with this category of

survivors. Our prior experience with similar cases dating back to 2014 enabled us to foresee the probability of war crimes, including CRSV, that would be committed by Russian soldiers.

Our consultants continuously improve their skills through legal and psychological training, especially in international matters. This training is very helpful during their work.

La Strada-Ukraine experts have created CRSV online courses on the Prometheus platform; courses are compulsory for all our consultants. We also maintain strong connections with our international partners. Experts from abroad provide training and webinars for our consultants on supporting CRSV survivors, sharing insights from their experiences in countries with a history of war and war crimes.

We conduct regular supervision sessions and interviews with our consultants to support them in preventing professional burnout while working on hotlines. Communicating with survivors can present emotional and psychological challenges. These sessions also involve discussions of difficult CRSV cases, enabling us to brainstorm and improve existing methodology based on practical experience.

Our experts provide CRSV training to other NGOs and government representatives. If a hotline consultant encounters a challenging question related to CRSV, they can always seek additional consultation from our experts.

**—When engaging with individuals, do you take into account their age and gender?**

—We recognize that each person responds uniquely to their experiences. For example, communicating with

male survivors of sexual violence committed by Russian soldiers can be psychologically challenging, because men are generally more reserved in reporting such crimes compared to women. Counseling children presents its own set of challenges, as they often find it difficult to cope with traumatic events. Teenagers, in particular, may incline towards self-hatred and self-harm and even contemplate suicide as a solution. Therefore, all these factors should be considered.

**—CRSV survivors often require specific assistance, including medical, psychological, legal, and other forms of support. Are there established partnerships with professionals and organizations capable of providing such services, to which you can refer survivors for help?**

—Certainly, we partner with government institutions, international organizations, and the civil society sector in Ukraine. We also collaborate with civil society and international organizations globally. For instance, if a Ukrainian woman who has experienced CRSV in another country reaches out to us and is unsure where to seek assistance abroad, we refer her to our local partners for support.

Similarly, in Ukraine, the hotline does not provide medical assistance, but we maintain a database of partner organizations operating in different regions. This enables us to refer survivors for medical assistance, comprehensive therapy, humanitarian aid and financial support.

**—What guidance do La Strada hotline consultants offer to survivors of CRSV?**

—First and foremost, we recommend survivors to find a safe place, taking into account the potential need to

prevent the recurrence of the crime or, in some cases, to save their lives.

After that, they should seek medical assistance by calling 103. Healthcare institutions should document physical injuries and assess the health condition of victims. We also advise survivors to report the crime to relevant authorities, including the National Police of Ukraine (by calling 102), the prosecutor's office (details available at<sup>1</sup>) and the military administration in the area where the crime took place or where the survivor is located.

We recommend diligently documenting the crime, whenever feasible, using photographs and videos. If there are witnesses to the crime, capturing their testimonies is important.

If survivors need psychological and legal assistance, they are encouraged to reach out to the Free Legal Aid Hotline (0 800 213 103 or [www.legalaid.gov.ua](http://www.legalaid.gov.ua)) and the Government Hotline (1547 or [www.1547.ukc.gov.ua](http://www.1547.ukc.gov.ua)). Our hotlines also offer similar services.

Survivors of CRSV in the temporarily occupied territories can contact the competent authorities of Ukraine, including reporting the crime to the General Prosecutor's Office via hotline for crimes committed during the armed conflict—(096) 755-02-40 (Viber, WhatsApp, Telegram, Signal) and via email at [conflict2022.ua@gmail.com](mailto:conflict2022.ua@gmail.com) (if information is sent by email, it is necessary to provide full name and contact details).

—**From whom do you receive funding?**

—Currently, our main partners and donors are international organizations. Specifically, the United Nations

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<sup>1</sup> <https://gp.gov.ua/ua/posts/sajti-oblasnih-prokuratur>.

Children's Fund (UNICEF), in collaboration with the Government of Japan, provides funding for the National Hotline for children and youth. The National Hotline for preventing domestic violence, human trafficking, and gender discrimination is funded by the United Nations Population Fund. We sincerely appreciate their vital assistance.

**—What support do you receive from the Government?**

—With regard to the National Hotline for preventing domestic violence, human trafficking, and gender discrimination, Government Commissioner for Gender Policy Kateryna LEVCHENKO or members of her staff are often involved in responding to calls and providing expert consultations. Those wishing to speak with the government representative are welcome to reach out to us.

Furthermore, Government Commissioner LEVCHENKO and her team provide training to our consultants, ensuring they have a comprehensive understanding of the government's initiatives to assist survivors of CRSV and the public support services available to them. The exchange of professional insights and expert viewpoints from government representatives is crucial to equip our consultants with extensive knowledge, encompassing not only the civil society initiatives but also the government's involvement in this realm.

**—What communication channels do survivors of CRSV typically use?**

—Most often, people reach out to us online via texts, accounting for around 80% of all inquiries, whereas phone conversations represent about 20% of inquiries. This pattern is intentional, as many CRSV survivors find it

more comfortable to share their stories in writing before engaging in verbal conversations.

For the National Hotline for children and youth, victims can call either 0 800 500 225 or the toll-free short number 116 111, available on all mobile phones. Alternatively, one can use our online channels: Facebook—@childhotline.ukraine, Instagram—childhotline\_ua, or Telegram—CHL116111. This hotline operates 24/7.

To contact the National Hotline for preventing domestic violence, human trafficking, and gender discrimination, these toll-free numbers are available: 0 800 500 335 or 116 123. These numbers are accessible from all mobile phones, or individuals can reach out through electronic channels—Skype @lastrada-ukraine, Facebook @lastradaukraine, Instagram @lastradaukraine, Telegram—NHL116123, or via email at hotline@la-strada.org.ua. This hotline operates 24/7 as well.

*“All our hotlines operate on the principles of anonymity and confidentiality. We do not have access to the caller’s phone number, and we do not gather or require any personal information.”*

Hotlines provide widespread coverage across Ukraine, enabling individuals in active conflict zones to access support, provided they have active mobile data or Internet access. This extends to residents of temporarily occupied territories. While Ukrainian mobile operators are not currently available in these areas, online communication channels and social networks remain accessible. Additionally, consultations, including voice consultations, can be facilitated through social media.

Ukrainians living abroad can contact us through social networks by texting or calling. They often may not be proficient in foreign languages, finding it more comfortable to share emotional and social issues and access free consultations in their native language.

Although there are organizations abroad providing consultations to our fellow citizens, individuals may encounter situations where not all psychological and legal assistance is offered free of charge.

**—How is it perceived if a person wants to report a case of CRSV anonymously?**

—All our hotlines operate on the principles of anonymity and confidentiality. We do not have access to the caller's phone number, and we do not gather or require any personal information. While a person may choose to reveal their identity and share personal details, we do not use this information in any way. Only if a person explicitly requests a specific action or engagement with a particular organization, an official request is necessary for our organization to intervene.

We can see nicknames of social media users, but we do not use them anywhere. If someone has reservations about this, they can create an entirely new profile solely for receiving our consultations, without disclosing their existing social network profile.

*August 2023*

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**Yurii Bielousov, Iryna Didenko**  
**EVOLVING DYNAMICS**  
**IN THE INVESTIGATIONS**  
**OF CONFLICT-RELATED SEXUAL**  
**VIOLENCE PROMPT CHANGES**  
**IN THE OFFICE**  
**OF THE PROSECUTOR GENERAL**

*We are here with Yurii BIELOUSOV, Chief of the Department for Combating Crimes Committed During Armed Conflict at the Office of the Prosecutor General of Ukraine, and Iryna DIDENKO, Head of the Department of Procedural Guidance of Pre-trial Investigation and Support of Public Prosecution in Criminal Proceedings on Crimes of Sexual Violence to talk about the transformations in the Office of the Prosecutor General (OPG) and discuss the specifics of investigating war crimes, including CRSV, protecting survivors, cooperating with the International Criminal Court, and drafting a bill on reparations.*

**—What led to the establishment of the department responsible for investigating instances of sexual violence committed by Russian combatants?**

**Iryna Didenko:**—The [specific] department was created in September 2022 to investigate war crimes associated with CRSV. The department is noteworthy for its focus on addressing a highly sensitive category of crimes, requiring new approaches, primarily in working with the survivors, to support and protect them.

Furthermore, it is important to follow the international protocols, such as the Murad Code.

**—What is the Murad Code?**

**Iryna Didenko:**—The Murad Code [Global Code of Conduct for Gathering and Using Information about Systematic and Conflict-Related Sexual Violence] offers guidelines for assisting survivors of conflict-related sexual violence. The Murad Code was developed by Nobel Peace Prize laureate Nadia Murad, who experienced conflict-related violence firsthand. Outlined are fundamental approaches for working with survivors, including the Do No Harm principles, the S.T.O.P! principle, explanations of informed consent, and confidentiality.

*“The challenge is that many survivors still live in frontline regions, where gunfire is common, and often they neither have a home nor a means of existence, obtaining food.. Their primary concern is survival and safety, with giving testimony a second priority.”*

**—Are these approaches innovative for the OPG?**

**Yurii Bielousov:**—The newly established department has become a catalyst for change. Prosecutors typically represent the prosecution side, focusing on holding the guilty accountable. The problem is that once a person who has suffered from a crime provides information, they often lose relevance to the criminal justice system. There is now an entirely different approach, where prosecutors prioritize the interests of the victim. While holding the guilty accountable remains essential, the prosecutor remains involved as the accuser as no one else can determine guilt. However, there

is an additional objective—not only to punish, but also to restore the rights of the victim to the fullest extent possible.

Later on, there was a proposal to establish a dedicated unit within the Office of the Prosecutor General to assist survivors. The Coordination Center for the Support of Victims and Witnesses of War Crimes has recently commenced operations, with a primary focus on individuals who have experienced CRSV.

**—What aspects distinguish your work, and what challenges do you face?**

**Iryna Didenko:**—A key aspect is that investigations are being conducted during this time of war. Individuals in this group [of victims] rarely approach law enforcement or the prosecutor’s office to report crimes against them. Moreover, documentation of these crimes is mainly carried out by mobile teams working in the liberated territories, consisting of a prosecutor, investigator, medic, and therapist.

The challenge is that many survivors still live in frontline regions, where gunfire is common, and often they neither have a home nor a means of existence, obtaining food.. Their primary concern is survival and safety, with giving testimony a second priority..

**Yurii Bielousov:**—We are often asked why we conduct investigations during wartime. We have no other choice. When crimes occur on such a significant scale, as seen in Bucha with numerous people beaten and bodies left in the streets, we had to document every detail.

In a certain sense, Ukraine is unique. Ukraine faces a war of unprecedented scale since World War II, yet its judicial system remains operational during wartime. The circumstances have changed so much and forced us to adapt and learn on the

go. We never questioned the need to document Russian war crimes; rather, the challenge laid in how to do so effectively. These are entirely different types of crimes that fall under international humanitarian law, with distinct investigation standards. We have been documenting while learning and refining our methods, seeking and engaging international expertise. We continue our efforts. In this regard, one advantage Ukraine possesses is its capacity to collect fresh evidence, unlike many jurisdictions where international crimes are only investigated after a decade. Certainly, their evidence base differs significantly. Ukraine has the capacity to swiftly gather evidence, which may give us an edge in documentation, although the sheer scale of work remains immense.

**Iryna Didenko:**—How could we possibly ignore documenting when someone comes forward to report a war crime? I clearly remember one of the first CRSV cases in Borodyanka district. We visited a woman, she was standing and holding a piece of paper. Despite being a CRSV survivor herself, her statement was not about that; her statement detailed how her husband was killed while protecting her from sexual violence by Russian soldiers. She pleaded with us to register the case, start an investigation, and exhume his body because she had buried him in her garden. We exhumed the body, and later, non-governmental organizations helped arrange a proper burial for him since the woman had no money as her possessions were looted by the Russians. It was only after resolving with these matters that we discussed the CRSV incident.

**—What do you think drives Russians to commit CRSV?**

**Iryna Didenko:**—CRSV is not about seeking sexual pleasure. Survivors themselves say that it is about

destruction—inflicting emotional harm and destroying a person emotionally. Perpetrators view such actions as a means of affirmation: they believe that by destroying others, they elevate themselves.

*“Regarding the scale of the issue, I am deeply troubled by a specific incident that occurred on a street in Kyiv region. Two Russian soldiers perpetrated war crimes against twelve victims, with CRSV being a factor in eight of these instances. These inhumane individuals strolled along a brief street in a small village and inflicted considerable harm within a mere 2-hour span. They raped both the mother in front of her child and the child in front of the mother.”*

**Yurii Bielousov:**—I was struck by how different we are and the varying levels of social development. Our perceptions of Russians are often shaped by TV shows, from places such as Moscow and St. Petersburg. Yet Russia is much more multifaceted. Russia has its own distinct culture and history. Over time, propaganda has dehumanized Russians and cultivated in them a sense of superiority towards Ukrainians, whom they see as ungrateful and seeking alliances with the West. This hatred towards Ukrainians arises from a sense of difference, which they clearly feel. I believe that many of the atrocities in Bucha were fueled by Russians observing a higher standard of living in Ukraine compared to their own country, leading them to direct their hatred towards Ukrainians.

It is truly disturbing to observe Russian combatants’ wives encouraging them to rape Ukrainian women or hear Russian soldiers and officers speaking disrespectfully to

their mothers on the phone. Such behaviour is not common in our society. While such conduct might occur in extremely dysfunctional families, the extent suggests a difference in cultural standards. Violence is deeply embedded in Russian culture. Although I have not studied this matter extensively, I believe that the prevalence of sexual violence in Russia is considerably higher.

**—Is CRSV classified as a crime against humanity, displaying signs of genocide?**

**Yurii Bielousov:**—How are crimes against humanity different from war crimes? They are systematic and widespread. If these were isolated incidents, they could be classified as individual war crimes. Given the widespread occurrence and signs of systemic behavior, we could potentially classify this pattern as a crime against humanity.

Wartime sexual violence might exhibit signs of genocide. However, not all cases fit this description. We are currently examining each case to understand why the victim was targeted, what was said during the assault, and what the perpetrator's intentions were. If these crimes show signs of genocide, especially when combined with other acts such as murder, torture, abduction, and forced displacement of children, they could collectively amount to the crime of genocide.

The Office of the Prosecutor General has stated that Russians employ CRSV as a weapon of war. These actions are not just the desire of an individual perpetrator, but a deliberate policy supported by the Russian Federation. I have not encountered in Russian sources any public condemnation of the conduct of their soldiers or officers.

**—How many cases of CRSV have been identified to date?**

**Iryna Didenko:**—We have documented 231 cases of CRSV, but we recognize that this number does not reflect the actual prevalence. It is important to consider the social stigma; many people hesitate to disclose what they have experienced due to fear of being judged by their community. Regrettably, we often encounter such condemnation and accusation of survivors.

Regarding the scale of the issue, I am deeply troubled by a specific incident that occurred on a street in Kyiv region. Two Russian soldiers perpetrated war crimes against twelve victims, with CRSV being a factor in eight of these instances. These inhumane individuals strolled along a brief street in a small village and inflicted considerable harm within a mere 2-hour span. They raped both the mother in front of her child and the child in front of the mother. The crime has been exposed; we have identified the perpetrators, and the criminal case is now being forwarded to court for prosecution. Regrettably, it will be a trial held in the absence of the accused.

However, I would like to mention something else. Once the residents of this street came to realize that they were all victims, they started sharing their stories. This shared experience created a sense of unity among them. They all provided testimony and now stay connected and support each other. It is essential for all survivors to understand that they are not to blame and should seek help, especially psychological support. I often receive messages from those who have started legal proceedings, are grateful for the support and state that they feel better. We have not encountered any negative experiences due to their involvement in legal proceedings.

**—Is it possible for a victim or witness of CRSV to report a case while remaining anonymous?**

**Iryna Didenko:**—We ensure confidentiality, and even advise survivors to take security measures. They can take a new name and surname for the case, start a new chapter in life, and these altered personal details are maintained throughout the legal proceedings.

We are bound to ensure that the rights of suspects are protected, even the Russian soldier implicated in this crime, within our legal proceedings. They have the right to a fair defense. To ensure the suspect is aware of the criminal charges and suspicions, we need to find a way to inform them. Since we do not have shared documentation with Russia, we resort to conducting trials in absentia. Notifications of suspicion, including all personal data, even that of the victim, must be published on the official website as required by law. To protect the victim's privacy, we promptly change their personal information in the legal proceedings. This approach has proven effective. There have been instances where human rights activists raised concerns about potential privacy breaches upon seeing specific names of individuals who were subjected to cruel treatment on our website. They were concerned that these individuals could be located. However, I assured them that we have taken measures to protect their identities by altering the personal details accordingly.

**—Do you cooperate with international partners to detect and investigate CRSV cases involving individuals who have left Ukraine?**

**Iryna Didenko:**—We do. We have conducted broad awareness campaigns in neighbouring allied countries,

encouraging individuals to share their experiences. Complications arise when some survivors are now living abroad, as we do not have a means to question them remotely. Currently, this process is managed through international legal assistance, which is time-consuming and burdened by bureaucracy. We are committed to advocating for legislative changes to ensure individuals have access to national justice from anywhere in the world.

Our international partners help us in various aspects of our work. Nearly every criminal case involves an international expert, who provides professional assistance in our investigations. This collaboration demonstrates our commitment to transparency and accountability. We conduct criminal investigations backed by evidence; we have nothing to fear. We do not fabricate cases, unlike practices observed in the Russian Federation. The Russians prohibit access to and do not disclose their legal proceedings, like in the “good old days” of the Soviet Union. A woman who was detained in Russia shared the formal accusation with us. You should see what it says! She was accused of posting on Facebook that Ukraine is an independent state, a charge that resulted in many years of imprisonment.

Another woman faced accusations simply because she owned a magnet displaying the Ukrainian flag. Subjected to torture, she was pressured into signing documents admitting guilt for all imaginable sins. How can this be considered justice? The magnet bearing the flag was sealed, packaged and marked as material evidence. Such profound cultural differences.

**—In the fall of 2022, the Strategy for a Victim and Witness-Centred Approach to CRSV Case Management was presented. What does it involve?**

**Iryna Didenko:**—This document is highly important for us. It signifies a commitment to revamp the system, endorsed by the Prosecutor General’s signature, indicating the agency’s backing for these reforms. This document outlines our way of moving forward, with the Murad Code serving as a key guiding principle.

Therefore, we have established a framework for cooperation, with the OPG overseeing CRSV crimes in the regions and providing methodological support. We are currently piloting this framework in two regions, Kharkiv and Kherson, where efforts to address these crimes are already underway. We stay in regular contact with our colleagues in these areas, discussing every step and addressing every concern they may have. We will eventually train experts in other regions, making our workload more manageable. To ensure the efficient functioning of the system, it is important that each district-level prosecutor understands how to manage the CRSV cases that have been previously transferred to Kyiv to investigate at the central level.

We are currently developing a step-by-step action plan to implement the Strategy. This action plan will include various measures, from necessary legislative changes to offering psychological assistance to prosecutors. It will be synchronized with the government’s implementation plan, with a primary focus on pre-trial investigation, supported by the broader framework laid out in the government plan.

**Yurii Bielousov:**—We're at a critical point that demands transformation. I often draw parallels with the Armed Forces: at the onset of the war, our military had to change to withstand the onslaught. The same is happening now in the criminal justice system. Without change, without evolving our approaches, it will simply collapse. The investigation of international war crimes serves as a testing ground for innovative approaches. This is not because we have nothing else to do; rather, we recognize that transitioning from paper to digital is essential. Without this shift, we will not efficiently handle the vast amount of case materials or identify perpetrators. After the war, this transition will enable the criminal justice system to advance to the next level.

Even amid these challenging circumstances, we must recognize opportunities for Ukraine. One such opportunity lies in embracing change and transitioning to a higher level of development.

**—How do you support victims and witnesses in CRSV cases?**

**Iryna Didenko:**—We follow what I call the single-entry point rule. This means that the prosecutor who initially reaches out to the victim remains engaged with them consistently. We used to formally recognize individuals as victims in court, but not anymore. Now, survivors are provided with a memo outlining their rights, which automatically and officially designates them as victims. To improve clarity, we have crafted letters to notify individuals of their status as victims in the criminal proceedings. However, we refrain from detailing the specifics to prevent triggering their trauma again. We also send letters

confirming their status in the case, without going into details to avoid causing further distress. My job title already indicates which types of crimes we investigate. Finally, we give contact details for the prosecutor handling their specific case and assure them to feel free to reach out with any questions.

We do our best to respond to all requests as much as possible. For example, if someone requires basic assistance such as food supplies, we reach out to humanitarian organizations, and they provide the necessary assistance. Additionally, there are NGOs that assist people in leaving conflict-affected areas, offer free housing for a year, arrange psychological support, and cater to various needs.

We handle each request on a case-by-case basis and come up with solutions. Typically, everyone is responsive and helps out. Now, everything runs smoothly. We used to only focus on searching, but now everyone knows who is responsible for what and where to turn for assistance. The Coordination Center for the Support of Victims and Witnesses of War Crimes, as I mentioned earlier, will now manage this task.

**—During a recent interview, Iryna Didenko mentioned the importance of establishing a comprehensive support and aid system for witnesses and victims of CRSV that spans their entire lifetime. Why is this necessary?**

**Yurii Bielousov:**—Many victims of CRSV have experienced deep psychological traumas that will have lasting effects on them. However, with timely intervention, they can still lead fulfilling lives despite the traumas. In my past work investigating torture, I witnessed situations where victims had no support or rehabilitation available.

Now, with so many war crimes happening, we have to reassess our approaches. Any one of us, we realize, could have been a victim. That's why we cannot stand idly by. It is crucial to consider creating a strong support system.

*"We will face many obstacles along the way. In the past, there was discussion about the Vietnam syndrome and the Afghanistan syndrome, and we'll need to deal with similar issues. It is easier when soldiers fight abroad and then return home, but it is much more complicated when the entire country is the site of criminal activity. And with tens of millions of victims, the scale of the challenge is immense."*

Our task is to identify the victim and coordinate an entire network of governmental and non-government organizations around them. This approach is both compassionate and practical. If we do not help survivors, we risk losing them. Many end up withdrawing from life, losing interest in work, family, and personal growth. This often results in increased crime rates, drug abuse, and heightened suicidal tendencies. The OPG is among the first to address this issue. Fortunately, social services and the education and healthcare systems are also aware of this.

Already we are thinking about the difficulties we will encounter after the war, understanding that finding solutions will not be easy. We will face many obstacles along the way. In the past, there was discussion about the Vietnam syndrome and the Afghanistan syndrome, and we'll need to deal with similar issues. It is easier when soldiers fight abroad and then return home, but it is much more complicated when the entire country is the site of

criminal activity. And with tens of millions of victims, the scale of the challenge is immense.

I do not think anyone in the world has ever had a rehabilitation and support system like this before. We are piloting completely new methods, and there are no guidelines to follow.

**—How does the Office of the Prosecutor General collaborate with international, as well as civil society organizations in Ukraine on matters related to CRSV?**

**Iryna Didenko:**—Our collaborative efforts are evolving and take various forms. For instance, the Office of the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, headed by Pramila PATTEN, has been guiding our efforts since the start. Her office helps us apply principles correctly, conduct investigations, follow international protocols, and uphold international humanitarian law. Many international experts and organizations also offer us their expertise and training. Moreover, they supply us with necessary equipment, particularly because we work in frontline regions. They have provided us with excellent protective gear, which we use in our work.

We are also discussing providing direct aid to survivors, usually through international organizations. Plans are underway to create a reparations system in the near future. It is important to note that interim reparations will not be provided by the aggressor country, as we still need to resolve issues with them. The global community is aiding Ukraine in addressing these losses.

**Yurii Bielousov:**—International organizations quickly stepped in to support Ukraine as it faced the challenge of

addressing war crimes. Despite dealing with these issues since 2014, our focus was narrow, and we lacked expertise in this field. However, with a surge in such crimes, our international partners, who have experience investigating similar crimes in African countries, the former Yugoslavia, and elsewhere, have been incredibly helpful. We have formed an advisory group consisting of experts from the US, UK, and EU to investigate the most serious crimes, and they have been collaborating with us for the past two years. Their expertise and technical support have greatly aided our efforts.

*“The International Criminal Court does not investigate individual cases of sexual violence or prosecute individual combatants; instead, it focuses on holding high-ranking military and political leaders accountable for the policies and significant large-scale crimes committed by Russia. Therefore, evidence of widespread CRSV can contribute to supporting this aspect of the policy.”*

Non-governmental organizations play a vital role as well. We all share the same global aim: to ensure justice and document all events occurring here. NGOs often serve as essential sources of information for us, being among the first responders to incidents, the first to identify affected individuals, and assisting in locating individuals we may have overlooked. This teamwork, this cooperation, strengthens our efforts.

**—Could you share your thoughts on the legislative changes needed to conduct effective investigations into CRSV cases?**

**Iryna Didenko:**—Amending current legislation is part of the action plan that is underway. First, immediate

changes are necessary and should be implemented quickly. Member of Parliament Maryna BARDINA has already submitted an 'urgent bill' No. 9351 to the Verkhovna Rada, addressing essential issues. One significant aspect is allowing closed court hearings. While proceedings are currently public under Article 438 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine (*Violation of the laws and customs of war*), it is important to allow for closed hearings to accommodate victims who may not feel comfortable testifying publicly.

All laws should be aligned to revise the procedure for easing suspicions, to allow for the option to conceal the actual names of survivors in CRSV cases in order to protect these individuals if they choose not to change their names.

In broad terms, we are thoroughly reviewing all legislation, suggesting amendments, and drafting new laws, including one specifically for reparations, which is currently underway. We are advocating for legislative support to ensure that investigations involve not only the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) but also the National Police. We firmly support the rule of a single entry point. If someone seeks assistance from, for example, the National Police, they should not be sent to the SBU or vice versa. Why shuffle people around? Once trust is established, individuals should receive direct assistance.

Informed consent should be a legal requirement. This involves fully informing individuals participating in the criminal process about all procedures and their rights. It goes beyond merely providing a document with legal provisions; it entails directly explaining various aspects, for example, how long interrogations may last, when mandatory breaks should be taken and the option to

decline if they find the process difficult or uncomfortable. We also take into account their preferred location for these conversations, often choosing neutral ground, particularly when families are unaware of the survivor’s circumstances. There are many other things we consider. While we are already implementing this principle in CRSV investigations, we have decided that it should be extended and applied across all types of crimes.

*“...we have been investigating CRSV cases since 2014. It is important to understand that comprehensive investigations will take place after all Ukrainian territories are liberated. This is when we will uncover the full extent of the crimes, which may vary significantly in scale.”*

Initially, our plan was to amend Article 438 by creating a separate type of criminal offense for CRSV. However, we realized this would not be feasible since we would have to do something similar for every type of crime. After consulting with experts, our inter-departmental team, lawyers, and judges, we have determined that Article 438 does not impose any limitations on us. It refers to international treaties, and we are simply leveraging the full force of the Geneva Convention. Our hands are not tied. If we choose to be more explicit, it could actually narrow our possibilities.

**—What motivates Ukraine to pursue cases of CRSV in the International Criminal Court (ICC) and other international institutions?**

**Yurii Bielousov:**—In my opinion, at the start of Russia’s direct invasion of Ukraine, there was a widespread

misunderstanding regarding the role of international judicial institutions. We often lacked confidence in our ability to handle the situation and looked to external parties to solve our problems. However, our courts will manage the prosecution of 99.9% of criminals. Nevertheless, we need the International Criminal Court, as it plays a vital role in dealing with matters that individual countries are unable to handle on their own. The ICC does not investigate individual cases of sexual violence or prosecute individual combatants; instead, it focuses on holding high-ranking military and political leaders accountable for the policies and significant large-scale crimes committed by Russia. Therefore, evidence of widespread CRSV can contribute to supporting this aspect of the policy.

The International Criminal Court is globally recognized as a fair judge, following the highest standards of the rule of law and justice. Once it identifies violations, they are unquestionably accepted worldwide, except maybe by the Russians.

However, it is not just the ICC involved in this effort. Ukraine is pioneering a new model that has not been tried before. We aim to encourage other nations to investigate Russian war crimes in Ukraine through their own national courts. Currently, over 24 countries have initiated their own investigations, including the UK, US, Scandinavian and Baltic countries, Poland, Slovakia, Romania, Spain, Italy, Germany, France, others. They have expressed readiness to support us, and in turn, we are offering all the evidence we have if they choose to pursue justice through their national legal systems. This collaborative effort will strengthen global trust in the events unfolding here, earning the

trust of the entire world. Remember initial doubts and uncertainties expressed: “It’s not entirely straightforward”, “We don’t know what happened there” ... Russia invests heavily in propaganda, but the actions of Western nations will undermine the propaganda’s impact because they are widely trusted. Greater involvement from Western countries, along with the ICC, the tribunal Ukraine aims to establish, and the European Court of Human Rights, will collectively increase pressure on Russia and help us achieve justice by holding the aggressor accountable. These critical decisions should discourage other aggressors and restore global stability, which is currently being disrupted by the destabilizing actions of Russia.

**—Why did discussions about CRSV only begin after the full-scale invasion, even though the first cases were reported when Russian forces started occupying Ukrainian Donbas?**

**Iryna Didenko:**—Public concern about the issue grew after the full invasion, although we have been investigating CRSV cases since 2014. It is important to understand that comprehensive investigations will take place after all Ukrainian territories are liberated. This is when we will uncover the full extent of the crimes, which may vary significantly in scale.

**—What motivates you to investigate such difficult crimes as CRSV, and how do you manage the inevitable stress during your work?**

**Iryna Didenko:**—Two days ago, we conducted a very tough interview with a man who had experienced torture and sexual assault, leaving him severely traumatized. We quickly brought in psychologists to help him and paused

any further investigation. Honestly, this job can be quite challenging.

The motivation is simple. I previously worked on cases involving domestic and gender-based violence, which made it easier for me to transition to addressing CRSV compared to those colleagues who dealt with economic crimes. So, our actions were straightforward: after the territories were liberated, we traveled to various regions and started collecting information and fact-checking.

When I hear the stories, I find it difficult to completely separate myself from such emotions; it doesn't work like that. But this is our job.

**Yurii Bielousov:**—I found my purpose when I took charge of this department. Before that I wanted to join the military and serve, and now I am serving on the legal front. This is what personally drives me. In this role, I have the opportunity to document all the atrocities that occurred, ensuring we do not lose any testimony and evidence. We are building valuable experience for a decade, or maybe even a century, which is incredibly rewarding!

Regarding support, we are collaborating with partners to develop various initiatives to build emotional resilience in prosecutors. These initiatives include self-diagnostic tools, self-assessment methods, stress management techniques, and the establishment of support groups to address professional burnout. This is crucial as some individuals might find it difficult to cope, leading them to pursue different career paths.

A highly empathetic prosecutor might only last a year, perhaps two at most. If you take on the suffering of every victim yourself, it becomes overwhelming—with over

104,000 war crimes in Ukraine already. Your job is to identify the case and refer the victim to specialists at the Coordination Center. However, finding a balance is crucial: being completely detached will not make you helpful either. You need to learn to protect yourself, develop the right skills, and set up support systems, which were lacking before. But we are determined to accomplish all this, and it will have positive effects in other aspects as well.

*September 2023*

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**Esther Dingemans**

**WE VIEW CRSV CASES THROUGH  
THE EYES OF SURVIVORS**

*Addressing CRSV cases from the perspective of the survivors is an approach employed by the Global Survivors Fund (GSF). Representatives of this fund collaborate closely with the Government of Ukraine and civil society organizations to provide survivors of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) with immediate interim reparations and implement a comprehensive reparations program. These topics were discussed in a special interview with Esther DINGEMANS, Executive Director of Global Survivors Fund.*

**—Please speak to the history of GSF and the fund’s main activities.**

—The Global Survivors Fund was established in 2019 by two Nobel Peace Prize laureates: Dr Denis MUKWEGE, a world-renowned gynecologist known for helping women survivors of conflict-related sexual violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Nadia MURAD, an Iraqi human rights activist of Yazidi descent who endured three months of torture by ISIS before escaping captivity. Together, they brought to life the idea of supporting survivors of conflict-related sexual violence worldwide.

Our fund operates in nearly 20 countries, including Bosnia and Herzegovina, Colombia, Nepal, South Sudan, Myanmar, Gambia, others. However, our work

varies depending on the location. In some countries, we advocate for survivors' rights, pushing governments to offer reparations. In ten other countries, we partner with civil society organizations to implement projects providing survivors with immediate interim reparations.

The effectiveness of our efforts greatly relies on the willingness of government institutions in different countries to actively support survivors of CRSV and to pay reparations. Unfortunately, many issues remain unresolved because not all governments have established comprehensive programs to support survivors of conflict-related sexual violence in their journey towards recovery, well-being, and development. However, as we carry out various aid initiatives, we witness remarkable and significant changes in the lives of female survivors. Once marginalized and abandoned by society, they are now undergoing profound transformations, emerging as leaders in their communities, thriving as businesswomen, and shaping of their own futures. Witnessing such remarkable transformations is incredibly inspiring and motivates us to persist in our efforts.

**—What motivated the Global Survivors Fund to be among the first international organizations to respond to the issue of CRSV in Ukraine at the beginning of the full-scale armed invasion by Russia?**

—We initiated our collaboration with Ukraine earlier, operating from abroad to advocate for reparations for survivors of sexual violence in cases spanning from 2014 to 2017. We partnered with several civil society organizations and courageous activists who shared their personal experiences.

*“Local residents shared stories of witnessing or hearing about horrific incidents, such as hiding their young daughters behind sacks of potatoes in root cellars to protect them from Russian soldiers and keep them safe.”*

Following the full-scale invasion in February 2022, new survivors of conflict-related sexual violence came forward, publicly disclosing such crimes with factual evidence. In March 2022, Government Commissioner for Gender Policy Kateryna LEVCHENKO approached Dr. Denis MUKWEGE and his team to discuss the provision of specialized support for addressing CRSV cases amid the ongoing conflict. (Note: Ukrainian peacekeeper Inna ZAVOROTKO, previously stationed in the Democratic Republic of Congo, facilitated this collaboration.) With increasing media coverage of CRSV cases and sexual violence reports, we recognized the urgency of going to Ukraine and taking action. So, we arrived in Ukraine in April 2022 at the invitation of the Government Commissioner and with the support of the Deputy Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration, Olha STEFANYSHYNA.

**—During that challenging period in Ukraine, were you feeling afraid?**

—I saw an opportunity to help the survivors, and it was crucial to take action. While I may not have felt afraid, my commitment to supporting those who had endured violence was stronger than any personal concerns. However, I was deeply shocked by the sight of Kyiv’s eerily empty streets. This was shortly after the events in Bucha, where destruction and devastation were widespread on the outskirts of the capital.

These difficulties notwithstanding, Ukrainian officials were resolute in their commitment to helping people overcome challenges. They worked tirelessly towards this goal. Meanwhile, reports from the military informed about the return of war hostages from Russian captivity, sharing harrowing stories of their experiences. Many non-governmental organizations received urgent pleas for help. Together with government representatives and civil society, we visited these affected communities and conducted interviews. The horrifying stories of atrocities we heard deeply affected us. Local residents shared storied of witnessing or hearing about horrific incidents, such as hiding their young daughters behind sacks of potatoes in root cellars to protect them from Russian soldiers and keep them safe.

**—Were you surprised by the high number of sexual violence cases perpetrated by Russian combatants? How does this compare to situations in other countries?**

—Talking about numbers can be tricky because they vary from one country to another. In Ukraine, there are many areas under temporary occupation and frontlines areas where people are hesitant to engage with Ukrainian authorities. As a result, the real number of unreported cases is likely higher than the number about which we are currently aware.

People who have experienced such traumas often keep their experiences hidden, sometimes only disclosing years after peace has been restored. In Kosovo, for instance, only 1,450 cases of rape and sexual violence were officially reported. However, our assessments suggest that the actual number of victims could be as high as 20,000.

In countries such as Congo, the reported instances of sexual violence fall between 200 to 500, yet the real numbers may surpass these estimates by hundreds. In Ukraine, I anticipate the count to be significantly higher—possibly reaching into the thousands. However, what remains consistent across all these conflicts and wars is the systematic occurrence of CRSV, serving as a widespread atrocity and a weapon of war.

**—The mission of the Global Survivors Fund is to enhance access to reparations for survivors of conflict-related sexual violence around the globe. How important is this for CRSV survivors experiencing severe emotional stress?**

—The core of reparations involves two critical components. First, is recognition of the status [of being a survivor of CRSV]. It is essential for survivors to be formally recognized as survivors of CRSV, affirming that they are not responsible for their suffering, they are still human beings, and they deserve dignity and respect.

The second aspect involves helping individuals rebuild their shattered lives and regain stability. After such traumatic events, people often drop out of school, lose their jobs, and are abandoned by their families, facing isolation. Our crucial task is to bring these individuals back to normal life and restore their self-esteem.

**—When considering reparations, how viable are they in Ukraine, given the ongoing conflict and its adverse economic impact?**

—Reparations encompass an official component, financial restitution, and we hope that survivors will eventually receive it. This restitution may come in various forms, such as life insurance benefits or state pensions,

serving as a tangible acknowledgment of their suffering. While it is important for them to receive compensation for the harm they have endured, we recognize that this process may take time. The expectation is that Russia will have to pay. However, this depends on favorable conditions and the Ukrainian government's ability to appropriate Russian assets seized and frozen abroad. Additionally, it depends on whether these funds will be allocated to compensation. Although a significant portion of these resources will be essential for Ukraine's recovery and reconstruction efforts, it is important for the Government of Ukraine to allocate a portion of these funds to compensate for the moral and material damages suffered by survivors of CRSV.

This is about the future. What are we doing now? We are launching a pilot initiative focused on advocating for immediate interim reparations for CRSV survivors. This responsibility lies with the Government of Ukraine. If Russia fails to fulfill its obligations, the international community may step in. Our current focus is on kickstarting the process of paying these reparations.

—**Who will fund the interim reparations?**

—International donors. But it is important for the Government of Ukraine to show commitment to advocating for the rights of survivors. This might involve providing financial assistance or implementing appropriate social welfare programs.

*"I haven't seen any other country where the government takes responsibility to assist those affected even amidst conflict. If this happens, it could lead to significant progress in this area. Such approaches should be adopted globally."*

There is growing discussion about the frozen assets of Russian billionaires, but Western experts are encountering hurdles in accessing these resources. One potential solution being considered is the sale of Abramovich's football club Chelsea. The proceeds from the sale, currently held in the UK, offer promising prospects for humanitarian assistance, particularly in Ukraine. A portion of these funds may go towards compensating victims of sexual violence.

**—How do various countries handle the issue of children born of CRSV?**

—Their lives are very challenging. In Congo, they are called 'snake children' or 'vipers,' while in Nigeria, they are called 'Boko Haram children' after the terrorist group that perpetrated sexual assaults on women. It is heartbreaking to see these children. Typically, these children are rejected even before they are born, with their mothers often not wanting them to be born. This underscores the importance of the initiatives where psychologists begin working with expectant mothers to build a strong bond between mother and child. Psychologists help create a narrative that the mother can share with her child. This leads to positive outcomes; we observe these children growing up to be kind and smart, excelling in school, and enjoying similar psychological well-being to their peers.

Discussing these matters openly is the first step toward addressing this problem. I recently participated in a large event arranged by the First Lady of Ukraine, where she openly addressed the international community, acknowledging the possibility of children being born in Ukraine because of these sexual crimes. I believe this courageous act of addressing such issues by a prominent

leader represents a significant breakthrough. We expect that there will be more good in the lives of these children, ensuring they do not bear the burden of something that occurred through no fault of their own.

**—What are the peculiarities of addressing CRSV in Ukraine?**

—I haven't seen any other country where the government takes responsibility to assist those affected even amidst conflict. If this happens, it could lead to significant progress in this area. Such approaches should be adopted globally.

**—Why do you think Russian combatants resort to sexual violence?**

—In other countries, there are also numerous instances of sexual violence perpetrated by regular military forces. For instance, in Syria, such acts of sexual violence occur frequently, even in officially sanctioned detention facilities, let alone the unlawful detention sites for civilians or military personnel.

When this happens, several considerations come into play. Is CRSV directly ordered by officers and higher-ranking officials? It is challenging to determine. Similarly, determining if these acts are perpetrated voluntarily by individuals without orders adds another layer of complexity.

When reflecting on events such as Bucha, I learned about a situation involving a well-known brigade that was later commended in Moscow for their actions there. They were rewarded for what they did in Bucha. It is evident that their commanders turned a blind eye to the atrocities and even praised them. So, it is quite clear who is accountable for this. When we hear about instances of rape, targeting both young children and elderly women, along with cases

of sexual harassment, it is about inflicting the maximum harm possible. I describe this as mass destruction.

I am not a legal expert to define the crime of genocide and its interpretation in this scenario accurately. However, when survivors of CRSV share how Russian soldiers targeted them based on their ethnic background, nationality, or support for the Ukrainian government, it raises concerns that align with certain aspects of genocide.

*“It is evident—the Russian Federation is breaking established customs and rules of warfare, as evidenced by numerous reports. Holding them accountable for these violations is paramount. This indicates progress and raises hope that those responsible will face consequences in due course.”*

Legal experts argue that an act of genocide must have intent, a strategic plan, and a systematic element. From the viewpoint of the survivors who have endured these atrocities, they describe the perpetrators as targeting the entire nation through them.

—**These methods resemble practices from the Middle Ages**

—In various countries, we continue to witness behaviors echoing those of medieval times, particularly regarding violence against women by men. Being conquered often leads to being treated as possessions rather than as fellow humans.

Similar atrocities occurred in Iraq with ISIS where female population was taken captive, and markets for human trafficking were set up. Women and girls were forced into slavery. You could witness these heartbreaking scenes on the streets, with ISIS fighters touching them, lifting

their clothes, and even bargaining. This deeply concerns me because it shows that humanity has not moved beyond the barbarian Dark Ages.

On the other hand, the global community is adamant that such actions cannot be ignored. Today, all eyes are on Russia. It is evident—the Russian Federation is breaking established customs and rules of warfare, as evidenced by numerous reports. Holding them accountable for these violations is paramount. This indicates progress and raises hope that those responsible will face consequences in due course.

**—There is substantial support for Ukraine from the international community in addressing and responding to CRSV. What is driving this support?**

—First and foremost, the severity of this issue demands support. Usually, such concerns are pushed to the sidelines, but in this instance, they are taking priority. Since the start of the full-scale war, survivors of CRSV from 2014–2015 have been vocal about their experiences. Additionally, there are individuals genuinely committed to addressing these challenges. Together, they are drawing the attention of the global community to the current situation in Ukraine.

As mentioned earlier, we approach CRSV cases from the perspective of the survivors. Sometimes it feels like no matter how much effort is put into addressing this issue, it is just a drop in the ocean. How many perpetrators have been held accountable? Sadly, not many. Yet, there remains hope that Ukraine will lead by example in the global fight against such crimes in the future because here these matters will be pursued relentlessly until justice is served.

*October 2023*

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**Iryna Dovhan, Liudmyla Huseynova  
SURVIVORS OF CRSV SPEAK OUT  
AGAINST THE CRIMES  
OF RUSSIAN OCCUPIERS**

*Iryna DOVHAN and Liudmyla HUSEYNOVA are well-known not only in Ukraine, but also worldwide. Despite enduring Russian captivity, torture, and humiliation, they have not only upheld their dignity, but have become symbols, as well, of resilience against the consequences of CRSV. Their narratives inspire global solidarity against this crime.*

*In 2014, Iryna DOVHAN was abducted by Russian occupiers in Donetsk because her tablet contained photos of the Ukrainian soldiers she was aiding, along with other evidence showing her strong support for our defenders. Since her family was well-off, the invaders began searching for money. Text messages about cash withdrawals from Iryna's bank accounts came even from the Sheremetyevo Airport in Moscow. Shortly afterward, the militants of the "Vostok" battalion arrived.*

*For five days, she was trapped in a terrifying nightmare where death felt like the only relief. Her rescue arrived through a famous photograph captured by Brazilian photojournalist Mauricio Lima. In the picture, she was standing by a pillar, wrapped in the Ukrainian flag, amid hostile adversaries. "Madame, you've become an Internet sensation" her captors reluctantly informed her before finally letting her go.*

*Liudmyla HUSEYNOVA provided humanitarian aid to children with developmental disabilities from a closed-down*

*residential institution in Novoazovsk district captured and controlled by Russian aggressors. These children were left without support, often hungry and poorly clothed. Liudmyla arranged deliveries of essential supplies from areas controlled by the Government of Ukraine, along with Ukrainian books and postcards filled with heartfelt wishes for the children. She also provided sincere assistance to Ukrainian soldiers defending the town of Shyrokyne. In 2019, she was imprisoned at the notorious Donetsk prison “Izolyatsiya” [Isolation]. She endured 50 days of humiliation and mistreatment. She recalls a period filled only with darkness, as she always had a bag placed over her head. “I could only change clothes under the blanket in the cell,” recalls HUSEYNOVA, “as constant video surveillance monitored my every move.” Later, she was transferred to a Donetsk pre-trial detention center, where she shared a cell with 20 female inmates. Among them were individuals associated with the armed groups of the DPR [Russian-controlled Donetsk Peoples Republic], responsible for brutal civilian killings, as well as those engaged in drug and arms trafficking, and detainees who suffered from AIDS and tuberculosis. HUSEYNOVA spent nearly three years in this challenging environment before she was released in autumn 2022 during a prisoner exchange and returned to Ukraine.*

*Both women managed to start a new life, as they remain committed to assisting those who currently require their support. They are actively involved in public initiatives: Iryna DOVHAN leads the NGO SEMA-Ukraine, aiding survivors of conflict-related sexual violence, while Liudmyla HUSEYNOVA takes on the role of communication manager and information policy coordinator for the organization.*

**—What inspired you to create SEMA-Ukraine?**

**Iryna Dovhan:**—I joined Ukrainian human rights activists on a trip to The Hague to testify in cases for the International Criminal Court. Although initially given only three-four minutes to address the prosecutors, they ended up listening to me for over 40 minutes. Later that evening, during a press conference attended by many journalists in The Hague, I was approached by a woman who gave me her business card and introduced herself as a representative of the Dr. Denis Mukwege Foundation, an international human rights organization that supports survivors of CRSV. Representatives of the Mukwege Foundation were unaware of the situation in Ukraine, as their focus had been primarily on African countries. The events unfolding in the heart of Europe came as a surprise to them!

For several months, we exchanged messages. She asked whether there were similar cases to mine in Ukraine and I confirmed that there were. Following that, I started searching for survivors of CRSV in Ukraine. With the assistance of Oleksandra MATVIICHUK, a Ukrainian human rights defender and Nobel Peace Prize laureate, we identified several survivors. Others were discovered through social media. I reached out to these women, suggesting the idea of together establishing an organization.

For me, I consider it to be a significant achievement that several women, including myself, were able to address international conferences and openly declare Russia to be an aggressor, and that Russian combatants are raping women.

**Liudmyla Huseynova:**—At the end of 2021, while I was still being held captive, I was honoured with the

National Human Rights Award from the Center for Civil Liberties in Ukraine for my efforts in defending human rights. My husband accepted the award on my behalf and gave it to my friend, Olya MUSAFIROVA, a well-known Ukrainian journalist, for safekeeping. They planned to personally present me with the award at the National Union of Journalists a month after my release, which was attended by media and civil society organizations representatives, including Iryna DOVHAN. Following the ceremony, she extended an invitation for me to join the organization. I shared that my priority was securing the release of women who were still imprisoned, some of whom I knew personally, while others I had only heard about. I understood the challenges they were enduring. Iryna explained that being part of the organization would offer me more opportunities to advocate for these prisoners on various platforms. I also met women who had experienced captivity in previously occupied territories. Given our shared experiences, we decided to work together towards common goals, recognizing the strength in unity.

**—What inspired your decision to unite?**

**Iryna Dovhan:**—At first, there were about 17 of us, with approximately eight to ten actively involved. What was our main objective? The Mukwege Foundation raised an important question: why have not any of you testified about your experiences in your own country? None of these women who have experienced CRSV has testified about what they went through. This is a critical issue to address. The mission of the Mukwege Foundation is to encourage the government to recognize these survivors and provide them with proper care and support.

We held a roundtable and invited representatives from law enforcement agencies. Viktoriia KAVCHUK from the Prosecutor General’s Office, responsible for communication, was among the attendees. Touched by the stories of our women, she brought them to the notice of the Prosecutor General, Iryna VENEDYKTOVA at the time, whose immediate response was: let’s interview all of them.

A young prosecutor from Mariupol, with some understanding of the situation, was appointed to handle the case. I convinced all our women to testify, and ten of them agreed. However, after the procedure, one woman changed her mind about cooperating with our organization. Six months later, she shared over the phone that the experience had been too traumatic for her to overcome, and she no longer wanted to talk about it.

*“If we remain silent, nothing will change. It is vital that we speak out now. Ukraine cannot afford to stay silent.”*

Every woman had her own unique circumstances. However, our primary objective remained the same: to compel the government to recognize our existence.

**—What inspired the choice of the name SEMA-Ukraine?**

**Iryna Dovhan:**—SEMA-NETWORK is the global network of organizations established by the Mukwege Foundation. Currently, the Mukwege Foundation unites female victims and survivors of CRSV from 26 countries affected by armed conflicts. We decided to join this network in 2019 because it aligned with our goals and values.

At first, we made little progress. At the beginning of the full-scale invasion, I considered giving up and walking away. However, I shifted my focus to documenting Russian crimes, finding the work more meaningful. While some women in our organization left the country, new members joined. We received financial aid from the Mukwege Foundation, which involved extensive administrative tasks questionnaires, such as surveys, and account setup. And I became fully engaged with the organization again.

In April 2022, the director of the Global Survivors Fund visited Ukraine. She was impressed by our country's efforts to support victims and survivors of CRSV during wartime—setting a global precedent. Hearing this, I could not help but think: “Wow, if we continue showcasing our efforts like this, Europe will welcome us with open arms!”

**—SEMA means ‘speak out’ in Swahili. What does this signify for you?**

**Iryna Dovhan:**—If we remain silent, nothing will change. It is vital that we speak out now. Ukraine cannot afford to stay silent.

The government, in cooperation with international institutions such as the UN, the Mukwege Foundation, the Global Survivors Fund, and others—initiated efforts to address CRSV. We were invited to numerous events, and we began to speak out. Whether we were asked to or not, we spoke out. We have learned to speak and express ourselves clearly. We have also recognized the willingness of European nations to assist us, showing immense empathy. We are doing everything to bring our country up to their standards, and we are excited to see progress pick up speed.

**Liudmyla Huseynova:**—Personally, I do not keep silent. I participate in interviews, regardless of whether for national, regional, or local media. Afterwards, I often find it difficult to sleep at night because speaking triggers memories and emotions all over again. However, my desire is for both the global community and our society to be aware of what the Russian occupiers have been doing on our land since 2014 and the suffering they have inflicted on our people.

*“I feel compelled to speak out because I have nothing of which to be ashamed. Their actions towards me, and towards other women and men, should not weigh on our shoulders. It is their wrongdoing that should haunt them for generations to come!”*

I feel compelled to speak out because I have nothing of which to be ashamed. Their actions towards me, and towards other women and men, should not weigh on our shoulders. It is their wrongdoing that should haunt them for generations to come!

—**What inspires you to speak out?**

**Liudmyla Huseynova:**—I am aware that women in the occupied regions are still enduring hardships and are unable to reunite with their loved ones. I always think of Olya MELESHCHENKO, who was arrested over her social media posts and wrongly accused of espionage. It’s been almost three years since Olya was imprisoned. When she was arrested, her youngest son was only 4 years old; now he is in first grade, living in the occupied territory. Since her husband cannot leave the area, he visits Olya weekly, bringing water, bread and encouragement. Given these circumstances, how can anyone remain silent?

I had the opportunity to join an advocacy trip to the United Nations and to speak at the United Nations. I spoke about imprisoned women and their struggles. This sparked many discussions. I strongly believe that people should know about what is happening in the occupied areas and in the detention facilities where civilians and prisoners of war are held. Drawing from my own experiences, I feel driven to speak out. I'll keep doing so as long as I am able to.

—**What are your areas of priority?**

**Liudmyla Huseynova:**—I believe we should advocate for the law for survivors of CRSV, which would secure official recognition of their status. This law should outline essential services for individuals who have experienced sexual violence during wartime. Since the trauma persists, continuous healthcare and psychological support are essential, not just primary care, three or four times and done.

I consulted a psychologist who recommended undergoing therapy for at least three years, considering my traumatic experience. However, I understand that sustained therapy is not free, and switching therapists after a set of free sessions can lead to re-traumatization and will not be helpful. All these matters should be addressed in laws.

The same is with reparations: immediate payments are essential, as survivors frequently need financial support. I also believe it is important to raise public awareness of CRSV cases and educate people how to respond properly. This way, survivors in the occupied territories or those who have left will not feel afraid. They need to know they can reach out to us, speak out, and stand together with us. They should understand that they have the right to seek help from law enforcement and pursue justice.

**—I believe your input should be taken into account when drafting this law.**

**Liudmyla Huseynova:**—Certainly, our organization has joined the Inter-Agency Working Group on Combating Sexual Violence Related to Russia’s Armed Aggression Against Ukraine and Assistance to Survivors. Many other civil society organizations are also engaged in this collaborative effort. Together, we are drafting recommendations for the reparations law, with a particular emphasis on CRSV. Kateryna LEVCHENKO, the Government Commissioner for Gender Policy, chairs this IWG, and we sincerely appreciate her genuine support.

We have shared our thoughts and suggestions for the draft law on different platforms, and some of them have been integrated.

**—What is the main goal of your organization: is it mainly supporting each other, or advocating for holding the perpetrators accountable?**

**Iryna Dovhan:**—Both. These both goals are intertwined for us. Trust me, without one, the other cannot succeed.

If you ask anyone in the organization if we aim to seek justice for the perpetrators, the answer will be a resounding “Yes!” That is our primary goal. However, we recognize that we can’t achieve justice on our own. Additionally, these women have to somehow survive in this world juggling various responsibilities like looking after their families, children, and themselves while also taking care of their well-being. It is important for these women to feel supported by the organization.

**Liudmyla Huseynova:**—First and for most, survivors should be granted a victim status; the government ought

to officially recognize them as victims of CRSV. We have people in the country who have been displaced from their homes, known as IDPs, yet it appears that our existence is not acknowledged.

Securing this status ensures support for women who may currently fear speaking about their experiences. It grants them access to reparations, medical care, financial aid, psychological assistance, and most importantly, protection. We advocate for justice and safeguarding these women to prevent perpetrators, those bastards, or their associates from intimidating or seeking revenge against them.

**—If a person is granted the status, does it mean that their personal CRSV experience will be made public?**

**Iryna Dovhan:**—The register must be entirely confidential, following international practices. Mistakes have been made previously, as in Bosnia, where financial assistance was provided in a pink envelope, inadvertently disclosing CRSV status. Therefore, our register is strictly internal, with restricted access. If reparations are secured in the future, each woman will receive them discreetly in her personal bank account to prevent further trauma.

*“Russian mentality is different: women there are not treated with the same respect as in Ukraine. Ukrainian women are highly regarded in families and society, often seen wearing expensive necklaces and embroidered shirts, which are also not cheap, symbolizing their high status. This is completely different in Russia. Men there often come home drunk and do not bother to seek woman’s consent. They are mistreating our women in the same manner.”*

I have heard some officials express the opinion that Ukrainian women who have experienced CRSV do not need official recognition. They assume these women are filled with so much anger and desire for revenge against Russia that they will testify and seek justice regardless. However, that's not true. While I may feel driven by a desire for revenge, others like Liudmyla might not share the same sentiment. We are all unique individuals. After all, some may have no strength for either seeking revenge or helping others. This is a responsibility the government must undertake.

**—How many women does SEMA-Ukraine bring together at present?**

**Iryna Dovhan:**—At present, we have 39 members, with the potential for two more joining. We identify survivors through different channels. Some of our existing members notify us about similar cases in their communities and extend invitations to join us. While some accept the invitation, others may choose not to join.

I often travel to villages that have been liberated, where I connect with locals like teachers, school principals, and nurses who are well-informed about the community. I explain to them that if they are aware of such women, the government should already have some assistance available for them. I can quickly arrange support through the International Organization for Migration, enabling a woman to access a rehabilitation center. There, she will receive comprehensive free care, with medication, tests, and extra medicine to take home, which is a huge help.

After that, I explain that we have received funding and prepared special gifts personally for each woman in need.

I also offer to arrange gatherings with other survivors of CRSV, so they can see how others are coping and overcoming their traumas. I also explain that there is global advocacy for these women to receive reparations from Russia and the government. The local community members, who are well-respected in the village and with whom I maintain communication, understand my message. They reach out to the affected women, and contact me when someone agrees to meet.

**—Do you share your stories with each other? Do you know the stories of all the women in the organization?**

**Iryna Dovhan:**—For the most part, I know about everyone as I occasionally document their stories with their consent. There are very few who remain completely silent, so while I do not know all their stories. I mostly know those who choose to speak out.

While currently we have almost 40 members, this is just a drop in the ocean! Even if we reach 200 members, that is only the beginning. There is a vast number of CRSV survivors across the country, a fact I have seen firsthand while visiting villages previously occupied by the Russians. In each village, there are known cases of raped women, but there are likely many more that remain undisclosed.

**—Why do the Russians resort to such methods of warfare?**

**Iryna Dovhan:**—I believe these rapes originate from envy—the stupid mindset prevalent among Russians. Often it is not combatants from regions of Moscow or St. Petersburg who commit rape, but rather those from rural Russia, where mistreatment of women is culturally ingrained.

Russian mentality is different: women there are not treated with the same respect as in Ukraine. Ukrainian women are highly regarded in families and society, often seen wearing expensive necklaces and embroidered shirts, which are also not cheap, symbolizing their high status. This is completely different in Russia. Men there often come home drunk and do not bother to seek woman's consent. They are mistreating our women in the same manner. Having grown accustomed to the respectful culture of Ukraine and Europe, we were caught off guard by the intrusion of these barbarians into our lives. Ukrainian women can openly speak their minds, but confronting a Russian man can endanger their safety. I have heard many instances of this happening.

*"I firmly believe that the civilized world will never view Russia in the same light again. Even the most tolerant Europeans have shown less tolerance towards Russia."*

In general, it is a savage horde where violence is commonplace. We can never fully comprehend their way of thinking. A Russian invader sees a young woman and an elderly one in the yard. After the young woman leaves, he returns and assaults the elderly woman, who is in her 80s. Despite her age, he shows no restraint. This woman is now in our organization.

We encourage every woman to testify. We firmly believe that without her testimony, her fight for justice is impossible.

**Liudmyla Huseynova:**—They recognize their inferiority when compared to us. When armed and facing unarmed

individuals such as children, women, or even men, Russians assert dominance through force, violence, threats or actual killing. However, these actions originate from weakness. Russians are unable to engage in meaningful conversation with us—because we are so different.

Back in 2014, when unidentified soldiers arrived, I posted on Facebook about ‘orcs’ wandering our city. How absurd is it for an investigator to flag that post for examination? Then, an “expert” with a similarly narrow mindset deemed this post an extremist statement. Finally, their superior official, displaying a similar lack of intelligence, angrily shouted at me: “Who are these ‘orcs’?”

At first, I felt frightened. I remember thinking: “Oh God, what will happen next?” Then, he asked, “Who are these orcs?” Holding back a laugh, I pressed my lips together, aware that any amusement might trigger violence and he would beat me. So, I calmly responded, “They are fictional characters”.

Who is the stronger one among us? Undoubtedly, it’s us.

**—Do you believe that all these perpetrators will actually be caught and held accountable?**

**Iryna Dovhan:**—No, I don’t. But I will ensure repercussions for their country. And I will hold accountable whoever initiated all of this.

I firmly believe that the civilized world will never view Russia in the same light again. Even the most tolerant Europeans have shown less tolerance towards Russia. This shift is apparent to me, and we are hearing about it as well.

**Liudmyla Huseynova:**—I have faith in this. I have authentic documents from individuals, containing their full names and signatures, which I obtained from occupied

Donetsk. Yet, even without such documents, identifying the perpetrators is possible. Nothing is beyond reach. Everything is possible. Just believe in yourself and your goals.

**—What are the primary concerns that must be addressed to assist survivors of CRSV?**

**Liudmyla Huseynova:**—Upon returning from captivity, especially when your home is destroyed and your town is controlled by Russian combatants, the immediate priority should be restoring documents. Survivors should have access to readily available support, including essential medical aid, without the need to seek funds for this purpose. For instance, there is an elderly woman in our organization, who had her teeth knocked out by Russian occupiers using the butt of a rifle, to prevent her from resisting or causing harm during the ordeal. Unfortunately, survivors do not have access to free dental care.

Psychological support is vital, not only for the survivors but also for their entire families. A friend I met in prison cares deeply for her son but has not been in touch with him for a while. She will need help to rebuild their relationship once she is released. Her child also needs help in rebuilding connections with his mother. This issue is very important, but sadly, it is currently being overlooked.

**Iryna Dovhan:**—As an organization, we will do our part, but the primary support should come from the government. This needs to be a key aspect of the state policy.

**—Another guiding principle when working with survivors is Nothing About Us Without Us. How does this principle work?**

**Liudmyla Huseynova:**—I believe that neither a government official nor a scientist, regardless of their level

of expertise, can engage in advocacy without contact with survivors who have endured this horror. Simply presenting statistics or research findings and uttering dry words on international platforms, lacks the emotional impact needed to truly resonate with others.

We seek empathy and support from foreign nations and want [representatives of these nations] to grasp the suffering inflicted by the Russian Federation in Ukraine. It is crucial for them to fully understand the depth of the tragedy and pain experienced by Ukrainians. No one can express it as well as someone who has experienced such pain firsthand. We need to support everyone who represents our country on all platforms.

We collaborate extensively with Ukrainian civil society organizations such as JurFem, Right to Protection, others. Whenever we require assistance, we are proactive in seeking it out. I believe our organization is still evolving, and we are constantly learning from our partners. Additionally, we engage with international institutions. I recently met with Diane Brown, the Head of the Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Unit at the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine, where I extended an invitation for her to meet our women. I am confident that every collaboration contributes to supporting survivors and advancing efforts to free those who remain in captivity or on the occupied territories.

*October 2023*

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**Maryna Bardina**  
**NEW LAW DRAFTED**  
**TO EXPAND PROTECTION**  
**OF CRSV SURVIVORS BEGINNING**  
**WITH 2014**

*As Ukraine's parliament, the Verkhovna Rada, deliberates Draft Law 10132 "On the Status of Survivors of Sexual Violence Associated with the Armed Aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine, and Immediate Interim Reparations," we discuss the specifics of this law with Maryna BARDINA, Deputy Chair of the the Verkhovna Rada Committee on Foreign Policy and Interparliamentary Cooperation who was directly involved in developing this legislation.*

**—Why was there a need for this draft bill?**

—The full-scale invasion of Ukrainian territory by the Russian Federation has exposed the war crimes committed by Russia against Ukrainians, including sexual violence. There is a grim and cynical saying that rape is the cheapest weapon of war. Today, there is widespread recognition that Russia employs sexual violence in different forms as a tactic of warfare. Occupation forces use it to degrade individuals, undermine their morale and dignity, inflict psychological and physical harm, and suppress resistance.

After the Kyiv region was de-occupied and Bucha was liberated in early April 2022, the stories shared by witnesses deeply affected us. Since the beginning of the invasion, we

had been receiving sporadic information: reports of targeted killing of both adults and children during evacuation efforts, reports of journalists and local activists disappearing or being killed, and numerous other incidents. However, the actual events surpassed our worst fears. Unfortunately, as our military advances into new territories, we continue to uncover similar atrocities. We hear accounts of torture facilities, mass graves, and instances of torture and sexual violence perpetrated by the Russian Federation.

As of October this year, the Prosecutor General's Office has documented 241 cases of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV), with 77 reported in Kherson region and 52 in Kyiv region. However, these numbers likely do not fully capture the extent of CRSV. Many survivors of conflict-related sexual violence hesitate to report to law enforcement immediately. This reluctance stems from various factors, including the fear of social judgement and the emotional trauma of revisiting experiences. Additionally, individuals may be hesitant to speak out if they or their relatives are under occupation, fearing repercussions. Furthermore, survivors may lack the emotional resilience to engage with law enforcement, often prioritizing immediate needs such as health concerns, securing safe housing and financial support for themselves and their families.

Therefore, the proposal was put forward to develop legislation aimed at offering immediate assistance to survivors. This assistance would include psychological, healthcare, and social aid, as well as financial support for their recovery while also helping victims prepare emotionally to engage with law enforcement. Both female and male survivors would be able to voluntarily access this

support and decide independently when and how they wish to engage in the criminal investigation of war crimes.

—**Who was engaged in drafting the law?**

—Almost all key stakeholders in our gender policy were engaged in drafting the law, including government ministries, law enforcement agencies, and civil society organizations. Additionally, our international partners provided valuable insights and support. For instance, we extensively examined the strategies employed in Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina. This effort was coordinated at the governmental level by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration and the Office of the Government Commissioner for Gender Policy.

*“In addition to granting the status, the government not only provides immediate interim reparations and assistance, but also recognises that the individual has been a victim of a war crime. The status emphasizes that such reparative measures and support should be provided without judgment, stigma, and with utmost respect for human dignity. This serves as the state’s method of communicating to society that in cases of sexual violence, blame lies with the perpetrator, not the survivor.”*

I would also like to emphasize the valuable input of my fellow members of parliament, who were actively engaged in discussions about the final text of the law and the inclusion of essential guarantees. This September, the Verkhovna Rada’s Temporary Investigative Commission on Sexual Violence Committed by the Russian Federation Against Ukraine completed its work. Working closely with

colleagues from different factions, we collectively developed this vision during the commission's sessions.

Survivors themselves and a wide range of human rights organizations assisting victims of the Russian Federation's armed aggression against Ukraine engaged in drafting the law.

**—Why is it urgent and crucial to obtain the status of a CRSV survivor?**

—In addition to granting the status, the government not only provides immediate interim reparations and assistance, but also recognises that the individual has been a victim of a war crime. The status emphasizes that such reparative measures and support should be provided without judgment, stigma, and with utmost respect for human dignity. This serves as the state's method of communicating to society that in cases of sexual violence, blame lies with the perpetrator, not the survivor. Therefore, assistance to those affected by sexual violence should be immediate. Meanwhile, both the government and international institutions are actively engaged in efforts to recover funds from the Russian Federation, track down war criminals, and ensure accountability.

**—Who will determine the status of the survivors and how will this process be carried out?**

—To obtain the status, those who consider themselves as survivors must submit an application to a special commission overseen by the Ministry of Social Policy. The commission functions similarly to the governmental commission handling affairs of prisoners of war.

Applicants can submit their testimonies in writing, along with relevant medical documentation or evidence

for the commission to review. Attendance in person for the application review is discretionary and not obligatory if the individual prefers not to attend.

Upon reviewing the application, the commission will determine whether to grant the status, and notify the applicant of its decision within 30 days. If the application is rejected, the applicant can choose to appeal to either the commission or the court.

**—Who qualifies for the CRSV survivor status, and what documentary evidence is required for eligibility?**

—Any person who has experienced sexual violence due to the Russian Federation’s armed aggression against Ukraine since February 20, 2014, and has verified this by submitting an application to the government commission is eligible. An exception applies to individuals who were collaborators.

The scope of acts considered as sexual violence is broad and conforms to the criteria specified in the Rome Statute, covering actions ranging from rape to coerced nudity.

Regarding documentary evidence, the draft law does not list specific requirements; these will be established at the government level to simplify processes. Acknowledging that people, especially those fleeing conflict areas during shelling, may have no documents at all, not even a passport, the procedure and verification processes must be flexible. Verification could involve a court ruling (if any) in some cases and the survivor’s testimony about the circumstances of the crime in others. The commission will include experts to verify such information while ensuring confidentiality.

*“We cannot delay until the point when Russia pays all reparations to Ukraine before launching suitable programmes and offering assistance. Recovery from the trauma of war and sexual violence takes time and efforts, and postponing assistance only serves the aggressor’s interests.”*

**—Do the family members of deceased CRSV victims qualify for the survivor status?**

—Certainly, family members of deceased individuals will also be eligible to obtain the relevant status, although they may receive a slightly limited range of immediate interim reparations and support.

**—Why is it important to avoid delaying the application for CRSV survivor status?**

—Immediate assistance is essential for the recovery, rehabilitation and social reintegration of survivors. We cannot delay until the point when Russia pays all reparations to Ukraine before launching suitable programmes and offering assistance. Recovery from the trauma of war and sexual violence takes time and efforts, and postponing assistance only serves the aggressor’s interests. The state is committed to protecting and assisting survivors, standing by them when they are ready to seek justice against Russian war criminals in court.

**—How does the draft law address compensations and reparations for CRSV victims and survivors?**

—The draft law provides for two primary mechanisms: immediate compensation, which involves monetary support for survivors, and immediate interim reparations. Immediate interim reparations are designed to mitigate the effects of CRSV by granting survivors access to legal aid,

compensation, rehabilitation, and the restitution of moral and material damages. These benefits will also extend to family members of deceased victims of CRSV. Access to these measures will be granted upon obtaining the relevant status through an application submitted to the commission under the Ministry of Social Policy.

**—The draft law suggests setting up an Immediate Compensation Fund. When can it start operating, and what will be the funding source?**

—Once the main draft law and amendments to the Budget Code (as specified in Draft Law 10133) are approved, the Immediate Compensation Fund will commence operations. Following the enactment of the draft law, it will take approximately six months for the government to set up and initiate all necessary procedures. However, passing the law is only the first step. Regarding funding, we anticipate recoveries from the Russian Federation, the aggressor state, while our international partners have also expressed willingness to offer financial support.

**—Does the draft law take into account the interests of CRSV survivors dating back to 2014?**

—The scope of the draft law encompasses all survivors affected from February 20, 2014, without regard to when the war crime took place—whether before or after the full-scale invasion. With the conflict ongoing since 2014, there is no ambiguity on this matter.

**—If the draft law is passed, how can survivors of CRSV living abroad access its benefits? Who should they contact?**

—Currently, the draft law offers a uniform procedure available to all individuals, requiring applicants to submit

a written application to the commission, which can be done either in physical or electronic form. The draft law ensures uniformity irrespective of the applicant's whereabouts.

**—When is the Verkhovna Rada scheduled to discuss the draft law?**

—The draft law is currently being considered by parliamentary committees. Although the timeline for its introduction into Parliament for the first reading is uncertain, we should anticipate a few months. Following this, the second reading will take place. Collaborative advocacy efforts are crucial to expediting the legislative process.

**—How effective was the Verkhovna Rada's Temporary Investigative Commission, which you initiated, in investigating CRSV crimes?**

—The Temporary Investigative Commission completed its work in September 2023. Members representing four different political factions participated in the commission's work. One key aspect of our efforts was building open communication with law enforcement agencies, such as the Prosecutor General's Office, the Security Service of Ukraine, and the National Police, all actively involved in investigating war crimes and sexual violence. Through these discussions, we identified investigative challenges and areas needing procedural and legislative improvements. Consequently, we proposed amendments to enhance the Criminal Procedure Code of Ukraine through Draft Law 9351. We also gained valuable insights from the psychologists who work with detainees and individuals from temporarily occupied territories, as well as human rights activists. Draft Law 10132, which we are currently discussing, is a testament to our collaborative efforts.

*November 2023*

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Vasyl Lutsyk

**NEW INITIATIVES FROM  
NATIONAL SOCIAL SERVICE  
TO SUPPORT CRSV SURVIVORS**

*In Ukraine, during the ongoing Russian aggression, there are 855 services to assist victims of war, including survivors of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV). How can we guarantee the high quality and efficacy of these services? Joining us to explore this topic is Vasyl LUTSYK, Head of the National Social Service of Ukraine.*

**—How does the National Social Service contribute to addressing CRSV and supporting survivors?**

—Since the war began, CRSV has become a pressing issue in Ukraine, yet it remains largely unregulated. Our primary focus has been on crafting comprehensive regulatory frameworks to address this issue. In particular, we were involved in drafting the law “*On the Status of Survivors of Sexual Violence Associated with the Armed Aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine, and Immediate Interim Reparations*,” submitted to [Ukraine’s parliament] the Verkhovna Rada by Member of Parliament Maryna BARDINA. This draft law establishes clear definition of CRSV within regulatory framework and entrusts the National Social Service with the authority to grant survivor status to those individuals who were victims of conflict-related sexual violence.

Additionally, we collect and manage information about CRSV throughout the country and supervise the quality of

services provided to survivors. Currently, there are 855 services operating throughout Ukraine, including those to assist survivors of this crime. It is essential to closely monitor their activities, carry out inspections, and offer methodological guidance to ensure that the services provided are of high quality, timely, and effective. Mistakes, such as offering counseling rather than immediate intervention, can happen, posing a serious risk as inadequate assistance may result in adverse consequences, even fatalities, for the survivors.

**—How important is it to enhance existing legal frameworks and formulate new legislation in light of the realities of warfare?**

—Today, our main focus is on combating external aggression. However, even in times of war, the state undergoes processes similar to those in times of peace, but with deeper and more complex ramifications. Hence, it is significant to draft laws, particularly those dealing with CRSV. For instance, while “gender-based violence” is widely recognized, Ukrainian laws do not provide a clear definition of this concept. Therefore, the objective of developing new legislation is to harmonize our legal terms with international standards and address the challenges arising from the war.

*“CRSV is a deeply sensitive and hidden crime, profoundly affecting the mental and psychological well-being of survivors. Therefore, our primary focus should be on raising awareness to eliminate any stigma associated with being a victim. It is important to recognize that being a victim is not the victim’s fault; rather, it is a tactic employed by the Russian aggressor against our civilian population.*”

*Awareness campaigns should shape understanding of this phenomenon and provide guidance on how to best address.”*

Many survivors of CRSV currently live in occupied regions, making their identification challenging. However, our goal is to ensure they have clear pathways for assistance. Whether they move from Russian territory or occupied areas to Europe, they should know where to seek assistance and how to obtain survivor status. Similarly, upon returning to Ukraine, they should be informed about available assistance and support services. Achieving this requires relevant amendments to legislation.

**—What are the biggest challenges you encounter in providing assistance to survivors of CRSV?**

—CRSV is a deeply sensitive and hidden crime, profoundly affecting the mental and psychological well-being of survivors. Therefore, our primary focus should be on raising awareness to eliminate any stigma associated with being a victim. It is important to recognize that being a victim is not the victim’s fault; rather, it is a tactic employed by the Russian aggressor against our civilian population. Awareness campaigns should shape understanding of this phenomenon and provide guidance on how to best address.

Another issue pertains to the actual sentences our courts will render for CRSV perpetrators. Witnessing perpetrators being held accountable will encourage people to seek help and have confidence in state protection.

Moreover, we encounter difficulties in operating within regions that were previously under occupation because of the lack of social workers and support services. Establishing

such services is crucial to ensure access to various types of assistance, including informational, psychological, financial.

Ultimately, in my opinion, the most pressing issue nationwide is the scarcity of human resources. Particularly in the social sector, there is a significant outflow of talent and skill due to low wages. Furthermore, there is a shortage of individuals willing to work in liberated areas or regions of active combat actions, despite the substantial number of survivors living there.

**—How does the state implement its policy regarding social protection and aid for CRSV survivors?**

—There is currently no specific legal framework regulating CRSV. Consequently, survivors of conflict-related sexual violence often receive the same assistance as victims of domestic violence, as there is no designated mechanism in place. On the other hand, we partner with international organizations to provide training for all professionals in the social sector. This initiative aims to enhance their understanding of the distinct characteristics of conflict-related sexual violence and equip them to interact effectively with survivors and gather evidence to support CRSV cases. Our goal has been to create suitable protocols, introduce new tools to social service professionals, and ensure ongoing training and development.

These strategies are implemented through our network of local offices, spanning across all regions of Ukraine. Our aim is to foster efficient communication with various communities, local authorities, and regional military administrations to identify survivors of CRSV and offer them effective assistance. Close collaboration with law enforcement is crucial to ensure their interview

protocols prioritise survivor's well-being and prevent re-traumatization.

**—How does the National Social Service coordinate its efforts and cooperate with other executive government agencies, civil society organizations and international institutions providing assistance to survivors of CRSV?**

—We engage with various counterparts. We collaborate with the Office of the Government Commissioner for Gender Policy, led by Kateryna LEVCHENKO, and actively contribute to all working groups dedicated to shaping policies in this field.

Another important partnership involves joint efforts with the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Internal Affairs, and the Prosecutor General's Office. Together, we have developed an methodology of actions for police officers, prosecutors, and healthcare providers working in liberated areas. This methodology not only provides guidance on interacting with identified survivors, but also emphasizes the importance of coordinated efforts among them. It has received positive feedback and is widely used as a practical guide by all police officers, prosecutors, and healthcare workers operating in formerly occupied areas.

We also engage extensively with international partners as part of the National Action Plan for the implementation of the UN Security Council Resolution on Women, Peace, and Security. Under the NAP, the National Social Service is responsible for various activities such as engaging international partners to provide training, developing methodological materials, and fostering communication among all stakeholders in this process. Drawing on international expertise enhances our efforts in addressing CRSV.

**—How does the National Social Service coordinate services for CRSV survivors provided by local authorities and communities?**

—In the summer of 2023, we recognized the necessity of revising regulations governing the operations of our local branches. This was essential to empower them to coordinate efforts related to domestic violence and CRSV within their respective regions.

The local branches actively monitor all services offered to CRSV survivors. Subsequently, they compile analytical reports based on their findings. If any shortcomings are identified, they are promptly reported to the regional administration for necessary action.

At the central level, we collect information about shortcomings across the country, compile analytical reports, and distribute them to all stakeholders. For instance, if an issue pertains to healthcare, we inform the Ministry of Health; if it concerns law enforcement, we send the report to the Ministry of Internal Affairs. We also conduct inspections when we identify inadequate services or encounter problems. For example, despite receiving donor support, a Survivor Relief Center was established, yet is barely operational. Visitors arrive to find it closed; so, our goal is to ensure it operates as intended.

**—Do you offer support to survivors located in temporarily occupied territories or in ‘grey zone’ areas?**

—The National Social Service acts as a regulatory body overseeing the quality of social services, social support, and children’s rights adherence, rather than directly delivering these services. Our focus lies mainly on individuals residing within the territory controlled by the Government

of Ukraine. In occupied regions, we partner with non-governmental organisations that maintain communication with the residents. We also contribute to returning children from temporarily occupied areas, including, sadly, those affected by CRSV.

*“In line with international standards during the de-occupation process, the Armed Forces of Ukraine enter first, followed by the National Police to restore order, and then social workers are involved. This sequence is essential as the entire population requires immediate assistance.”*

We have our territorial branches operating in ‘grey zone’ areas, and I personally visit these regions. If cases of CRSV are identified, we promptly initiate support mechanisms for the survivors.

**—How does the National Social Service assist survivors of CRSV in liberated territories? How do you identify them and who do you engage with on these issues?**

—We engage with different groups depending on the region. Initially, we reach out to community leaders, including informal ones, who demonstrated patriotism and supported residents during the occupation.

In line with international standards during the de-occupation process, the Armed Forces of Ukraine enter first, followed by the National Police to restore order, and then social workers are involved. This sequence is essential as the entire population requires immediate assistance. Therefore, we collaborate closely with social workers who start their involvement immediately after liberation,

as they have valuable insights into the community's needs. If there are no social workers available, we seek assistance from civil society organisations to strengthen our efforts and help identify the survivors.

**—Many European countries require service providers assisting victims of gender-based violence (GBV), including sexual violence (excluding conflict-related incidents), to be licensed. Does Ukraine require or plan to introduce similar regulation for service providers aiding victims and survivors of GBV and CRSV?**

—Licensing has its advantages, as it provides a framework for the service and establishes government oversight. But is Ukraine ready for this step? I believe it is too early, considering our circumstances. Social services in Ukraine are still developing. Even in regions, such as Zakarpattia and Lviv, there are communities without any social service providers. If we introduce regulations now, there might be no providers to comply with them. Instead, I suggest focusing on licensing and certifying individuals capable of providing these services. They should have proper training and be listed in a registry. This is the path we are pursuing.

**—The National Social Service employs a significant number of professionals. How do you guarantee their comprehensive training to effectively handle and support survivors of CRSV?**

—In 2023, we made significant progress in addressing this issue. Nearly 400 employees, comprising around 70% of our territorial branch personnel, received training on assisting CRSV survivors. This training was conducted in collaboration with NGO JurFem, the Association of

Women Lawyers of Ukraine. Furthermore, the central office staff of the National Social Service provided training to employees at the Government Contact Center, responsible for managing all CRSV-related inquiries and ensuring efficient communication with the survivors.

We partnered with the NGO Women’s Information and Advisory Center to train and prepare the employees of our main departments. We developed a guide outlining the necessary actions to take in CRSV cases, including where to seek assistance and the responsibilities of social service providers. Additionally, we ensured that social workers from liberated territories also received training.

**—Your staff frequently encounter secondary (vicarious) trauma due to their work, placing them in ongoing stressful situations. How does the National Social Service deal with this issue?**

—We are pursuing two primary strategies. First, we are deeply invested in the well-being of our employees. We are currently collaborating with the Dr. Denis Mukwege Foundation to develop a training program tailored to provide psychological support to those directly assisting CRSV survivors. Recognizing the sensitive and emotionally taxing nature of their roles, it is crucial for them to learn how to manage trauma, foster peer support, and enhance resilience.

Second, beginning December 2023, we have initiated the Resilience Building social service in partnership with the Ministry of Social Policy. This initiative involves setting up Resilience Centers in every community, funded from the state budget. These centers will extend a range of services, including psychological support, to all community members.

This approach will restore and strengthen resilience for all citizens, extending beyond just social workers.

*“Raising public awareness about combatting CRSV and encouraging reporting is crucial. This not only promotes social understanding, but also fosters greater tolerance towards survivors. Ultimately, it enhances the likelihood of achieving justice for CRSV survivors through both an international tribunal and through our national courts.”*

This endeavor is a major state project for 2024, aimed at ensuring widespread public access to quality psychological services to aid in recovery and resilience-building efforts.

**—Do you believe that all documented cases of CRSV will be prosecuted, and perpetrators held accountable?**

—With more than ten years of experience in criminal justice and legal proceedings, I remain optimistic, yet mindful of the challenges in gathering required evidence and navigating legal processes, especially in cases like these.

Our primary goal is to preserve information from victims and survivors, particularly their testimonies. Prior to the war, sexual violence cases followed a different procedure, requiring a forensic medical examination to be conducted promptly following the incident. However, the onset of war presented new challenges, as survivors could reside in temporarily occupied territories for extended periods, making it challenging to retain physical evidence. As a result, new methods for gathering evidence have been developed.

Raising public awareness about combatting CRSV and encouraging reporting is crucial. This not only promotes

social understanding, but also fosters greater tolerance towards survivors. Ultimately, it enhances the likelihood of achieving justice for CRSV survivors through both an international tribunal and through our national courts.

**—What do you think encourages Russians to resort to CRSV?**

—We are dealing with a nation that is still developing, influenced significantly by outdated beliefs, particularly those reminiscent of medieval times. Think back to historical events of 1918 near Kyiv and 1939 in Western Ukraine—both ended in widespread terror and repression.

This behavior stems from Russian chauvinism and a broader cultural mindset prevalent in Russia. Today, they exploit CRSV as a weapon of war to instill fear among our population in the occupied territories. However, we recognize our obligation to ensure that those responsible for such actions face consequences, thus imprinting upon them a memory that deters their descendants from ever deeming such actions acceptable in the future.

*December 2023*

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**Kateryna Pavlichenko**  
**MINISTRY OF INTERNAL AFFAIRS**  
**MAINTAINS CONTROL**  
**OVER INVISIBLE CRIME**

*As Ukrainian territories are liberated, law enforcement officers are at the forefront to take the lead in restoring order and tackling various challenges, including the identification of survivors of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV). Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs of Ukraine, Kateryna PAVLICHENKO, provides valuable insights into the efforts and initiatives undertaken by her colleagues in addressing these critical issues.*

**—The Ministry of Internal Affairs has taken the lead in establishing mobile response teams to address CRSV incidents in the liberated areas. Who makes up these teams, and where do they operate?**

—Since April 2022, specialized police mobile units have been deployed to the de-occupied regions, with a primary mission to uncover sexual crimes, which has proven to be our most effective strategy. Their mission is to identify and document instances of sexual violence perpetrated by Russian combatants against civilians.

These mobile units are composed of police officers with expertise in handling gender-based violence cases, investigators, juvenile police officers, prosecutors, and psychologists. Additionally, social workers and healthcare professionals contribute to their efforts in the liberated regions.

A total of eight mobile units have been established, each assigned to one of the following oblasts: Donetsk, Kyiv, Sumy, Chernihiv, Mykolaiv, Zaporizhzhia, Kharkiv, and Kherson.

Since their inception, these teams have covered approximately 540 settlements.

**—What immediate assistance do mobile units provide to survivors of CRSV once they have been identified?**

—The units go beyond simply recording crimes; they also help survivors access comprehensive rehabilitation support. Psychologists and social workers play crucial roles in this effort, collaborating closely with the police.

In particular, the police provide civilians with essential information, detailing available support services and supplying a list of institutions and hotlines for further assistance.

**—Do members of the mobile units receive psychological and other essential training before engaging with survivors of CRSV?**

—Certainly, police officers within these mobile units receive specialized training. Back in 2022, in collaboration with our international partners, the Ministry of Internal Affairs launched targeted training programs for all police officers assisting CRSV survivors. It is important to note that mobile units comprise not only law enforcement but also other types of police officers who may come into contact with victims or witnesses. Additionally, we train lecturers of relevant state universities who then pass on their expertise to cadets.

*“Think about this: the age range of the survivors of sexual violence varies greatly, from as young as four-years-old to as old as 82. The highest number of these crimes, totaling 40, were documented in the liberated right-bank region of Kherson oblast. Among these cases, 24 male victims were identified by the police as having suffered sexual violence perpetrated by the occupiers.”*

Overall, we have trained approximately 500 employees within the National Police system. Equipping all personnel with the necessary skills to effectively investigate conflict-related sexual violence crimes, support survivors, and provide assistance is paramount for the Ministry of Internal Affairs. We place particular emphasis on training representatives from investigative and preventive units of the National Police, as well as those engaged in juvenile prevention. Ukrainian and foreign psychologists, alongside law enforcement experts, deliver vital knowledge and communication skills for engaging with survivors.

Prioritizing the interests of survivors is central to our employees.

**—How many instances of CRSV have been identified to date? According to your statistics, who is most often affected by this type of crime?**

—Since the beginning of the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, the National Police have been investigating 71 criminal cases related to sexual violence committed by Russian combatants against a minimum of 89 individuals. These victims include both women and men, as well as children, with ten recorded cases of sexual violence specifically involving minors.

Think about this: the age range of the survivors of sexual violence varies greatly, from as young as four- years-old to as old as 82. The highest number of these crimes, totaling 40, were documented in the liberated right-bank region of Kherson oblast. Among these cases, 24 male victims were identified by the police as having suffered sexual violence perpetrated by the occupiers.

The National Police is currently investigating 54 cases of sexual violence committed by the occupants, with some involving multiple victims.

A total of 19 Russian combatants have been identified and officially notified, in their absence, of suspicion under Article 438 of the Ukrainian Criminal Code for violating the laws and traditions of war, which include international treaties and agreements. Our dedication to seeking justice remains steadfast; we persist in our efforts to identify and prosecute every war criminal.

We recognize that over time, more cases of CRSV will come to light, resulting in an increase in the reported figures.

**—How many survivors of CRSV do you think have been identified? Why many of them still choose to remain silent about their experiences?**

—It may be too early to give an exact percentage, especially since some parts of Ukraine are still controlled by the Russians. Nevertheless, the number of survivors is much higher than those currently identified.

*“From our perspective, the review of documented cases of sexual violence perpetrated by Russian combatants in Ukraine suggests all signs of genocide.”*

Sexual violence is often called an “invisible crime” because survivors usually avoid reporting it to law enforcement. This reluctance arises from several factors, such as the unwillingness to revisit traumatic experiences, fear of the return of perpetrators, or concerns about the safety of family members living in occupied areas. Additionally, the fear of social stigma plays a significant role in shaping their choices.

The marginalization of sexual violence survivors reveals the lasting impact of archaic patriarchal beliefs on our attitudes. Drawing from Croatia’s experience, we anticipate uncovering historical cases of CRSV over the next decade, because survivors often require time to come forward and share their experiences. Nevertheless, these crimes are not subject to any time constraints: the cases will be investigated irrespective of when individuals report them to the police.

**—How are incidents of conflict-related sexual violence documented?**

—It is a straightforward process. Mobile units proceed straight to the recently liberated regions, interacting with community members to identify witnesses and survivors of sexual violence perpetrated by Russian combatants. Law enforcement officials gather evidence and statements.

Sexual crimes committed by the occupants, once identified by the police, are promptly recorded and documented in the Unified Register of Pre-Trial Investigations.

**—Are these crimes committed by the Russian military considered genocide against the Ukrainian civilians? If**

**such genocide is acknowledged internationally, what repercussions could Russia potentially encounter?**

—From our perspective, the review of documented cases of sexual violence perpetrated by Russian combatants in Ukraine suggests all signs of genocide.

*“The world must know and understand that Russia, acting as an aggressor nation, employs violence against civilians—including killings, torture, and intimidation—as part of its military tactics, with sexual violence being a part of this strategy.”*

Instances where Russian military leaders commanded their subordinates to rape Ukrainian women serve as clear evidence of the intentional use of sexual violence as a tactic of warfare. Once such case occurred in Kyiv region, where a commanding officer directly ordered his soldiers to rape local women. Accompanied by two of his subordinates, they roamed the village in search of women deemed suitable targets. Two women fell victim to rape. When one victim’s husband attempted to protect his wife, he was killed. Following the assault, the victimized woman and her 15-year-old son remained in their home for 3 days alongside the deceased husband’s body before burying him in the garden.

The world must know and understand that Russia, acting as an aggressor nation, employs violence against civilians—including killings, torture, and intimidation—as part of its military tactics, with sexual violence being a part of this strategy.

*December 2023*

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**Kathrien Coppens**

**RESTORING TRUST IN PEOPLE  
AND LIFE: THE MISSION  
OF THE DR. DENIS MUKWEGE  
FOUNDATION FOR SURVIVORS  
OF CRSV**

*The Dr. Denis Mukwege Foundation initiated its operations in Ukraine before the [2022 commencement] of large-scale Russian aggression. Kathrien COPPENS, the Executive Director of the Mukwege Foundation joins us as we explore the support this international humanitarian organization provides to survivors of conflict-related sexual violence and its collaborative efforts with the Government of Ukraine and civil society.*

**—When and how did the story of the Mukwege Foundation begin? What assistance does it provide?**

—The Dr. Denis Mukwege Foundation is an international organization assisting survivors of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) worldwide. Established in 2016 by Dr. Denis Mukwege, it promotes the Panzi model and philosophy of holistic care. This model aims to facilitate access for survivors of CRSV to medical, psychological, and social support, alongside access to justice on the local level, empowering them to effectively cope with the aftermath of their trauma.

Survivors of CRSV often face stigma and shame, frequently from their own families and communities and

sometimes feeling guilty about what they have been through. Overcoming these challenges can be a lengthy process, sometimes extending over years. After providing support to individual survivors, Dr. Mukwege and his team at Panzi Hospital in the Democratic Republic of Congo recognized that survivors benefit from coming together to openly discuss their experiences and share their journey towards healing, thus making the healing process less painful. This collective support among survivors strengthens them as they rebuild their lives.

An additional component of the holistic care model relies on collaboration between government institutions and civil society organizations to provide effective assistance to CRSV survivors.

The Mukwege Foundation started uniting CRSV survivors by establishing the global movement of survivors called SEMA. Currently, SEMA is active in 26 countries, including Ukraine. SEMA-Ukraine is run by Iryna DOVHAN, who recognizes the significance of survivor gatherings.

**—Does the Mukwege Foundation provide assistance exclusively to female survivors, or also to male survivors?**

—Dr. Denis Mukwege, an obstetrician-gynecologist, practiced in the Democratic Republic of Congo to ensure safe childbirth and maternal survival, addressing a significant concern there. However, his hospital also received women with severe vaginal injuries, initially without disclosure of the cause. Over time, the women shared that those injuries were the consequences of sexual violence, often perpetrated using sticks that inflicted severe internal damage to their organs. Initially, CRSV awareness was primarily on affected women.

During the initial meeting of the worldwide SEMA movement, approximately 60 survivors from nearly 20 countries came together to discuss the possibility of including male survivors into the organization. Some were hesitant, given their upbringing in patriarchal societies, concerned that male survivors might overshadow women. That was a few years ago. I believe, the network has since grown and proven resilient and has welcomed its first male members. Branches catering to male survivors have now emerged within national movements, including those in Colombia and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

In Ukraine, both the Mukwege Foundation and SEMA-Ukraine engage with, and provide support to, male survivors.

—**Are children affected by CRSV?**

—The impact of CRSV on children varies depending on the country's circumstances. It affects them in various ways. Children themselves can be survivors of sexual and gender-based violence. They can also be unwilling witnesses when CRSV occurs to women or to men in their families or communities. Witnessing their mother or sister experiencing sexual harm can be equally traumatic for them.

There is the third aspect to consider. Sometimes, mothers who have experienced CRSV may struggle to resume their previous roles. They may withdraw from their families, battle with depression, and face difficulties in caring for their children. As a result, the children may be affected.

Finally, a very important aspect: in many countries, we observe that women who have experienced sexual violence become pregnant and give birth to children. This experience

can be extremely traumatic for the mother, and depending on how society responds, it can also be distressing for the child.

Children are indeed a significant part of CRSV survivors, and particularly in areas such as Congo and elsewhere, they are identified as a vulnerable population requiring appropriate support and aid.

**—In which countries does the Mukwege Foundation operate?**

—We operate on three different levels. In countries such as Ukraine, Democratic Republic of Congo, Central African Republic and Burundi, we employ the comprehensive model of holistic care. In places such as Iraq, our primary focus is on providing training. Additionally, in ten countries, including Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Colombia, Guatemala, Syria, Mali, South Africa, and Sudan, we support survivors by strengthening national networks. We organize various events such as meetings and webinars to raise awareness about CRSV, discuss strategies for prevention, and foster global solidarity to address this issue.

*“In April 2022, we and our fellow colleagues traveled to Ukraine for a meeting convened by Kateryna LEVCHENKO, bringing together representatives from ministries, government agencies, and civil society organizations to chart our future course of action. During that time, Ukrainian authorities demonstrated sincere political will and commitment to collaborate in aiding survivors of CRSV.”*

**—What is the purpose of your work in Ukraine? Have there been any adjustments to your approach since**

## **the commencement of the full-scale aggression by the Russian Federation?**

—Even before the full-scale aggression, we extended support to SEMA-Ukraine, a group that brought together survivors of CRSV following the events in Donbas [in 2014] committed by Russia. However, our program was quite constrained at that time. We focused on advocating for Ukrainian authorities to recognize these survivors and provide them with assistance.

After the full-scale invasion, we significantly stepped up our partnership with the Government of Ukraine, particularly with the Office of the Government Commissioner for Gender Policy led by Kateryna LEVCHENKO and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration led by Olha STEFANISHYNA. In the first months, a deep understanding emerged that the Russians were employing sexual violence as a weapon of terror, posing a high risk to many more civilians. We recognized the urgent need to leverage the expertise of Dr. Mukwege and our team in collaborating with professionals in Ukraine to offer the best possible support to survivors.

In April 2022, we and our fellow colleagues traveled to Ukraine for a meeting convened by Kateryna LEVCHENKO, bringing together representatives from ministries, government agencies, and civil society organizations to chart our future course of action. During that time, Ukrainian authorities demonstrated sincere political will and commitment to collaborate in aiding survivors of CRSV.

The authorities were also deeply committed to investigating instances of CRSV, collecting evidence, and

documenting them to substantiate the atrocities perpetrated by the Russian military. We even had some concerns about potential conflicts of interest due to the strong focus on survivors testifying to gather adequate evidence for investigating various CRSV cases. Nonetheless, it remained imperative for professionals such as doctors, psychologists, and prosecutors to prioritize the interests of the survivors above all else.

Ukrainian policy makers supported our position during the discussion, marking a highly valuable achievement.

Another advantageous aspect was that before the full-scale aggression Ukraine had a solid infrastructure for providing medical and other forms of assistance. This included facilities for safe childbirth, access to psychologists and psychiatrists, a functional justice system, and the Prosecutor General's Office. With these services already in place, we did not have to create new infrastructure or deploy doctors or psychologists to the country. Instead, our efforts were directed towards enhancing existing facilities to ensure they operate smoothly and are fully equipped to provide effective assistance to survivors of CRSV.

Perhaps, some difficulties arose from an overly segmented assistance system. For instance, survivors seeking various medical services at healthcare facilities had to repeatedly narrate their experiences to each doctor, resulting in retraumatization. We provided training to show how assigning a dedicated social worker to each survivor could ensure they receive ongoing guidance and support throughout the system.

Another concern relates to funding. When individuals relocate from one region to another, they encounter

numerous bureaucratic obstacles in accessing assistance. Some improvement is needed in this area.

*“...both governmental agencies and non-governmental organizations such as SEMA-Ukraine are actively engaged in assisting these survivors, many of whom remain in occupied territories or are held captive. This represents a unique aspect of the situation in Ukraine.”*

**—How do you assess the situation with CRSV in Ukraine?**

—Sexual violence in Ukraine is primarily prevalent in the occupied territories and detention centers for prisoners of war. Fortunately, the majority of the country remains unaffected by Russian aggression, and there sexual violence is not as prevalent. This is different than, for example, in Sudan or Myanmar, where conflicts involve multiple parties. In Ukraine, the Ukrainian military confronts Russian occupying forces.

Moreover, all governmental institutions operate effectively here. For example, there has been no rise in violence against women in any region due to the absence of police.

We know that there are many CRSV survivors in Ukraine, and we realize that we are only scratching the surface, as many individuals in such circumstances find it extremely difficult to seek help. Nonetheless, both governmental agencies and non-governmental organizations such as SEMA-Ukraine are actively engaged in assisting these survivors, many of whom remain in occupied territories or are held captive. This represents a unique aspect of the situation in Ukraine.

**—Why do Russians resort to CRSV?**

—Responding to such a question is always challenging because the motivations stem from the minds of those perpetrating CRSV or those who allow it to happen. In any conflict, sexual violence can be employed as a weapon of terror. Regrettably, it serves as a convenient tactic of warfare for instilling fear and horror. The reports from Bucha have instilled fear in many people. Violence is often wielded by a group against individuals to assert dominance and authority. CRSV serves as a means of exerting control. If they seek control and encounter resistance, resorting to violence is common.

When speaking about CRSV and those held captive as prisoners, CRSV serves as a method of torture, stripping individuals of their dignity and humanity, particularly men.

**—What are your main approaches to working with CRSV survivors?**

—We always place the needs of the survivor at the forefront. Survivors often feel helpless and desperate, losing control over their own lives. As I mentioned earlier, victim-blaming is common in many societies. Therefore, our efforts extend beyond aiding the individual to addressing social perceptions and biases, so the community firmly declares “that which you have experienced is dreadful, but it is not your fault, and we stand by you!” This aspect of support holds immense importance.

Any form of torture is horrifying, but the added burden of shame and stigma makes CRSV much more difficult for both the survivor and their family. In some instances, men may abandon their wives following incidents of sexual violence. This is why we often engage with the families of survivors to ensure they receive ongoing support.

*“...addressing these issues amidst ongoing conflict, setting a commendable example for other nations. This demonstrates that even during times of armed aggression, governments can fulfill international obligations and prioritize the well-being of one of the most vulnerable populations—CRSV survivors. This initiative is undeniably essential.”*

Respecting the decisions made by the survivors is paramount. If they choose not to involve the police, that is okay. If they choose not to testify, that is okay. If they choose not to discuss their experiences, that is okay. Survivors should not face any pressure, whether from law enforcement pursuing legal action or journalists seeking media coverage. We do not support anything that could potentially harm survivors. Only a survivor-centered approach will help wounded people regain trust in others and in life.

**—What assistance do you think CRSV survivors in Ukraine need the most?**

—Survivors need a comprehensive array of support services to aid in their recovery. This encompasses medical assistance, particularly gynecological care. Often, sexual violence is accompanied by physical injuries such as tooth loss, broken noses, or leg injuries, necessitating medical care to address these issues.

Additionally, social and economic support are crucial. When a survivor has been displaced from their home, is responsible for caring for three young children, and facing uncertainty about fulfilling basic needs like food and shelter, their primary concern may not be their own psychological well-being.

Similarly, they may not always prioritize seeking justice immediately, as even if the perpetrator is brought to trial, their day-to-day circumstances may not significantly improve. For many survivors of conflict-related sexual violence, the pursuit of justice is a future perspective.

Additionally, there are concerns regarding reparations. It is crucial for the state to recognize that the harm inflicted to you is not your fault and that you deserve to be compensated. Therefore, it is not just about punishing and imprisoning the perpetrator. Not all offenders involved in crimes committed by the Russian military will face imprisonment, at least not right away.

**—The Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine is deliberating on a draft law regarding survivor status for CRSV survivors and the provision of immediate interim reparations. What do you think of the lawmakers’ intentions, and how do you anticipate this law will impact your future endeavors in Ukraine?**

— Reparations hold great significance for both victims and society. They serve to shift blame away from the survivors and allow for the provision of comprehensive assistance, including socio-economic support. It is not about charity; it is about recognizing the harm endured and for the state to be responsible for compensating for this harm. It is particularly noteworthy that the Government of Ukraine is addressing these issues amidst ongoing conflict, setting a commendable example for other nations. This demonstrates that even during times of armed aggression, governments can fulfill international obligations and prioritize the well-being of one of the most vulnerable populations—CRSV survivors. This initiative is undeniably essential.

*January 2024*

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Ivan Vyhivskyy  
**CRSV CRIMES  
ARE UNDOUBTEDLY WAR CRIMES**

*The government institution National Police of Ukraine is instrumental in uncovering and documenting instances of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) and offering support to survivors of CRSV. We are joined by Ivan VYHIVSKYY, Head of the National Police of Ukraine, Police General, Third Rank to answer questions about legal accountability for CRSV crimes, the collection and securing of evidence collected for review by courts, as well as the assignment of female officers to work with CRSV survivors.*

**—What was your initial response, initial assessment upon hearing about the widespread sexual violence in Bucha and other liberated settlements in the Kyiv region?**

—My initial response, likely shared by many, was anger. From the very beginning, it was evident that the incidents being reported were not only about violating sexual integrity; but also were some of the most atrocious crimes possible perpetrated by Russian combatants in order to instill fear and control civilians. Their cruelty knows no limits. [My assessment] is that these actions are intended to destroy the Ukrainian nation. Our primary goal was to ensure accountability and justice. Based on previous experiences, we knew that Bucha, Irpin, and Makariv were likely just the tip of the iceberg.

**—What initial actions did you take regarding CRSV cases?**

—Shortly after the liberation of Kyiv region, there was a significant increase in reports of CRSV, marked by its extreme brutality and heartlessness. I believe the global community was shocked by the scale and severity of the atrocities committed by Russian combatants during their brief occupation. At that time, I held the position of Chief of the Kyiv City Main Department of the National Police, not yet assuming the role of Head of the National Police, and these horrific incidents took place in Kyiv region. However, the Government of Ukraine promptly responded, tasking us with comprehensively investigating and documenting these crimes while providing assistance to the survivors of CRSV.

Recognizing the unique nature of addressing such crimes, the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the National Police launched a specialized mobile police unit dedicated to uncovering violations of sexual integrity perpetrated by Russian Federation military personnel. Notably, my assistant, Olha YUSKEVYCH, led the first team, initiating operations in the newly liberated Kyiv region.

The primary objective of the unit was to determine the full scope of the situation. This involved locating victims, witnesses, and bystanders, recognizing that some may have relocated, while others might have been killed or been forcibly taken out of the country.

The police have been heavily present in the liberated areas since the start of de-occupation, focusing on promptly and effectively documenting war crimes. This effort involved deploying officers from different regions as part

of unified units. However, most reports received by the police primarily concerned casualties, torture incidents, shelling, and property damage, with limited information about CRSV. Many people were reluctant to discuss this sensitive issue, choosing to avoid it altogether. The silence surrounding these incidents largely stems from the severe psychological trauma experienced by the survivors, coupled with the fear of social judgment. In such instances, establishing psychological trust between the police officer and the survivors is crucial.

**—Was the Government of Ukraine successful in coordinated efforts among state agencies to identify, investigate, and address CRSV crimes during the initial phase of Russia’s full-scale war?**

—Certainly, it was. This was made possible by establishing an effective mechanism early on in collaboration with prosecutors from the Prosecutor General’s Office, representatives of social services, healthcare institutions, and local authorities. This mechanism facilitated the identification and documentation of numerous cases of CRSV crimes ensuring that survivors received professional psychological support and legal aid at no cost.

*“No one was prepared for such horrific acts, but we swiftly adjusted to this new, grim reality. There was no time for reflection; urgent action was required.”*

**—How did civil society and international organizations assist the National Police in addressing cases of CRSV?**

—The National Police immediately teamed up with various civil society organizations such as the Ukrainian

Women Lawyers Association JurFem, the ZMINA Human Rights Center, the Ukrainian Legal Advisory Group, La Strada-Ukraine, others to clarify the mission of the mobile unit and streamline the exchange of information regarding identified cases of sexual violence. This partnership proved very successful, as some survivors choose to seek support from NGOs rather than law enforcement agencies. Nonetheless, we knew that our partners would encourage survivors to report crimes and cooperate with law enforcement.

**—Was the National Police prepared to address cases of CRSV perpetrated by Russian aggressors? How does sexual violence in peacetime differ from CRSV?**

—No one was prepared for such horrific acts, but we swiftly adjusted to this new, grim reality. There was no time for reflection; urgent action was required.

Identifying cases of sexual violence perpetrated by Russian combatants against Ukrainian civilians and prisoners of war entails registering the criminal offense in the Unified Register of Pre-trial Investigations, classifying it under Article 438 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine (Violation of the Laws and Customs of War). Under criminal law, such offences carry penalties ranging from 8 to 15 years imprisonment or life imprisonment.

Regardless of the victim's gender, sexual violence covered by Article 438 may include rape, forced sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilization, and other forms of sexual violence that are an outrage against personal dignity, including cruel and degrading treatment, as well as torture involving genital mutilation. The number of violent acts committed does not affect the classification under this article.

An essential aspect of this crime is its connection to armed conflict, even extending to situations after the conflict, such as the treatment of prisoners of war. In international armed conflict, the presence of the aggressor country's military on temporarily occupied territory removes the possibility for individuals to give true consent to engage in sexual activities.

It is important to note that war crimes are not subject to any statute of limitation, enabling survivors of CRSV to report the crime to authorities at any point, regardless of when it occurred.

**—What does the work of the National Police mobile units involve in the liberated areas? How is the selection process for personnel carried out?**

—The mobile units include representatives of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, prevention police officers (specializing in domestic violence prevention and response), juvenile police officers, investigators, and psychologists.

Each member of the mobile unit has relevant experience in supporting victims of violence and children. During their operations, police officers and psychologists engage with local residents, identifying cases of sexual crimes and providing guidance on where to seek assistance.

To support this effort, law enforcement has created an information guide containing up-to-date support resources, which we distributed to local authorities, police, schools, shops, and directly handed to local residents during interactions.

Police officers and psychologists within the unit not only document crimes but also assist survivors in accessing comprehensive support, including psychological, medical, rehabilitative, social, and legal aid.

Two-thirds of the unit consist of female police officers to facilitate effective communication with survivors, primarily women and children, who may feel more comfortable speaking with female rather than male officers.

**—What are the unique aspects of documenting CRSV crimes?**

—During investigative and procedural actions, including engagements with victims and witnesses, it is essential to follow the Murad Code, a global code of conduct for those collecting information about systematic and conflict-related sexual violence.

Key steps involved in collecting and verifying information include:

- Obtaining information from local authorities, community groups, communal (healthcare facilities, district committees, homeowners' associations) and social services about any known cases of conflict-related sexual violence and the survivors;
- Establishing communication with community representatives to obtain specific details about cases of wartime sexual violence against civilians, including approximate timing, survivor profiles, etc.);
- Conducting inspections of flats, houses, or residences to collect information about known cases of conflict-related sexual violence and build trust and rapport between the community and law enforcement;
- Circulating informational leaflets among local authorities, community groups, communal and social services, and the public to inform survivors by wartime sexual violence about their rights and available assistance;
- Collaborating with volunteer and grassroots organisations to report known cases of conflict-related

sexual violence and individuals in need of assistance to the mobile unit.

Upon reviewing the operations of the mobile units, we noticed a significant trend of CRSV crimes perpetrated by Russian Federation servicemen being vastly underreported. Victims often avoid seeking help from law enforcement due to limited awareness of their rights and available support services. Therefore, it is important to approach each survivor on an individual basis, providing psychological support and assistance.

**—Once cases of CRSV are uncovered, registered and documented, what steps follow thereafter? What are the potential avenues for holding the perpetrators accountable?**

—Since the beginning of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation, National Police investigators have initiated 75 criminal proceedings related to CRSV incidents involving Russian servicemen. These cases involve at least 89 victims, with 47 reported in Kherson region, 19 in Kyiv region, and 7 each in Zaporizhzhia and Kharkiv regions. Additionally, 6 victims were identified in Donetsk region, and 2 each in Luhansk, Mykolayiv, and Chernihiv regions.

Nine criminal cases have been initiated based on media reports with survivors being identified.

The age range of victims of sexual violence perpetrated by Russian servicemen spans from as young as four-years-old to as old as 82.

Eighteen cases have been handed over to the Security Service of Ukraine for further investigation.

Currently, the National Police of Ukraine is conducting investigations in 55 cases, with four of them suspended

under Article 280, Part 1, Clause 2 of the Criminal Procedure Code of Ukraine, with the suspects being declared wanted.

Twenty-five suspects have been officially notified of charges in absentia.

In five cases, pre-trial investigations have been completed, resulting in the indictment of 11 individuals whose cases have been referred to court for special pre-trial proceedings.

The National Police is diligently documenting and investigating instances of CRSV. We are optimistic that, with the assistance of our international allies, all perpetrators will be held accountable for their actions.

**—How do you classify CRSV crimes? What evidence do you gather to support such classification?**

—CRSV crimes are unequivocally classified as war crimes.

The fundamental distinction between conflict-related sexual violence (as defined in Part 1 of Article 438 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine) and isolated incidents of sexual violence (outlined in Articles 152 and 153 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine) is their connection to armed conflict, being committed during armed conflict. Any instances of CRSV are classified under Article 438 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine, which pertains to violations of laws and customs of war.

*“The widespread war crimes perpetrated by Russian occupiers and their accomplices are unprecedented, audacious, and brutal violations of human rights. Employing violence against civilians as a deliberate tactic of war reflects methods utilized in past conflicts and wars initiated by the Russian Federation.”*

In times of armed conflict, cases of sexual violence frequently gain widespread attention, intensifying feelings of shame and humiliation. This can lead survivors to view themselves as symbols of community disgrace, while witnesses, including family and friends, may feel guilt for their inability to prevent the harm.

Evidence in such cases typically relies on survivor statements, backed by witness testimonies and further information obtained through investigative methods, criminal analysis, video scrutiny, physical evidence, forensic medical examinations.

**—Why do you think Russian combatants engage in sexual violence?**

—The widespread war crimes perpetrated by Russian occupiers and their accomplices are unprecedented, audacious, and brutal violations of human rights. Employing violence against civilians as a deliberate tactic of war reflects methods utilized in past conflicts and wars initiated by the Russian Federation. From my perspective, this approach serves as a means of psychological manipulation aimed at instilling fear among civilians and undermining their resolve to resist.

**—How do you communicate with survivors of CRSV?**

—Establishing effective and proper communication with survivors is vital for building trust between the police officer and the survivor.

First, prioritizing the survivor's safety and well-being and providing clear and detailed explanations to address any concerns is paramount, as this may affect their decision to report the crime.

It is important to reassure the survivor that their actions will not be judged and that their information will remain

confidential. Furthermore, providing information about the investigative process and the measures involved in the pre-trial investigation is necessary.

Police officers should be mindful that survivors may have physical, cognitive, (combination of both) or sensory impairments that could affect their ability to effectively communicate necessary information.

Given the deeply intimate and sensitive nature of sexual violence, communication between the survivor and law enforcement can be particularly challenging for both parties. Conversations about sexual violence experiences are inherently private and may trigger feelings of shame, making survivors reluctant to speak out. The trust survivors place in law enforcement often depends on their initial interactions or past encounters, whether positive or negative.

To assist police officers in handling such crimes, we provide specialised training, focusing on the peculiarities of investigating CRSV and drawing on expertise from international experts, practical psychologists, etc.

The Prosecutor General's Office, in partnership with the National Police, has developed innovative victim and witness-oriented strategies for the prosecution of conflict-related sexual violence crimes. These strategies are regularly employed by specialised police investigators.

**—How frequently do National Police officers need to interact with a survivor upon identifying a CRSV case? What measures are taken to prevent their re-traumatization?**

—In most instances, police officers, seeking to avoid re-traumatization and considering the latest survivor and

witness-centred approaches, strive to conduct all required investigative and procedural actions involving the survivors as efficiently as possible.

*“The National Police is committed to addressing every instance of CRSV, including those reported from temporarily occupied regions. Immediate actions are taken to register relevant details in the Unified Register of Pre-trial Investigations. However, when dealing with cases from these areas, precautionary measures are put in place to protect the individuals involved.”*

Furthermore, during the pre-trial investigation, legal safeguards, such as ensuring data confidentiality, closed court proceedings, conducting investigative actions or hearings via videoconferencing, providing physical protection, may be implemented as needed to safeguard the survivors or witnesses.

**—What measures can be taken to counter CRSV in temporarily occupied territories?**

—The National Police is committed to addressing every instance of CRSV, including those reported from temporarily occupied regions. Immediate actions are taken to register relevant details in the Unified Register of Pre-trial Investigations. However, when dealing with cases from these areas, precautionary measures are put in place to protect the individuals involved.

Documenting and investigating such crimes pose significant challenges due to the physical absence of survivors, witnesses, and suspects. Typically, when temporarily occupied territories are liberated, war criminals and their accomplices escape, while their extradition or

return to Ukraine by Russian Federation is impeded by the ongoing conflict.

**—Does the National Police have adequate resources to address the repercussions of CRSV and hold the perpetrators accountable?**

—Uncovering the truth is crucial for achieving justice, addressing traumatic impacts of these crimes on individuals, communities, and the nation as a whole, and evaluating the harm inflicted on the state and its citizens. Documenting war crimes will provide the evidence required for future legal proceedings in both national and international courts.

The National Police has sufficient resources for documenting and investigating CRSV.

In the future, as we regain control of our territories from the enemy and specialized units start working with local people to document war crimes, things might change, and many more of CRSV occurrences may reveal. Anticipating such developments, we are actively training future investigators to handle these crimes. Collaborating closely with our international partners, we are organising training sessions, workshops, conferences, and roundtables aimed at equipping investigators with the necessary skills to document and investigate war crimes in the newly liberated territories.

*January 2024*

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**Sabine Gunes Frazier**

**IN UKRAINE, CRSV IS CLEARLY  
RECOGNIZED AS A WAR CRIME**

*According to Sabine FREIZER GUNES, UN Women Representative in Ukraine, addressing gender equality concerns in Ukraine has facilitated swift responses to conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) and effective countermeasures.*

**—How does Ukraine’s approach to gender equality policy and response to CRSV differ from that of other countries?**

—During the past few years, Ukraine has made significant progress in institutionalizing gender equality. Several crucial laws have been passed to empower women. Moreover, Ukraine has ratified important international agreements such as The Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence, also known as the Istanbul Convention.

*“As for conflict-related sexual violence, it is important to note that the Government of Ukraine has swiftly responded to CRSV, recognizing it as a significant problem and a severe breach of human rights of both women and men.”*

However, there are certain areas where Ukraine still falls short. For instance, women make up only 21% of [Ukraine’s parliament] the Verkhovna Rada, underscoring an imbalance

in gender representation. Therefore, implementing effective gender quotas and interim measures to increase women's participation in government institutions and their presence on electoral party lists would promote greater gender equality in decision making.

As for conflict-related sexual violence, it is important to note that the Government of Ukraine has swiftly responded to CRSV, recognizing it as a significant problem and a severe breach of human rights of both women and men. In spring 2022, the Government of Ukraine, represented by Deputy Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration Olha STEFANISHYNA, and UN Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict Pramila PATTEN, signed the Framework of Cooperation on the Prevention and Response to Conflict-Related Sexual Violence.

Presently, the Government of Ukraine and the United Nations are actively implementing the Framework of Cooperation through the Interagency Working Group. This group coordinates efforts to execute the action plan, with a focus on providing comprehensive support services to survivors of CRSV and ensuring access to justice.

**—UN Women is the United Nations entity that collaborates not only with governments to uphold women's rights and gender equality, but with other UN agencies, as well, to promote gender mainstreaming in their operations. Is this work being carried out in Ukraine?**

—UN Women has operated in Ukraine since 2016. Our mission involves working on advancing women's rights and promoting gender equality, alongside efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal 5 (Gender

Equality). We collaborate closely with other UN agencies as part of the UN team in Ukraine and the United Nations humanitarian groups. For instance, we work closely with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) to address gender-based violence, including conflict-related sexual violence. While UNFPA primarily focuses on delivering immediate assistance to survivors of CRSV, our focus lies more on empowering justice and security institutions to prevent and respond effectively to conflict-related sexual violence.

Another example of our close partnership is our collaboration with the International Labour Organization (ILO). Together, we are part of the global initiative called the Equal Pay International Coalition (EPIC), led by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), of which Ukraine became a member and committed to ensure equal pay for equal work regardless of gender.

Working alongside the ILO, we have contributed to the development of, and have already embarked on, the implementation of a new equal pay strategy adopted by the Government of Ukraine. This strategy aims to facilitate the full and fair integration of women into economic life.

Promoting gender equality requires us to confront and challenge gender stereotypes. People often are unaware of existing gender inequalities or even what constitutes violence. As part of the global 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence campaign annually held from November 25 to December 10, we launched a nationwide communication campaign against gender-based violence, called #NotTolerated. The purpose of this campaign was

to raise public awareness of gender-based violence against women and girls, advocate for its prevention, and offer information about support platforms for survivors. Over the 16-day period, viewers of national television channels were presented with real-life stories of women who have unfortunately faced violence, provided information about different forms of violence as well as information about prevention and response mechanisms.

**—What programs and initiatives is UN Women undertaking in Ukraine to respond to CRSV?**

—I mentioned the Framework of Cooperation.. It is very important that the collaboration between the Government of Ukraine and various agencies of the United Nations is well-coordinated. As for implementation on initiatives, we closely cooperate with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration, led by Olha STEFANISHYNA, the Secretariat of the Government Commissioner for Gender Policy, led by Kateryna LEVCHENKO, the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA), the Prosecutor General's Office, the State Emergency Service of Ukraine (SES), local authorities, and civil society organisations.

In 2023, we contributed to enhancing capacity of the security sector to address CRSV. We conducted training for the National Police, State Emergency Service, Ministry of Internal Affairs, and other institutions. Additionally, we teamed up with the National Agency of Ukraine on Civil Service to develop and launch a training video series to equip civil servants with the knowledge and skills to recognize and respond to CRSV and provide assistance to survivors. Over 1,500 civil servants have completed the training course. We

collaborated with the Ukrainian Women Lawyers Association JurFem to create and deliver this course. Based on our calculations, our partnership with JurFem enabled us to reach 3,120,000 individuals by distributing informational and reference materials on CRSV.

We also contribute to the government's efforts in drafting legislation to support survivors of CRSV. Draft Law 10132 *On the Status of Survivors of Sexual Violence Related to the Armed Aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine and Urgent Interim Reparations* was registered in the Parliament in October 2023. This proposed legislation is closely linked to Draft Law 10256 *On Recording Military Damages Caused by the Russian Federation*.

The experience of other countries indicate that creating a reparations system for survivors of conflict-related sexual violence is crucial to ensure their access to a range of support services including medical, psychological, legal, and financial assistance. We recognize that significant advocacy efforts will be needed to secure funding for implementing the reparations law. While some funds may come from frozen assets, involving donors will likely be crucial to ensuring sufficient support for reparations.

**—The Government of Ukraine, the World Bank, the European Commission, and the United Nations are preparing the Third Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment for the Recovery of Ukraine. Will gender implications of the war in Ukraine and the issue of CRSV be covered in this Assessment?**

—Ensuring that this assessment accurately portrays the gender ramifications of the war is essential. The first two reports lacked disaggregated gender-specific data, thereby

limiting our understanding of the unique challenges encountered by women and girls during wartime. These assessments overlooked critical issues such as women losing jobs and the economic consequences of the conflict on women. The Assessment has only a little coverage of CRSV. Therefore, we have partnered with the Government of Ukraine, other UN agencies, and civil society organizations to prepare a dedicated section focusing on the impact of the war on women and girls, which will be incorporated into the Third Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment. This section highlights concerns related to women's participation in politics, economic stability, security, and the prevalence of CRSV.

**—Is it important to include gender equality and the needs of CRSV survivors in the Ukraine Recovery Plan?**

—I want to note that when we talk about reconstruction, many people immediately think of rebuilding infrastructure such as bridges and schools. In the first two assessments, there was indeed a considerable focus on infrastructure, particularly on damaged buildings. Why so? Partly due to the simplicity of calculating the costs of rebuilding physical infrastructure. However, assessing human rights violations, particularly the impacts of violence against women, presents significantly greater challenges. That is why we consider it very important to emphasize the gender component and incorporate a separate gender-focused section in the Third Rapid Assessment. This section will cover gender needs in recovery plans for Ukraine.

When it comes to CRSV, having a reparations law is crucial for survivors to access justice, essential services, and financial compensation.

I am unsure if reparations funding is part of the Ukraine Recovery Plan, but it is clear that implementing such a law will require financial resources. Therefore, it is important to incorporate this aspect into the Plan. Despite political support for gender equality initiatives, funding is not always allocated accordingly. Providing effective support for CRSV survivors requires a significant budget. Survivors require ongoing assistance, not just a one-time payment.

Planning for this is essential now. Drawing on the experiences of countries such as the [six countries in the] Western Balkans, among them Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as Kosovo. We understand that CRSV trauma can extend across generations, necessitating both financial and human resources for resolution.

*“Unlike in some countries where CRSV is perceived as an inevitable consequence of war with no legal remedy, and often with the assumption that the woman may be at fault or somehow provoked the violence, Ukraine unequivocally recognizes CRSV as a war crime. There is a firm belief that survivors of CRSV should have access to justice.”*

**—What challenges do you see in responding to CRSV in Ukraine and how are they addressed?**

—Currently, the Prosecutor General’s Office has documented 257 cases of CRSV. Yet, it is unclear if this number fully captures the scale of the problem or merely scratches the surface. CRSV survivors often hesitate to come forward about their experiences, choosing to remain silent. Therefore, a major challenge in this mission is building trust, ensuring that survivors feel safe to share their stories

and seek justice. That is why, I emphasize the critical need for implementing a reparations law, which would reassure survivors that speaking up about their experiences can result in real support and assistance.

Another challenge for Ukraine involves grasping the situation in those [occupied] territories currently outside the control of the Government of Ukraine. We lack detailed information about what is happening, for example, in detention centers, potential occurrences of sexual violence there, and events within private households. The extent of sexual violence cases in areas under temporary military control of the Russian Federation remains unknown. Even if such incidents are identified, we often encounter situations where perpetrators are outside the territory of Ukraine, making it difficult to ensure their imprisonment upon conviction.

Addressing CRSV indeed presents numerous challenges.

**—How does the emphasis on women’s rights and gender equality policies in Ukraine contribute to addressing the repercussions of CRSV?**

— The Government of Ukraine’s commitment to advancing gender equality and empowering women in the country has played a pivotal role in the swift response to CRSV. Unlike in some countries where CRSV is perceived as an inevitable consequence of war with no legal remedy, and often with the assumption that the woman may be at fault or somehow provoked the violence, Ukraine unequivocally recognizes CRSV as a war crime. There is a firm belief that survivors of CRSV should have access to justice.

*January 2024*

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**Uliana Tokarieva**  
**REGISTER FOR VICTIMS  
OF RUSSIAN AGGRESSION WILL  
BE CREATED IN UKRAINE**

*The national Register for Victims of Russian Aggression envisaged by Draft Law No. 10256 “On Registering Individuals Affected by the Armed Aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine.” This legislation, initiated by the Ministry of Social Policy, is set for consideration in [Ukraine’s parliament] the Verkhovna Rada. We have with us today Deputy Minister of Social Policy of Ukraine, Uliana TOKARIEVA, to discuss the importance and intricacies of the proposed law.*

—We recognize that the armed aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine has resulted in the severe violations of the rights of Ukrainians’ to life and health, Uliana TOKARIEVA stated at the outset of our discussion. Indeed, many individuals require assistance and support. In order to protect the rights of our fellow citizens, the Government of Ukraine has proposed draft legislation to create a register that documents instances of harm to the life and well-being of the citizens of Ukraine.

If passed, this law will fulfill three key objectives. First,, the law will identify those affected by Russian aggression. Second, the law will provide up-to-date data swiftly on actual instances of harm to the well-being and lives of Ukrainian citizens through the exchange of information

among relevant registries. Finally, the law will reveal; Ukraine's expenditures in mitigating the aftermath of Russian aggression, covering both state-funded initiatives, as well as local programs.

Of particular concern is the incidents of wartime sexual violence, which must be documented as these acts constitute serious crimes. Currently, the Prosecutor General's Office has recorded nearly 260 cases of CRSV, with the likelihood of this number increasing once our territories are liberated from occupation. Assistance will be required for all these women, men, and children, who have survived CRSV.

**—Which provisions of the draft law pertain to conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV)?**

—The proposed legislation provides a clear definition of CRSV, aligning closely with definitions in laws of other nations.

*"...the necessity take into account the timeframe for assessing crimes that have harmed the health and well-being of Ukrainians, commencing February 19, 2014. This provision allows us to ensure thorough justice and cover all the cases where women, men, and children, have endured CRSV."*

The draft law specifies that sexual violence perpetrated during the armed aggression of Russian Federation against Ukraine encompasses various forms such as rape, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilization, forced abortion, forced prostitution, sexual exploitation, coerced sexual acts with third parties, forced observation of sexual acts, sexual slavery, forced circumcision, castration, genital mutilation, forced nudity, or any other severe forms of sexual violence.

It is no secret to anyone, especially within the professional community, that we drew heavily from Croatia's experience in drafting this legislation. This not only applies to the current draft law but also extends to Draft Law No. 10132, which provides more comprehensive assistance to survivors of conflict-related sexual violence. This draft law, initiated by parliamentarian Maryna BARDINA, is titled *On the Status of Survivors of Sexual Violence Related to the Armed Aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine and Urgent Interim Reparations*.

Another important factor is the necessity take into account the timeframe for assessing crimes that have harmed the health and well-being of Ukrainians, commencing February 19, 2014. This provision allows us to ensure thorough justice and cover all the cases where women, men, and children, have endured CRSV.

This proposed legislation lays the groundwork for our efforts. Further procedures will be outlined in regulations approved by the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine. This will allow us to thoroughly examine the process of establishing status, determining assistance, and addressing other crucial aspects, all of which are very important.

**—Survivors of CRSV often seek to safeguard the confidentiality of their experiences. Once the draft law is adopted and the Register created, will the state be able to ensure confidentiality?**

—Rest assured, this information will be kept highly confidential, inaccessible to the general public.

Does Ukraine have prior experience handling such sensitive matters? Absolutely. For instance, we have been working with victims of human trafficking, a category also

covered by the Register. Information from these individuals has been collected, and decisions regarding compensation has been made, all while ensuring the utmost protection of this sensitive data.

However, we acknowledge that specific professional groups will manage the information in the Register. Which specific groups? They will be determined, and their involvement will be outlined in the forthcoming resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers. As an illustration, consider Draft Law No. 10132.

How will individuals, women, men and children, communicate what support they need, as outlined in this draft law? During our discussions, we even explored the option of enabling survivors of conflict-related sexual violence to anonymously submit their requests digitally. This way, experts could reach out to them and offer assistance.

The draft law for the Register requires presenting evidence indicating that an individual has been affected by the armed aggression of the Russian Federation, covering various issues beyond CRSV. This involves the survivor interacting with professionals, such as doctors, or other professionals, to verify an incident of violence.

I emphasize that all procedures will be meticulously designed with utmost consideration for the interests of those affected by the armed aggression of the Russian Federation to minimize the risk of re-traumatization and ensure that these cases are not publicly disclosed, among other precautions.

**—Who do you think should have access to this Register?**

—There is no easy answer. When documenting a crime, involvement of law enforcement officers is inevitable.

They must be included. Additionally, there are individuals responsible for deciding whether to include received data in the Register and those handling the compensation management. However, can we aim to depersonalize these procedures, or at least some of them?

There are precedents for such depersonalization. After inputting information into the system, after the space for “contact” the data is coded to ensure that individuals providing technical support do not have access to specific identities. As a result, these professionals will work with factual details rather than personal data. While the amount of assistance can be calculated, they will not know the identities of specific recipients.

**—Will survivors of CRSV who have left the country be included in the Register?**

—Above all else, we firmly believe in Ukraine’s ultimate victory in this war and are optimistic about all our citizens returning to their homes, where together, we will rebuild our nation. With this in mind, I am confident that the majority of people currently residing abroad due to Russian aggression will be able to directly input their information into the Register once it becomes operational.

Our focus lies in the extensive digitization of the social sector. Our goal is to reduce reliance on paper-based processes, thus minimizing the need for individuals to physically visit social service authorities or other offices with paperwork. As we develop the Register, we will adopt a similar approach, striving to digitize all processes as comprehensively as possible. This will enable individuals to submit documents for assistance, support, digitally or to register a case within the system.

We have already made significant progress in this regard. We have revamped a portion of our assistance programs to operate entirely through digital channels, enabling all applications to be submitted digitally and eliminating the need for individuals to duplicate paperwork.

**—How well does the proposed draft law align with Draft Law No. 10132 initiated by parliamentarian Maryna BARDINA?**

—Both draft laws are in complete harmony. The Ministry of Social Policy collaborates closely with Maryna BARDINA to ensure her proposed assistance model is fully integrated into our draft law about the Register. Our legislation outlines the procedures for establishing the Register, data exchange protocols, and other technical aspects. Maryna’s draft law, which we have contributed to and will continue refining, details a specific mechanism to provide assistance, including rehabilitation, psychological support, medical aid, other.

We are building upon already existing assistance model, which is working and developing in Ukraine. Out of the 260 officially registered CRSV survivors identified by the General Prosecutor’s Office of Ukraine, 208 reached out to our national network for responding to cases of gender-based and domestic violence for assistance.

In 2022-2023, we made efforts to enhance this system. We broadened the scope of our specialized services tailored to assist victims of domestic and gender-based violence, focusing specifically on survivors of CRSV. We provided extensive training and established a framework for effective collaboration.

—**Who was involved in writing Draft Law No. 10256?**

—We collaborated closely with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration, led by Olha STEFANISHYNA, and the Secretariat of the Government Commissioner for Gender Policy, directed by Kateryna LEVCHENKO, to develop our draft law on the Register. This collaboration began with proactive efforts following the onset of full-scale Russian aggression, aimed at establishing the groundwork for addressing CRSV. These efforts included amending the National Action Plan for the Implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 Women, Peace, and Security, implementing state target programmes, other.

An Interagency Working Group on Combating Sexual Violence Associated with Russia's Armed Aggression Against Ukraine and Providing Assistance to Survivors is working under the leadership of Kateryna LEVCHENKO. In addition to the Ministry of Social Policy, the IWG comprises representatives from various government agencies, including the Office of the Prosecutor General, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the National Police, the State Emergency Service, the Ministry of Defense, the Security Service of Ukraine, the Ministry of Health, as well as civil society and international organizations. Their commitment to addressing CRSV is commendable, reflecting a strong dedication to combating this crime. And this is extremely important because we must understand that CRSV is a crime. It is essential to consistently emphasize on all international platforms that CRSV constitutes both a criminal offense and a violation of humanitarian law.

Regarding our international partnerships, we have built a strong collaboration with the Dr. Denis Mukwege Foundation, which has a highly competent team based in Kyiv. Furthermore, we have established close ties with the Global Survivors Fund, the International Organization for Migration, and various civil society organizations in Ukraine. I highlight these collaborations to underscore the consistent and enduring commitment we have towards preventing and addressing CRSV.

**—How will the enactment of the law and the establishment of the Register contribute to the work of the international compensation mechanism?**

—You may have heard about the important meetings we held, including the Summit of Heads of State and the government of the Council of Europe in Reykjavik, Iceland, on May,16-17, 2023. The Council of Europe summit announced the creation of an international Register of Damage caused by the aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine, marking the first step towards an international compensation mechanism, aimed at ensuring that victims receive appropriate compensation.

*“...the main responsibility of the state at this stage is to assist survivors in recording all instances of harm and damages caused by the aggression of the Russian Federation. This will streamline the process of applying to the International Compensation Mechanism in the future.”*

It’s worth noting that 43 countries, along with the European Union, have either joined or expressed their intention to join the Register established during the

Summit. Furthermore, it was decided that the Register would be based in The Hague, renowned as the legal capital of the world, with a supporting office in Ukraine.

With this development, we now have a crucial tool allowing citizens and residents of Ukraine to seek reparations from the aggressor country. However, it is important to note that individuals seeking access to this international compensation mechanism will need to provide evidence proving the harm inflicted on their lives or well-being and the damages incurred. This applies to the entire list specified in the draft law.

Therefore, the main responsibility of the state at this stage is to assist survivors in recording all instances of harm and damages caused by the aggression of the Russian Federation. This will streamline the process of applying to the International Compensation Mechanism in the future.

**—Can the information from the Register serve as evidence in Ukrainian and international courts to obtain compensation for survivors, particularly those affected by CRSV, through reparations or other recovery from Russia as the aggressor state?**

—Certainly. Currently, during discussions with representatives of the International Criminal Court, we consistently provide evidence of various damages inflicted on social infrastructure or casualties among social workers resulting from shelling by the Russian Federation. For example, we have documented cases where elderly care facilities were destroyed, leaving these people without adequate living conditions.

This evidence allows us to build cases against the Russian Federation, documenting its crimes and the harm

inflicted on Ukrainians and Ukraine as a nation. Therefore, any documentation of these crimes, along with supporting evidence and detailed descriptions, as well as records of expenses incurred to compensate for damages caused by the Russian Federation, will be crucial arguments in our communications with the International Criminal Court.

**—When will the Verkhovna Rada consider the draft law? Which parliamentary committees are you cooperating with on this matter? How do MPs feel about the draft law?**

—The Committee on Social Policy and Protection of Veterans' Rights was tasked with considering Draft Law No. 10256. After holding a committee session to deliberate and review the draft law, it was decided to include it in the agenda for the tenth session of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine. It is anticipated that the draft law will be approved in its first reading following further discussions.

*January 2024*

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Fedir Dunebabin

**NEW LAWS WILL ENHANCE  
SUPPORT FOR VICTIMS  
OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE INFLICTED  
DURING RUSSIA'S ARMED  
AGGRESSION**

*In a recent interview, Fedir DUNEBAVIN, who serves as the Representative in Ukraine of the Dr. Denis Mukwege Foundation [whose founder, Dr. Denis Mukwege was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2018], as well as a representative of the Global Survivors Fund, shared his perspective: “It’s better to lean towards helping someone who might not be a victim than to risk denying assistance to someone who truly needs support” During our conversation, we discussed the existing support system for survivors and the urgent need to improve it through legislative reforms.*

**—Different governmental and non-governmental entities offer assistance to survivors of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) in Ukraine. How effectively are these efforts coordinated, and what challenges are encountered?**

—Unlike many countries facing CRSV during ongoing internal or external armed conflicts, Ukraine has established a comprehensive assistance system for survivors, covering medical, legal, and social assistance. However, this system is quite complex. The primary challenge for service providers, including the government entities, social support services,

civil society and international organizations, and law enforcement agencies, lies in coordinating their efforts. Often, services are duplicated, or the referral mechanism fails when certain organizations lack the resources to provide necessary assistance and are unaware that other entities with suitable capabilities and funding could offer support.

This poses a significant challenge in humanitarian response as such system consumes resources, with each organization incurring staffing, operational, and administrative costs, while survivors may not receive the required assistance promptly or comprehensively. Despite ongoing improvements, the assistance system remains insufficiently effective, lacking coordination and feedback to promptly respond to the needs of survivors and offer them a full array of services.

*“While some countries respond swiftly and effectively to CRSV, often through international humanitarian response, Ukraine’s response is primarily led by the Government of Ukraine in partnership with civil society organizations and international entities. This initiative was instigated by the Cabinet of Ministers. To my knowledge, no other country has taken such comprehensive measures to protect the rights of survivors, especially of CRSV, amid active conflict.”*

**—How is this problem being addressed?**

—At present, service providers are actively collaborating to improve coordination efforts, exploring various approaches like establishing strategic subclusters in different regions. The Mukwege Foundation conducts

seminars across Ukraine for service providers and frontline responders to CRSV, including medical professionals, the National Police, and the Security Service of Ukraine, other. During these seminars, we rapidly initiated conversations by asking, “What are you currently doing for survivors?” The knowledge exchanged among participants is highly beneficial to their colleagues. Occasionally, attendees express surprise, remarking, “We were unaware of the services you provide. We will now refer ten survivors to you and collaborate with your team moving forward.”

Some participants have proposed hosting these meetings every three months. Unfortunately, we do not have sufficient resources for this. Nevertheless, I believe that innovative and effective solutions will emerge from this undertaking.

**—Are efforts to counter CRSV and minimize consequences that Ukraine initiated during an active phase of hostilities being adequately reflected?**

—Indeed, the situation we are facing is unique. While some countries respond swiftly and effectively to CRSV, often through international humanitarian response, Ukraine’s response is primarily led by the Government of Ukraine in partnership with civil society organizations and international entities. This initiative was instigated by the Cabinet of Ministers. To my knowledge, no other country has taken such comprehensive measures to protect the rights of survivors, especially of CRSV, amid active conflict. The closest comparison might be Colombia, where an armed conflict has persisted for more than four decades, yet they did not initiate comparable actions at the onset of the conflict.

In Ukraine, the process of crafting essential regulatory framework began early in the full-scale aggression. Several draft laws have been proposed, some currently undergoing review in [Ukraine’s Parliament] the Verkhovna Rada. I remain hopeful that soon they will be approved.

**—What, in your opinion, prompted legislative initiatives regarding CRSV?**

—Several factors contribute to this situation. First, the pressing nature of the issue at hand and the necessity for immediate action. Second, there is a growing global focus on addressing CRSV and supporting the survivors. Additionally, individual policymakers, such as Maryna BARDINA and her team, have taken personal initiative, championing the protection of survivors’ rights.

Experts also highlight the absence of a clear definition of ‘survivor of CRSV’ in current legislation of Ukraine. As a result, state institutions such as hospitals or healthcare facilities must come up with special procedures to register survivors and provide necessary assistance.

*“Merely acknowledging CRSV in legislation brings a sense of satisfaction. Those affected by Russian aggression in Ukraine since 2014 have felt neglected and hopeless regarding the protection of their rights. Now, they can feel acknowledged, knowing they have not been overlooked.”*

**—What specific issues related to CRSV will the draft laws address?**

—Primarily, the draft laws are focused on establishing the definition of ‘conflict-related sexual violence.’ This definition is a key aspect of governmental Draft Law No.

10256 *On Registering Individuals Affected by the Armed Aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine*, prepared by the Ministry of Social Policy of Ukraine in collaboration with various stakeholders and experts. Draft Law No. 10132 *On the Status of Survivors of Sexual Violence Related to the Armed Aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine and Urgent Interim Reparations*, introduced by parliamentarian Maryna BARDINA, offers approaches to address the status of CRSV survivors.

**—What do survivors of CRSV themselves think about the proposed laws?**

—Merely acknowledging CRSV in legislation brings a sense of satisfaction. Those affected by Russian aggression in Ukraine since 2014 have felt neglected and hopeless regarding the protection of their rights. Now, they can feel acknowledged, knowing they have not been overlooked. Whether they choose to seek survivor status is their choice, but having the option available in the law is crucial.

**—What other benefits will be available to the survivors upon obtaining the status of CRSV survivor?**

—The Global Survivors Fund conducted consultations in the format of focus groups with male survivors and intends to do the same with female survivors. The first focus group discussed whether obtaining CRSV survivor status would bring more benefits beyond existing support. Although they acknowledged the importance of interim compensation as part of reparative measures and appreciated the medical, psychological, and legal assistance currently offered by NGOs and international partners, they expressed interest in additional compensation linked to survivor status, provided they do not have to undergo

further procedures, such as revisiting their experiences or recounting their stories. The perspective of female survivors is yet to be explored. However, male participants expressed doubts about the usefulness of receiving certificates labeling them as CRSV survivors, questioning where they would go with such documents, possibly to the outpatient hospital.

This issue demands careful consideration, including consultations with experts and parliamentarians. Establishing a task force to develop strategies for destigmatizing the concept of survivor status could be beneficial, since many survivors may be hesitant to apply for such status due to the associated stigma.

**—How might the enactment of the draft law proposed by the Ministry of Social Policy, which establishes a [national] Register of Damage impact the support available to survivors of CRSV, the life and well-being of Ukrainians?**

—First, as I have mentioned earlier, the draft law provides definition of CRSV and outlines immediate interim reparations. However, the primary purpose of establishing the Register is to potentially synchronize with the International Register of Damage and other initiatives related to reparations, frozen assets of the Russian Federation, legal actions against the Russian Federation, other possibilities.

My colleagues stress the importance of Ukraine aiding survivors while maintaining records of expenditures for later recovery from Russia. Therefore, the Register will facilitate tracking the state's spending on assistance for survivors, essential for substantiating legal claims against the Russian Federation. Without such record-keeping, substantiating claims would be challenging.

Nonetheless, it should be noted that international experts have flagged terminological inconsistencies in this draft law. For instance, there are questions about how to assess harm to lives and well-being of the survivors. They suggest using terms such as ‘violation of personal non-property rights’ and ‘personal integrity’ to address a broader range of human rights violations.

**—Will establishing a [national] Register be effective? Is it worthwhile to prioritize such a register over other tasks?**

—I believe it’s worthwhile. Consider this: the Prosecutor General’s Office of Ukraine has reported 128,000 registered survivors of war crimes. The international Register of Damage [in the Hague] will only have 35 employees, and even the most prestigious courts operate with limited human resources. Processing 128,000 lawsuits would be unrealistic even over a decade. However, the plan is for the international Register of Damage and international courts to recognize the facts documented in the Ukrainian Register by the Ministry of Social Policy as credible evidence. This will streamline the process of gathering evidence, ensuring relatively prompt protection of human rights when seeking compensation from the Russian Federation for the damage inflicted.

**—The [national] Register will contain highly sensitive information. To what extent could human factor influence the granting of status to survivors of CRSV and the inputting of data?**

—The process of inputting data into the Register should be automated, with strict confidentiality measures in place, including various levels of access. This technical responsibility falls within the domain of IT teams.

*“...we must believe the survivor’s testimony. Although mistakes may occur, and there are different kinds of mistakes, it is better to lean towards helping someone who might not be a victim than to risk denying assistance to someone who truly needs support.”*

However, the identification of survivors and the determination of their eligibility for reparations should be managed by a special commission. This commission should include survivors themselves, along with international and national experts in conflict-related sexual violence, and government officials. This approach ensures transparency while preserving confidentiality to maintain the trust of the survivors.

Trust should be mutual: we must believe the survivor’s testimony. Although mistakes may occur, and there are different kinds of mistakes, it is better to lean towards helping someone who might not be a victim than to risk denying assistance to someone who truly needs support.

**—If both proposed laws are passed, can we expect an increase in the number of identified survivors of CRSV? Will they engage in more active cooperation with law enforcement to secure reparations?**

—Above all else, I would like to emphasize that receiving reparations should not depend on seeking help from law enforcement agencies. Assistance for victims, particularly those of conflict-related sexual violence, should be unconditional.

According to estimates from law enforcement and civil society, for every survivor who has come forward,

there may be ten survivors who have not sought any assistance at all.

We are optimistic that passing the draft laws and implementing the proposed mechanisms, including immediate interim reparations, will build trust in the response system among survivors. As word spreads about available assistance, we expect more people will seek help. Additionally, the identification process can be lengthy, with survivors sometimes coming forward over a span of two to ten years, or even longer in some cases.

**—Is the response system equipped to manage a significant increase in CRSV requests?**

—We need to be prepared for this scenario. A key measure of our effectiveness is the fact that survivors are reaching out for assistance. More requests indicate greater strategic efficiency. Our goal is to combat stigma in Ukrainian society so that survivors feel no fear of community judgment, guilt, or reluctance to seek support. While this may pose financial challenges, our donors should also be prepared. Improving coordination with other organizations can enhance our resource pool.

**—Were any members of your team involved in drafting legislation on CRSV?**

—In April 2023, the Global Survivors Fund team supported an initiative by Ukrainian women’s organizations, such as the Ukrainian Women Lawyers Association JurFem and the Ukrainian Women’s Fund. Together, we organized a collaborative working and training session for survivors, representatives of civil society organizations, and various government agencies such as the Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Social Policy, Office of the Government

Commissioner for Gender Policy, the Prosecutor General's Office, etc. During this session, we collectively formulated proposals for Bill No. 10132, initiated by Maryna BARDINA. This collaboration has continued since then.

Additionally, we contributed to refining Draft Law No. 10256 and actively advocate for its adoption. The Ministry of Social Policy is open for further collaboration, and we look forward to continuing our joint efforts to enhance legislation governing assistance for survivors of CRSV, and potentially extending support to other victim groups.

**—How important is it to engage survivors of this crime in drafting laws related to CRSV?**

— The Mukwege Foundation and the Global Survivors Fund follow a survivor-centered approach in their work, placing survivors at the centre of any process by prioritizing their interests and rights. This approach is vital not only for the organizations, but also for the survivors themselves. Engaging in effective communication with survivors who have experienced trauma and are willing to cooperate helps them regain control over their lives and feel supported.

When crafting support mechanisms, we cannot decide for survivors; they know better what they need and what assistance is required. Encouraging survivors to seek support means actively involving them, communicating with them, and seeking their input.

While meeting all their needs may not be possible, efforts are made to strike a balance with the resources available from both the Ukrainian state and the international community.

*February 2024*

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Olena Suslova

**WE CANNOT GROW WEARY  
IN OUR EFFORTS TO ASSIST  
SURVIVORS OF CRSV**

*During a recent interview, Olena SUSLOVA, a prominent human rights activist, gender advocate, founder and senior researcher of the Women’s Information Consultative Center (WICC), emphasized the importance of not growing weary in our efforts to assist survivors of conflict-related sexual violence.*

—“Civil society organizations were among the first to respond to the terrible issue of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV),” stated Olena SUSLOVA. “Their proactive approach and mobility have been instrumental. It is evident that the efforts of non-governmental organizations in assisting survivors and enhancing the capacities of governmental agencies have undoubtedly produced positive outcomes.”

**—What dynamics have you observed in this work over two years of full-scale Russian aggression?**

—I would like to talk about how the state’s response has evolved, as it directly impacts the work of civil society organizations, which are an integral component of the institutional framework of gender equality.

Indeed, there has been a noticeable shift in how we understand and address CRSV between 2022 and 2023. In 2022, we experienced confusion, limited awareness of the

full scope and severity of the issue, disorganized actions, and various shortcomings and mistakes.

One notable shortcoming, particularly concerning civil society and international organizations, was the lack of coordination in documenting CRSV crimes committed by Russian aggressors. At WICC, we proposed various civic organizations which had expressed their intent to commence documentation, collaborate to ensure a consistent approach. Regrettably, this collaboration did not happen, resulting in negative consequences.

*“However, overall, 2023 was more organized. The government and its collaboration with the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Pramila PATTEN, Ukraine’s Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration, as well as the Secretariat of the Government Commissioner for Gender Policy undoubtedly contributed significantly to this outcome. They have done a great deal to enhance coordination in our CRSV action plan.”*

First, there were instances where documented records were duplicated for the same individuals, which only further traumatized the survivors. Furthermore, due to insufficient communication, by the third year of the large-scale Russian invasion into Ukraine, we still lack approximate numbers of CRSV survivors outside of those provided by the Prosecutor General’s Office, which only accounts for survivors who have given official testimonies.

However, overall, 2023 was more organized. The government and its collaboration with the UN Special

Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Pramila PATTEN, Ukraine's Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration, as well as the Secretariat of the Government Commissioner for Gender Policy undoubtedly contributed significantly to this outcome. They have done a great deal to enhance coordination in our CRSV action plan.

Once more, I would like to emphasize the the significance of civil society organizations. Civil society organizations, including ours, initiated the revision of the National Action Plan 1325 at the beginning of the Russian invasion. During that period, the Women's Information Consultative Center conducted monitoring, revealing the timeliness of these revisions.

Despite significant efforts taken in 2023 to address CRSV and mitigate its impact, there is a worrying trend of fatigue in assisting survivors, reflected in a decline in the identification of new CRSV cases. I hope this is a temporary phenomenon challenge, and we all will join efforts to overcome this fatigue.

**—In your recent speech, you mentioned the innovative nature of your organization's work. Could you elaborate on what makes our organizations innovative and the outcomes it has achieved?**

—Innovation emerges from a blend of theoretical insights, scientific advancements, practical experiences, and lessons learned from both successes and failures. In our work, we always strive to align our actions with globally recognized standards of gender equality while drawing from our own knowledge and expertise.

Take, for example, the Murad Code, the widely acknowledged code of conduct for interacting with survivors of conflict-related sexual violence. Understanding its potential importance for professionals in this field, we meticulously examined its contents. Due to its expansiveness, practitioners frequently face time constraints in fully exploring its contents, which led us to create a practical guide on the Murad Code. When Nobel Prize laureate Nadia MURAD visited Ukraine, we had the privilege of presenting this summary to her. Her positive response was incredibly rewarding.

This practical guide reflects the principles that our organization has followed for nearly three decades, which we regularly discuss in our training sessions. It represents our extensive experience in assisting survivors and cooperating with government agencies, the security and defense sector to document war crimes.

We have many examples demonstrating our approach.

We encounter challenges when international organizations supporting Ukraine and survivors of aggression bring forth their ideas and practices. Sadly, our civil society organizations or government bodies often neglect to critically assess these proposals, even though some of them are ineffective or inefficient. They proceed with implementation, unaware that each non-constructive action could further complicate the already challenging situation for the survivors.

**—You conduct many trainings on CRSV. Who is your target audience? What are the primary areas of focus in your work?**

—It is nearly easier to say who we haven't yet engaged as our audience. Since August 2022, we have engaged with

survivors, the security and defense sector, government agencies, civil society organizations, and international organizations. Our audience is remarkably diverse.

We have compiled around 40 cases, which we use in our training sessions to illustrate a survivor-centered approach. Interestingly, while discussing theoretical examples of cases and topics regarding the Murad Code or other things, participants often suggest clear and precise actions. However, when we explore case studies, this clarity sometimes diminishes. This indicates that the challenges encountered in addressing CRSV survivors are inherent to the longstanding issues in supporting victims of traumatic events, including a rigid approach, understaffing, inadequate monitoring, and other overlooked factors, which demand immediate attention.

Our trainings have proven effective in addressing these challenges, inspiring us to strive for broad participation across various sectors.

**—You collaborate with the National Academy of the Security Service of Ukraine. What influenced their decision to collaborate, and does this collaboration include addressing CRSV? What hands-on experience do they offer?**

—We have been collaborating with the National Academy of the Security Service of Ukraine (SSU) for nearly a decade, dating back to the onset of the war with Russia. Our partnership originated from our organization's focus on national security matters. Our research and advocacy concerning the threat to Ukraine's national security posed by Russia have been centered around gender-related issues.

Indeed, our research in this area dates back to 2010. With the rise of anti-gender campaigns during Yanukovich's presidency, the significance of our work gained importance. This attention caught the interest of individuals within the SSU Academy, leading to the establishment of a longstanding institutional partnership.

Following Russia's large-scale invasion of Ukraine, our collaboration with the Security Service of Ukraine intensified, given their leading role in investigating war crimes. Our objective was to support SSU investigators in engaging with survivors and to reassure survivors about engaging with this institution, guiding them to take steps towards overcoming the repercussions of CRSV.

Through collaboration with SSU investigators, our civil organization created the first materials that provide practical guidance for officials dealing with these issues. In partnership with the SSU, we also crafted methodological recommendations that were printed twice and distributed more than 20,000 copies.

Upon revisiting these recommendations a year later, I found that they are still relevant and up-to-date. They still offer concise and highly useful advice for users.

*“The extent of CRSV in Ukraine caught many countries by surprise, including NATO members. However, their unanimous perception and assessment of this phenomenon are clear: it is unacceptable and must be condemned alongside its root causes.”*

**—You have extensive experience working with an international audience. How do you communicate**

**information about CRSV in Ukraine to foreign partners, and how do they perceive it? Does this influence their support for our country?**

—I serve on the NATO Civil Society Advisory Panel, which was established by the North Atlantic Alliance to address gender-related issues, and I have been collaborating with them for for quite some time.

Following the Russian invasion, NATO's focus on Ukraine has notably increased, particularly under the guidance of Irene FELLIN, the Special Representative of the NATO Secretary-General for Women, Peace, and Security, who oversees the Civil Society Advisory Panel. I am very grateful to her and her colleagues for organizing special events on the gender implications of the Russian war against Ukraine and for their genuine support.

The extent of CRSV in Ukraine caught many countries by surprise, including NATO members. However, their unanimous perception and assessment of this phenomenon are clear: it is unacceptable and must be condemned alongside its root causes.

This shared position undoubtedly influences their support for Ukraine, which is further shaped by the actions of our government entities on the global arena, our diplomats, individual policymakers, parliamentarians, and even our grassroots diplomatic efforts. It is important that we we stand together in our endeavors.

Recently, Ukraine has been a recurring topic during the annual meeting of the NATO Civil Society Advisory Panel, with discussions focusing on CRSV crimes perpetrated by Russian aggressors.

We should understand that even though NATO's capabilities to counter CRSV and its consequences are limited, keeping the individual missions of countries that are most active in assisting Ukraine informed is undeniably vital.

**—What is your opinion of the role of Nadia Murad Code in addressing CRSV in Ukraine? How did your civil society organization promote this Code among both governmental and non-governmental entities, and what were the reasons behind this promotion?**

—Despite the long-standing history of CRSV crime and the Geneva Conventions being in effect for the past 75 years, there has been a scarcity of tools developed by the international community and specific organizations to address these issues comprehensively. While the International Protocol on the Documentation and Investigation of Sexual Violence in Conflict developed by the United Kingdom holds significance, it remains unofficial. Certainly, the Guidance Note of the Secretary-General Reparations for Conflict Related Sexual Violence is an official document of significance. In this context, the Nadia Murad Code holds particular importance, especially considering its recent emergence.

Following the onset of Russia's large-scale invasion into Ukraine, our organization swiftly introduced new sections on our website, notable one dedicated to CRSV. We promptly added the Ukrainian translation of the Murad Code, although the translation quality may not be the best due to time constraints, as we rushed to make it available to users without the opportunity for thorough

editing. However, this aspect is less relevant for the Murad Code, as it is not a legally binding international document.

*“Therefore, I advocate for redefining conflict-related sexual violence as sexualized violence, as it has nothing to do with sex per se.”*

In essence, the document is both extensive and intricately structured, comprising 10 overarching principles for addressing CRSV survivors, each containing 8-10 sub-principles. However, its significance goes beyond its mere length and complexity. It was written by someone who directly experienced CRSV, endured slavery, torture, and was subjected to the slave market, managing to escape captivity multiple times. Thus, she has a profound understanding and insight into the issue. Primarily, this document establishes a unified approach to engaging with individuals who have suffered severe trauma, bridging a critical gap in global standards. Often, individuals with good intentions may lack the necessary understanding to offer appropriate support to survivors or may unintentionally use inappropriate language.

For instance, terms like “victim” or direct statements such as “you were raped” can trigger distress in survivors, leaving them helpless and exacerbating their emotional, psychological, and physical trauma resulting from CRSV. Therefore, we advocate for a shift in terminology, even within existing international documents that use such terminology.

**—Why do you think Russians resort to sexual violence in wartime?**

—I have no idea, because I didn't have the opportunity to ask those who did it. However, I strongly believe that sexual violence in times of war serves as a weapon of warfare—a means of exerting control, coercion, intimidation, and destruction. Therefore, I advocate for redefining conflict-related sexual violence as sexualized violence, as it has nothing to do with sex per se.

*February 2024*

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Oleksii Sivak, Andrii

**FORMER PRISONERS OF WAR  
ESTABLISH NEW CIVIL SOCIETY  
ORGANIZATION**

*In our interview, we spoke with members of the initiative group for the new civil society organization. Among them is Oleksii SIVAK, a Kherson resident and former sailor on a merchant passenger fleet prior to the war. The other member, Andrii, chooses not to reveal his surname out of concern for the safety of his family members residing in Russian-occupied Crimea. Both men were imprisoned due to their pro-Ukrainian stance, experiencing firsthand the harsh realities of Russian occupation. They share their personal stories that inspired the establishment of this new organization and discuss their commitment to supporting other male survivors. Additionally, they offer insights into the organization's goals and objectives moving forward.*

**—What is the name and mission of your civil society organization?**

**Andrii:**—We have not decided on a final name yet. We are contemplating a provisional suggestion—Graduates and we will confirm our choice as we advance with our activities.

We are starting this organization to support Ukrainians affected by Russian aggression, especially those who have endured torture and CRSV. Many face challenges accessing government aid or compensation. Drawing from our own

experiences, we understand that numerous individuals facing similar situations are uncertain about where to seek help, and, most importantly, how to do so without furthering trauma or triggering painful memories. Our goal is to provide them with protection and support. Survivors are encouraged to reach out to us, and we will assist them in navigating their next steps with dignity and confidence.

**Oleksii Sivak:**—Why Graduates? We have chosen a neutral name to minimize distress for survivors. Our focus will be on bringing together former male prisoners of war, as they currently receive the most support from civic organizations. The state's readiness for this type of assistance remains limited.

**Andrii:**—The state often struggles to organize effective support due to its lack of experience in aiding such individuals. Nevertheless, we are well-prepared to offer assistance in this regard.

**—What challenges do male survivors encounter?**

**Andrii:**—I faced significant challenges that took nearly a year to resolve. After Kherson was liberated, I sought assistance from the Ministry for the Reintegration of Temporarily Occupied Territories of Ukraine in Kyiv. They run a financial aid programme for individuals who have been unlawfully imprisoned by Russian aggressors. However, I struggled to prove my victim status.

Upon my release, I provided testimony to Ukrainian law enforcement and assisted in identifying the individuals responsible for our torture. The pre-trial investigation concluded by identifying the perpetrators and confirming their violation of my rights. Currently, the trial is ongoing, and the perpetrators may face convictions in absentia due

to their non-detention. This is primarily for the proceedings of the International Criminal Court. Initially, the Ukrainian court must establish their guilt before legal action can proceed at the International Criminal Court for reparations.

Despite submitting all necessary documentation, I was rejected twice by the Ministry for Reintegration without explanation. Only after my third attempt was I able to prove my survivor status and receive the necessary assistance.

Many other male survivors have encountered similar challenges. Therefore, one of the main goals of our organization, which is personally significant to me, is to facilitate communication between survivors and the government.

**Oleksii Sivak:**—Survivors face challenges when trying to engage with government officials at the Ministry for Reintegration. The commission handling social payments, where documents are submitted, uses complicated language in its paperwork. Moreover, obtaining the necessary documents at the beginning is a common challenge, involving navigating different institutions, providing explanations, and presenting evidence. This lengthy process often leads people to lose hope of accessing justice and assistance. Some even stop cooperating with the investigation, while others avoid contacting law enforcement agencies altogether.

—**Were you in Russian captivity?**

**Andrii:**—Yes, I was held captive as a civilian during the occupation of Kherson. I had volunteered to distribute food supplies to people in need across various villages and towns in the region. This activity resulted in my detention by the Russians on two separate occasions.

**Oleksii Sivak:**—I spent a total of 57 days in Russian captivity, initially held in a police station and later transferred

to a temporary detention center. These facilities were repurposed as torture chambers during the occupation. I was also helping people. However, my neighbour and I were arrested for a different reason: on August 24, Ukraine's Independence Day, we proudly displayed Ukrainian flags, which ultimately led to someone reporting us to the aggressors.

**—How many people are in your organization?**

**Andrii:**—Currently, we are a small group of six men leading this effort. However, each of us knows other people affected by Russian aggression, including survivors of CRSV. Once they see our ability to provide the necessary support, they are likely to join our cause.

We have also reached out to the NGO December 29, primarily composed of individuals who were imprisoned in the so-called DPR [Donetsk People's Republic] between 2014 and 2017. We have even spoken with someone recently released in a prisoner swap. A few of them have expressed interest in collaborating with us.

**—Will your focus solely be on civilians who have experienced Russian captivity?**

**Andrii:**—At the moment, our focus is solely on civilians. We are not dealing with military-related matters at this point. However, we may consider expanding our support to include servicemen survivors in the future.

*“Our operations will expand throughout Ukraine. Many affected individuals have relocated from temporarily occupied territories to safer areas such as Kyiv, as well as central and western regions. It does not matter to us where they come from; our focus is on helping individuals rather than specific locations.”*

**—What is the reason for exclusively focusing on civilian prisoners of war?**

**Andrii:**—Certainly, former military prisoners of war encounter similar challenges, yet the government tends to provide better support for them, offering more avenues for rehabilitation and reintegration into society. However, the situation is more complex for civilians.

**Oleksii Sivak:**—We certainly do not intend to create divisions. If a man was initially captured as a civilian but later joined the Armed Forces, he shares our collective experiences as Graduates. Therefore, there is no reason we should not offer our assistance to him.

However, if he was captured while serving in the Armed Forces, further factors come into play. His status as a serviceman suggests inherent risks such as capture or even death. For civilians, being held captive represents a blatant violation of their human rights. The Geneva Conventions, which outline the laws of warfare, advocate for their protection, stating that civilians should not be targeted during conflicts.

**—In which regions of Ukraine will you operate? In those that are liberated?**

**Andrii:**—Our operations will expand throughout Ukraine. Many affected individuals have relocated from temporarily occupied territories to safer areas such as Kyiv, as well as central and western regions. It does not matter to us where they come from; our focus is on helping individuals rather than specific locations.

We will not distinguish based on the duration of captivity, whether it lasted a month, several months, or

years. Even though the Russian occupation of Bucha and Hostomel was brief, many suffered under their brutal actions.

**Oleksii SIVAK:**—Prison guards might not lay a hand on a prisoner for a month, but the severity of their punishment in just one day is unspeakable.

—**What methods of torture do the Russians employ?**

**Oleksii SIVAK:**—They have implemented an actual torture system. When they arrested me, there was no proper investigation; their search seemed more like theft than a legitimate search. Confident they could elicit any confession in their basement torture chamber, they employed every tactic to break individuals.

They tortured me using electric shocks with a military field phone, a *tapik* [attached to a portable generator], targeting sensitive areas like genitals, ears, and the entire body, along with being beaten with fists and rods, and mock executions. Many others endured similar harsh treatment.

**Andrii:**—Their attempts to break me mentally were unsuccessful. Shaped by prior experiences and working with a psychologist, I turned out to be resilient to stress. Despite their vigorous efforts to exert physical pain, they were also unsuccessful due to my long-term physical training and ability to tolerate pain. They used every method available, including electric shock, beatings with canes, pieces of metal pipes, kicks, and punches, all without restraint. They forced me onto my knees, held a gun to my head, cocked the trigger, and demanded that I sing the Russian anthem or speak aloud phrases such as “Glory to Ukraine under Russia!”

*“In the detention facility, we were interrogated nightly. Usually, by 10:00 pm, the building would be fully lit. Throughout the night, individuals would be taken away for interrogation, which imposed intense psychological pressure on us, as we heard the screams of others being tortured and felt their pain.”*

The first time, I was held captive for four days in a temporary detention facility. The second time, captivity lasted for 14 days in the local administrative building that had been turned into a torture chamber.

In the detention facility, we were interrogated nightly. Usually, by 10:00 pm, the building would be fully lit. Throughout the night, individuals would be taken away for interrogation, which imposed intense psychological pressure on us, as we heard the screams of others being tortured and felt their pain.

They used electric shock devices or a dynamo machine [portable electric generator] for torture, attaching electrodes as they pleased. Luckily, I only had electrodes attached to my hands. The intensity of the electric shocks varied depending on the speed at which they operated the dynamo machine. As a matter of practice, they increased the speed for stronger shocks.

Over four consecutive days, they would subject me to torture without asking any questions. They simply beat, mocked, and attempted to break me both emotionally and physically, I would even say to destroy me.

Of course, all people are different, each with their own threshold of resilience. Speaking for myself, I was able to stay silent.

The administrative building had five cells, where both men and women were detained together. My cell housed only men, with ages ranging from the youngest, who had just turned 17, to the eldest, who was 33.

I was captured alongside two girls with whom I had volunteered. Throughout the four days, they interrogated us using the same method: first, the girls were interrogated, allowing us to hear their suffering, before it was my turn. This added to the psychological pressure we experienced.

**Oleksii Sivak:**—We also underwent various psychological trials while in captivity. Guards were always nearby, poised to enter our cell at any moment. We were forced to sing the Russian anthem or shout “Glory! to putler. Any refusal or misstep resulted in collective punishment for the entire cell.

The torture chambers were located beneath our cells. When someone was being interrogated, they kept the windows open so we could hear the screams. This meant that even a single day spent in such conditions would be etched into their memory for a lifetime.

*“I overheard women being threatened during interrogations, “We’ll gang rape you!” We heard women screaming during tortures. This was also stressful for us because we didn’t know who the threats were aimed at. It might have been directed at my wife, a friend, or someone close to me.”*

While my first cell was designed for five occupants, it consistently housed at least seven people. There was a constant rotation of people alongside the long-term detainees. New arrivals, “transits” they were called, came

in daily for a brief period and then disappeared. To where they disappeared, nobody knows.

**—Did the torturers resort to sexual violence against prisoners?**

**Andrii:**—Indeed, amidst the torture, they committed sexual violence in unimaginable forms. The horrifying consequences were suffered by both women and men.

**Oleksii Sivak:**—As I mentioned earlier, they attached the electrodes to my genitals. While torturing with electric shock, they threatened to sterilize me. They referred to it as a lie detector test.

I overheard women being threatened during interrogations, “We’ll gang rape you!” We heard women screaming during tortures. This was also stressful for us because we didn’t know who the threats were aimed at. It might have been directed at my wife, a friend, or someone close to me.

**—Why are you establishing an organization exclusively for men?**

**Andrii:**—Our good fortune that our country did not encounter widespread torture or CRSV in the past, therefore, sometimes, there is uncertainty about how to respond. We have experience dealing with these issues and can assess them accurately. In the future, we may expand our focus to include collaboration with women, rather than exclusively focusing on men.

**Oleksii Sivak:**—I believe men and women respond differently to the same situations and challenges. Apart from differing medical requirements, there are other nuances to consider. For instance, women who have experienced CRSV have usually suffered at the hands of men. Therefore, being

around other men in these instances can be uncomfortable for them, potentially hindering their ability to open up. They are more likely to share their experiences with other women, particularly those who have encountered similar traumas. Trust me, in situations of abuse such as these, men and women are not that different.

**Andrii:**—Even during times of peace, women face a higher risk of experiencing sexual violence compared to men. Civic organizations and the government are already equipped to address these cases and provide support to female victims. Many of these incidents receive public attention, garnering media coverage and judicial scrutiny. Women often receive sympathy in these circumstances. However, not all survivors are comfortable with publicity; many struggle to overcome this barrier and may refrain from seeking assistance, which can sometimes lead to suicide.

In our society, there is a common stereotype that men should always be tough, self-sufficient, and deal with their problems alone. This often leads men who become victims to feel ashamed and reluctant to talk about what happened to them.

Our goal is to break down this barrier of distrust. We want male survivors of CRSV to know that they can receive confidential support without any publicity. The main thing is for them to learn about us and join our organization. When we come together, understanding and supporting each other becomes easier. This support becomes more effective because we do not need to create it from scratch. Consistent communication enables us to identify who needs what type of support. This embodies the essence of our organization.

**—How do you intend to reach out to potential members of your organization?**

**Andrii:**—The simplest way is through social media platforms. There is a level of trust in these platforms since they often attract like-minded individuals, professionals from the same field, friends, relatives, and classmates. Many people turn to social media to find answers to their questions.

Therefore, our plan involves creating pages on Facebook and Instagram. In the future, we may also engage in constructive discussions with the media. We do not aim to operate in isolation.

We are open to addressing our concerns on an international scale. It is crucial for the world to be aware of the actions of Russian aggressors and the suffering they inflict on innocent civilians. I emphasize, innocent civilians. This awareness is essential to prevent similar atrocities elsewhere.

Despite everything, I hold onto my belief in the power of goodness and the victory of justice. Yet, I am convinced that achieving this requires ongoing commitment to fighting evil and standing together in support of one another.

**Oleksii Sivak:**—In the early stages, informal networking, commonly known as word-of-mouth, may prove to be effective. I estimate that approximately 30 individuals have passed through the same detention cell where I spent less than two months, and I keep in touch with some of them. Additionally, my colleagues maintain contact with their former inmates, creating a substantial network of individuals who could potentially unite into an organization.

*“We are ready to support other survivors. For example, I have already received compensation from the Ministry of Reintegration. It is a substantial sum. I can guide others on navigating this process, including which offices to visit, what paperwork to prepare, and where to seek additional assistance. This type of advice is very helpful and I, along with my wife, are already offering it.”*

The best way to promote our cause will be through the real outcomes of our efforts. We are ready to support other survivors. For example, I have already received compensation from the Ministry of Reintegration. It is a substantial sum. I can guide others on navigating this process, including which offices to visit, what paperwork to prepare, and where to seek additional assistance. This type of advice is very helpful and I, along with my wife, are already offering it.

**—What assistance do survivors require most urgently today?**

**Andrii:**—Every survivor has unique needs. Some may require psychological or medical support, often facing expenses for treatments that are not always covered. For example, dental care can be costly, and many who have suffered abuse from Russian “liberators” during captivity now require such services.

Financial help is very important too. Like Oleksii, who spoke about his home being searched, a situation I also experienced, the aftermath of such events can be devastating. All my money, valuables, and personal belongings were taken from my home, leaving me with nothing. Starting over now is really tough.

At a recent conference on reparations, someone mentioned that the money offered usually doesn't fully make up for what we have lost, but it is better than nothing. Receiving financial assistance from the government, donors, or NGOs reassures individuals that they are not forgotten and genuinely cared about. Therefore financial help is not just about money; it also provides emotional reassurance, which is particularly important during challenging times. Losing a phone is one thing, but losing your home is an entirely other level of difficulty.

**—What does your cooperation with the Dr. Denis Mukwege Foundation involve?**

**Andrii:**—I first learned about the Dr. Denis Mukwege Foundation through a friend who was in captivity with me. Upon being invited to a meeting, I was not only offered assistance, but also presented with an opportunity to engage in advocating for the needs of survivors firsthand. I accepted this responsibility.

Before the war, we led ordinary lives, with no involvement in foundations or civil society organizations. We were self-sufficient, earning our livelihoods and supporting our families independently. However, the current circumstances have left us reliant on external aid. The Mukwege Foundation not only assists individual survivors, but also educates us on how to help others, emphasizing the significance of such help. This includes effective communication with the government, proper paperwork, and better advocacy work.

**Oleksii Sivak:**—This is both collaboration and mutual support. We share our vision with the Mukwege Foundation on enhancing assistance to former civilian detainees and effectively reaching out to them. While many civic and

international organizations offer assistance based on what they have available, we believe that support should be tailored to individual needs to be truly effective. The Mukwege Foundation shares this perspective, fostering mutual understanding.

**—Currently, Ukraine’s parliament, the Verkhovna Rada, is considering draft laws aimed at establishing mechanisms for reparations to survivors and victims of Russian aggression in Ukraine, including those affected by CRSV. What are your thoughts about these efforts??**

**Andrii:**—We have concerns about their practical impact. Many provisions are vague, such as the criteria for determining the status of a CRSV survivor. This concept can be emotionally charged for individuals. On one hand, there are concerns about the need to disclose information to law enforcement agencies to obtain this status, potentially leading to public exposure and stigma. On the other hand, survivors may not fully comprehend the benefits of this status. Therefore, we urge careful refinement of these draft laws.

**—Down the line, obtaining a status of CRSV survivor could open up avenues for receiving reparations.**

**Andrii:**—The outlook is uncertain. Although Russia must pay reparations, it could take decades, akin to Germany, which took 40 years to acknowledge its responsibility for the aftermath of World War II and provide reparations. However, Russia denies its involvement in the war with Ukraine, disregarding international norms.

Discussions revolve around the possibility of obtaining reparations from seized Russian assets. Should this happen, it could offer tangible help, making a noticeable difference

to the survivors. The crucial factor lies in establishing an effective mechanism for dispensing this aid—one that is both transparent and confidential, safeguarding the rights and interests of the survivors. This is also a goal of our organization.

**—Why are Russian occupiers so brutal towards civilians, particularly resorting to CRSV?**

**Andrii:**—They are morally low. Having been raised under a totalitarian regime in poverty and fear, they resort to violence to exert dominance, particularly over Ukrainians.

While passing through a checkpoint during the Kherson occupation, I came across a young Russian man. Approximately 22, 23-years-old, he questioned me about my car, insinuating disbelief that someone young, like me, could afford such luxury. Despite my explanation of how I earned my car through hard work, he remained skeptical, stating, “ We were told that you live in poverty, even homeless. When we drove into Kherson from Crimea, we were extremely surprised to see asphalt and gas in your villages. It was quite a shock for us.”

My friend has connections in a village in Kherson region, currently under temporary Russian occupation. Russian soldiers started digging a pit under a fence to hide an APC . Despite being cautioned by local residents about the gas pipeline, the soldiers dismissed these warning, doubting the existence of such sophisticated infrastructure in a village. They ignored the warnings and continued digging. As a result, the excavator bucket accidentally damaged the gas line, leaving them unsure about what to do next.

Most Russians, predominantly from rural backgrounds, lack exposure to life in other countries, leading them to

uncritically accept the propaganda fed to them through media. Even those living in more developed areas such as Moscow, who travel the world and are exposed to different lifestyles, still advocate for the destruction of Ukraine, despite having visited Ukraine and being familiar with our peaceful nation and the situation before the war.

Furthermore, some Russians living in developed countries such as Germany, France, and Great Britain advocate for Ukraine's destruction and foresee Europe's decline. Interestingly, they show no desire to return to Russia, highlighting a contradiction between their beliefs and behavior. This is a unique aspect of *Russkiy Mir* [Russian World], their inability to logically evaluate and accordingly react unfolding events.

**Oleksii Sivak:**—This conduct extends beyond their treatment of Ukrainians. Reflect on their actions toward the people of Ichkeria [Chechnya] during their conflict. This pattern repeats across history, involving various countries. In Syria, they devastated the two-million-resident and ancient city of Aleppo, which has a history spanning millennia.

To some extent, we are lucky to be living in the era of the Internet, which enables people worldwide to become aware of the brutality of the Russians towards the peaceful Ukrainian nation.

*February 2024*

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Iryna Mudra

**THE INTERNATIONAL REGISTER  
OF DAMAGE IS READY  
TO COMMENCE OPERATIONS**

*The international Register of Damage will open for claims on April 2, 2024. Individuals, entities, and our state, all bearing the brunt of damage inflicted by Russian aggression, will have the chance to submit a claim to the Register of Damage Caused by the Aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine [Register of Damage or RD4U]. Receiving priority will be the first category claim, those from individuals who have either lost their homes or experienced damage to their residential property; The Register of Damage will broaden its scope progressively to encompass diverse victim categories, including survivors of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV). In our conversation with Deputy Minister of Justice of Ukraine, Iryna MUDRA, we spoke about the eligibility criteria and procedures for accessing the benefits offered by the Register of Damage and qualifying for compensation.*

**—What was the key motivation behind the establishment of the international Register of Damage?**

—When large-scale aggression began, legal experts recognized the absence of an effective legal venue for victims, who had suffered both tangible and intangible losses, to seek compensation, therefore it was essential to devise a mechanism to address this issue. In May 2022, under the President of Ukraine’s decree, a task force was

established, comprising representatives from government entities such as the Ministry of Justice of Ukraine, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, law enforcement agencies, alongside prominent international legal experts. This task force put forward the proposal to establish an international compensation mechanism.

The idea of creating such an international compensation mechanism received support from influential international organizations. Several resolutions by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and decisions by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe were adopted in support of this initiative.

In November 2022, this proposal was brought before the United Nations General Assembly. The resolution of the UN General Assembly titled “Furtherance of remedy and reparation for aggression against Ukraine” dated November 14, 2022, emerged as the legal and political foundation that paved the way for establishing an international compensation mechanism.

The UN General Assembly resolution outlines three primary provisions. First, the resolution declares that Russia is responsible for an internationally wrongful act in connection with Russia’s aggression against Ukraine. Consequently, in accordance with international laws, Russia must make full reparation.

The second provision underscores the necessity of establishing an international mechanism for reparation for damage, loss or injury arising from Russia’s aggression against Ukraine.

The third provision of the UN General Assembly resolution recommends the creation by Member States of

an international Register of Damage to serve as a record of evidence and claims for victims, damage, loss or injury.

*“...approved a resolution establishing the Enlarged Partial Agreement on the Register of Damage Caused by the Aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine. The Agreement garnered support from 43 countries and one international organization—the European Union—bringing the total number of participants to 44 today.”*

The resolution received the support of 94 Member States of the UN General Assembly, with 13 voting against. Ukraine and close allies initiated the implementation of this resolution. The first crucial step toward establishing an international compensation mechanism involved establishing the Register of Damage. Introducing an international Register of Damage was essential to guarantee legal validity, obtain worldwide acknowledgment, and garner support from international partners. The data collected by the Register of Damage will enable the [Compensation] Board of the Register to determine the exact compensation amounts to be paid to affected individuals. Without a doubt, these decisions must be sound, given that they are not judicial rulings, but determinations made by an administrative board.

The Register of Damage operates on a victim-centric approach, prioritizing the needs of those who have endured hardships. Given the Council of Europe’s (CoE) commitment to safeguarding human rights, the decision was made to establish the Register of Damage under the umbrella of this global institution. In May 2023, just under

eight months after the UN General Assembly resolution was passed, the Committee of Ministers of the CoE approved a resolution establishing the Enlarged Partial Agreement on the Register of Damage Caused by the Aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine. The Agreement garnered support from 43 countries and one international organization—the European Union—bringing the total number of participants to 44 today.

This marks an unprecedented event within the Council of Europe and on a global scale, with only a handful of similar occurrences. For example, in response to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1991, the UN Security Council established a Compensation Commission under the auspices of the United Nations. Currently, the international compensation mechanism is implemented through a partially enlarged agreement, open not only to Council of Europe members, but also to others. In our case, the entire Group of Seven, including Japan, Canada, the United States, along with others, has joined this agreement, providing substantial legal support. The legitimacy of the Register of Damage will remain unchallenged, except by Russia, of course.

However, as mentioned earlier, the Register of Damage marks just the initial phase in establishing an international compensation mechanism. The subsequent phase is immensely significant. Without implementing a mechanism to make compensation decisions based on the information collected in the Register of Damage, that information will remain merely as data. Therefore, establishing an administrative body—a Compensation Board—is crucial, and we are presently involved in the formation.

**—What roles does the Compensation Board fulfill?**

—The Register of Damage gathers and manages information, arranging claims and evidence based on different types of damage. Once prepared, this structured information will be submitted to the Compensation Board. The Board, empowered by the information from the Register of Damage, will review each claim by affected individuals and decide on compensation amounts. Essentially, the Board will serve as a record of all debts owed by Russia. Important to note that the Register of Damage will focus solely on financial compensation.

How will the compensations be funded? The third aspect of the international compensation mechanism involves the Compensation Fund, which Ukraine proposes primarily rely on Russian funds. These funds could come from Russian assets, revenue generated by oil and gas sales, or profits earned from Russian assets.

**—Will our partners contribute funds for compensation?**

—The compensation fund has the potential to obtain funds from diverse sources. If governments, civil society organizations, or donors are willing or take action, they can contribute to the fund or set aside funds for specific purposes, such as compensating survivors of CRSV. Our discussions with partners indicate their willingness to do so. However, this matter is still being discussed as we need to establish the Compensation Board first, which will take time.

**—Regarding Russian funds, are we referring only to state-held funds abroad, or also to funds owned by Russian oligarchs and other businesses?**

—Currently, our focus is on Russian sovereign assets. We adhere to international law requirements that dictate

that a sovereign entity responsible for internationally wrongful acts is under an obligation to provide reparations. Therefore, the state should use its own funds for this purpose. Should the state not comply voluntarily, other countries have the right to take actions to enforce the violator's obligation. We are exploring avenues to access the sovereign funds of the Russian Federation. According to publicly available information, approximately \$300 billion of Russian funds are located in major jurisdictions of the Group of Seven and the European Union. These funds can be accessed through a well-structured legal framework and appropriate legal grounds. Seizing these funds requires political will.

When it comes to private assets, different legal rules come into play, mostly aimed at protecting individual property rights. Some countries have these rules enshrined in their constitutions, requiring constitutional amendments. In other cases, these rules stem from international legal sources, such as relevant conventions, such as the European Convention on Human Rights. Dealing with private funds poses greater challenges since it is necessary to link damage directly to Russia's aggression. This involves a legal process or may require criminal proceedings when assets are seized. Legal proceedings can be protracted, especially when dealing with oligarchs who possess ample resources to prolong the process. Therefore, we would rather not use our limited human resources on efforts that might take a long time and might not bring positive results. Also, private assets are usually much smaller in scale compared to government-owned assets. Even after undergoing all legal procedures and gaining access to private assets, they must still be sold, taxes settled, and often, they may be burdened by debt

obligations. Therefore, directing attention to sovereign funds, which we intend to allocate to the Compensation Fund, is a more efficient way forward.

**—Russia is trying to preserve its foreign assets. Are our allies ready to take resolute action in support of Ukraine?**

—Russia is devoting substantial resources and effort to propagate its narratives globally. Predictably, they are seeking to discredit the notion of seizing Russian assets by leveraging opinions from certain international legal experts. However, recently, seven highly respected and reputable international law experts released a joint statement recognizing that seizing Russian assets could be a legitimate course of action for countries hosting these assets, as a response to Russian aggression. Therefore, there are now fewer legal objections to this approach. These objections were present at the beginning of 2023. However, since then, attorneys have thoroughly examined the existing norms of international law and identified the required legal frameworks. Therefore, the notion of illegitimacy [of using Russian assets] is no longer being mentioned.

Instead, other arguments are appearing—financial ones. Some suggest that confiscating assets in euros or dollars could affect Europe’s financial stability. However, strong counterarguments have been found, indicating that there is simply no substitute for the dollar and the euro. Currently, the dollar accounts for 59% of all global reserves, while the euro for 20%, with 5% each for the yen, pound sterling, and rupee, and the rest at less than 5%. If there is distrust in the euro and the dollar, what currency will countries use to hold their reserves? Even countries in Asia and the eastern

part of the world do not hold reserves in the Chinese yuan and Indian rupee.

The Group of Seven needs to reach a unanimous decision to enforce countermeasures that aim to mitigate the risks linked to financial instability or a decline in the attractiveness of the euro or dollar. If this decision is endorsed by the United States, Europe, the United Kingdom, and Japan, there will be no alternatives for holding reserves in other currencies.

Therefore, with robust arguments challenging the financial risks, a third risk factor comes into play—political. And here, the focus is squarely on political determination. Is this determination evident? At present, it seems to be lacking.

Major companies in European jurisdictions like France, Germany, or Belgium continue their operations in Russia, viewing it solely as business. They believe that a peace agreement will eventually be reached, and they will resume normal business operations in Russia. Their concerns about losing significant profits there outweigh any other factors. Consequently, they are exerting pressure on their respective country leaders to avert the confiscation.

For example, EU countries have blocked more than 200 billion euros belonging to the Russian Central Bank. The majority of these funds are held in the international depository Euroclear. Euroclear is reluctant to relinquish this substantial amount of money because it profits from the reserve. Euroclear earned 5.2 billion euros from these funds between 2022 and 2023. Simply without any effort. Since these assets are frozen, the profits accrue directly to Euroclear.

*“Recently, the World Bank, along with European partners, assessed Ukraine’s total losses at \$486 billion, predominantly encompassing state losses such as infrastructure, environmental damage, cultural heritage, other.. However, these calculations do not cover losses suffered by individuals or businesses, be they tangible or intangible. That is why we believe the Register of Damage should encompass all forms of losses.”*

Powerful corporations and central banks, hesitant to lose substantial investments and a key depositor such as Russia, are exerting pressure on Western governments. Claims of decreased attractiveness or trust in European financial institutions, or even worse, the threat of financial instability, lack merit.

Regrettably, a political scenario persists. We must engage with our state leadership and government institutions to collaborate with European leaders to ensure this decision is ultimately reached.

**—How does the international Register of Damage ensure the rights of survivors, especially those of CRSV? Who is eligible to access this Register—the state, legal entities, or ordinary people? What steps are involved in submitting a claim?**

—Since its inception, the Register of Damage aimed to address a broad range of damage categories. Recently, the World Bank, along with European partners, assessed Ukraine’s total losses at \$486 billion, predominantly encompassing state losses such as infrastructure, environmental damage, cultural heritage, other.. However, these calculations do not cover losses suffered by individuals

or businesses, be they tangible or intangible. That is why we believe the Register of Damage should encompass all forms of losses.

The Ukrainian government conducted a thorough analysis of the various types of losses following the full-scale invasion. We collaborated with all government agencies and local authorities to identify approximately 30 categories of damage. These findings were then formalized and submitted to the elected Board of the international Register of Damage. The Board approves the rules, procedures, and damage categories of the Register and comprises seven members, with one representing Ukraine and six elected by the other members of the Conference of Participants in the Register of Damage.

Any damage resulting from Russia's aggression, whether CRSV, torture, or any violation of personal integrity, must be documented in the Register of Damage. I am certain that the Board overseeing the Register of Damage will indeed approve this decision.

What should someone who has experienced such damage do? Anyone affected, whether an individual, a business, or a state, as the state is also a victim in this aggressive war, can submit a claim. We are structuring the operations of the international Register of Damage to avoid retraumatizing individuals who have already reported violence against them either to law enforcement agencies, the police, prosecutor's office, civil society organizations, or the Ukrainian National Register of CRSV Survivors, the establishment of which is currently under discussion. A claim to the international Register of Damage must be filed by the affected individual. However, the Register

will gather information about them from the mentioned sources.

The international Register of Damage is a digital platform where electronic data must be submitted. In collaboration with the Office of the Register of Damage, to be established in Ukraine, we will develop an information campaign to guide people on what steps to take. We will engage in outreach efforts, including in the regions.

**—Ukraine intends to establish its own Register of Damage caused by Russian aggression. How will these two registers collaborate, and is there a possibility of duplicated efforts?**

—The international Register of Damage is designed to work together with Ukrainian registers, facilitating smooth information exchange via the Diia application. In cases where compensations have already been provided through the internal register, duplicated payments will be avoided by sharing the information with the international Register of Damage. Furthermore, individuals may endure various forms of harm beyond CRSV, such as losing their homes or loved ones due to war. They can seek compensation for multiple types of damage and receive distinct compensations accordingly.

Therefore, cooperation between the international Register of Damage and the internal register is essential. If the internal register is established to complement the functions of the international Register of Damage, it must comply with its rules, procedures, and categories of damage. Once the international Register of Damage is up and running, the internal register can serve as a supportive tool.

**—Would ordinary people get confused with these two registries being around?**

—If someone is seeking compensation, they should approach the register capable of making such payments. Applying to a register that only keeps the record of affected individuals without compensation will not result in any payments. Those seeking compensation for damages caused by Russian aggression should file claims to the international Register of Damage.

While businesses can rely on their legal counsel to navigate these matters, it is more challenging for ordinary people, especially those residing in regions affected by Russian occupation. They need clear procedures, guidance, and information, including whether one application to the internal register, which will then forward it to the international register, is sufficient or whether they need to submit applications twice.

We cannot simply copy solutions from elsewhere for Ukraine because there is no existing example to follow. Instead, we are building everything from scratch and experimenting to discover the most effective, user-friendly approaches. Given the limited access to smartphones and the Internet, particularly in some regions, we are focusing heavily on IT solutions. We are identifying regional hubs where people can receive guidance on their next steps. As the central authority, we are developing mechanisms to communicate clearly with the public how to proceed. This includes public relations campaigns and collaboration with local authorities to raise awareness and disseminate information. We may also offer free legal assistance so that our attorneys can provide guidance to citizens. Information

about the Register of Damage will be available at the Administrative Service Centers, where people usually seek assistance.

**—Why does the international Register of Damage only address damages inflicted by Russia following the large-scale invasion, despite the Russian-Ukrainian war starting in 2014?**

—This issue revolves around legal complexities. Regrettably, despite global condemnation of Crimea's annexation and Russia's actions in Donetsk and Luhansk between 2014 and February 24, 2022, these acts were not formally recognized as aggression. Russia's aggression was recognized as an internationally wrongful act warranting reparations by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the UN General Assembly only after February 24, 2022. Therefore, the international Register of Damage will only address damages and losses incurred after February 24, 2022.

However, this does not imply that legal professionals are not seeking solutions for addressing damages and losses that date back to 2014. For instance, in the case of Crimea, many Ukrainian investors pursued compensation through the bilateral investment treaty, securing favorable rulings in international investment arbitrations for their lost assets in Crimea.

Yet, our focus remains on compensating for physical losses, such as lost assets. When it comes to intangible losses, we are still searching for the proper legal framework to address them. However, we are actively pursuing avenues to translate judgments from international courts, held by individuals or businesses, into monetary compensation

from the compensation fund once the Compensation Board is established. All of this, of course, depends on the availability of sufficient funds. Priority will be given to compensating damages suffered after February 24, 2022, particularly for individuals.

**—How soon do you think a register of victims/survivors of Russian crimes, especially CRSV, can be established in Ukraine?**

—The Ministry of Social Policy has drafted a law to set up the register. It makes sense for authorities to plan databases to keep track of CRSV survivors, property damage, other. However, they must clearly define their purpose—are they solely for national use or serve specific purposes such as compensation? If compensation is the goal, the question arises: where will the funds come from? Pursuing this internally, without following international legal standards, means we cannot seek compensation from Russian assets. Thus, we can rely on government support only.

While there are excellent initiatives, we must realistically evaluate if we have the finances to support them.

*“Previously, there was no quick solution to securing compensation for war-related damages. Now, we must address this issue urgently. Unfortunately, international law cannot be created overnight. It requires global consensus to establish a globally accepted mechanism for us, with the UN being the primary authority.”*

If we are establishing these registers to assist individuals in obtaining compensation from Russian assets and

acknowledging it as reparations, we must align these registers with the international Register of Damage. They should complement each other. Therefore, we should wait for the international Register of Damage to define the guidelines and procedures, as well as the categories of damage and victims, and then establish internal registries accordingly to support its operations.

**—When can affected individuals start using the opportunities provided by the international Register of Damage?**

—Having experienced the loss of friends and witnessing many others lose their homes and suffer from this war, I am committed to finding swift resolutions. However, we understand that attorneys are presently revising international legal standards. Previously, there was no quick solution to securing compensation for war-related damages. Now, we must address this issue urgently. Unfortunately, international law cannot be created overnight. It requires global consensus to establish a globally accepted mechanism for us, with the UN being the primary authority.

Unfortunately, our international partners are not ready to establish the entire mechanism at once. They prefer to take a gradual, step-by-step approach to ensure accuracy and consistency. It is a positive step forward that the entire mechanism has gained approval, and they have recognized the importance of each stage. However, they take one step at a time, rather than simultaneously. They initiated the Register of Damage and have now moved on to the Compensation Board. Establishing the Compensation Board will take at least a year, as it involves an international agreement that requires discussion, signing, and ratification

by parliaments. Additionally, there is the decision on the Compensation Fund, which does not necessarily need to be built from scratch; any existing fund can be repurposed to receive Russian assets.

Therefore, it is meticulous legal work that is challenging to explain to ordinary citizens who have lost their homes or suffered CRSV. The government is exerting maximum effort to support people. One such effort is the establishment of a register documenting damaged and destroyed property, facilitating compensation distribution via certificates for lost homes. However, we must also acknowledge the constraints of our limited budget, which impedes full-scale implementation.

When addressing survivors of CRSV, compensation is just part of the reparation mechanism. Alongside compensation, efforts include psychological support, restoring mental and reproductive health, among other needs. Working with civil society organizations, the government is facilitating these reparative measures to aid those affected by the war. Relying solely on compensation from Russian assets is not enough; we must leverage existing resources such as healthcare and education systems. Many donors are ready to assist the state financially by offering healthcare professionals, psychologists, and organizing training initiatives.

I cannot guarantee people will receive financial compensation tomorrow, nor can I say it will fully heal the wounds of those suffering from CRSV. Money is not the cure for everything. What is needed today are collective efforts from society to ensure the affected people do not feel isolated, ashamed, or forsaken. Above all, achieving

peace is crucial so that air raid sirens or explosions do not trigger traumas again.

**—Do you believe that Russia will pay reparations to Ukraine?**

—Personally, I do not believe so.

**—Can anything be done to influence Russia?**

—Russia can only be influenced through a decision by the UN Security Council, which is binding. However, Russia is a permanent member of the Security Council with veto power. In 2023, 35 decisions were brought to the Security Council regarding Ukraine, and Russia vetoed all of them.

Reparations typically follow a country's defeat in war. It is important to note that Russia describes its actions in Ukraine as a 'special military operation', not a war, and claims they lack a legal basis for paying reparations.

Another scenario involves an international agreement with Russia in which it commits to paying reparations.

Regarding both scenarios, I have no illusions whatsoever.

Therefore, the only viable solution is a coalition of nations employing coercive measures to force Russia to use its assets for reparations.

**—Where is the international Register of Damage located?**

—The Register of Damage is located in The Hague. We symbolically choose the capital of justice—the International Criminal Court and the International Court of Justice operate there, and the Peace Palace, where the International Centre for the Prosecution of Russia's Crime of Aggression against Ukraine was established, and consequently, the international Register of Damage, are all in close proximity to each other.

**—When will the international Register of Damage start its operations?**

—The Register of Damage is set to launch officially on April 2, 2024. By then, the first group of affected individuals—those who lost housing—will be accounted for. This data, currently held by Ukraine, is managed by the Ministry of Infrastructure in the register of damaged and destroyed property. In the following month or two, attention will shift to other categories of affected individuals, particularly focusing on breaches of personal integrity. This includes those who endured torture and CRSV.

I anticipate that by the end of the second quarter of 2024, individuals will be able to submit their claims. We will provide guidance on filling out the forms, either through free legal aid centers or the Office of Register, which will also guide affected individuals on how to apply through local authorities.

*March 2024*

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Nataliia Aliushyna, Yuliia Lykhach  
**EMPOWERING UKRAINIAN  
STATE OFFICIALS TO ADDRESS  
CRSV**

*During Russia's large-scale aggression against Ukraine, the need for Ukrainian civil servants and local government officials to learn and respond to new challenges has become paramount. Specifically, the focus has shifted towards addressing conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) and providing effective support to survivors. Learning to provide effective support is now included in the continuing education program offered by the Advanced School of Public Governance, overseen by the National Agency of Ukraine on Civil Service (NAUCS). Joining us to explain this initiative further are Nataliia ALIUSHYNA, Head of NAUCS, and Yuliia LYKHACH, Director of NAUCS Postgraduate Education.*

**—NAUCS oversees the training and education of civil servants and professionals in public administration. How does your work address the issue of responding to CRSV and offering support to survivors?**

**Nataliia Aliushyna:**—As large-scale armed aggression unfolded, addressing this issue became increasingly critical. Given that the Russian aggressor employs sexual violence as a weapon of war, it is paramount for Ukrainian civil servants and local government officials to be well-equipped to address this crime. They must understand how to interact with survivors, provide support, and collaborate with specialists, as needed.

Consequently, at the Advanced School of Public Governance, addressing conflict-related sexual violence has become a key focus of our training agenda. We offer a continuing education program on CRSV, identifying the target number of individuals in need of this knowledge and these skills.

In partnership with regional Centres for Advanced Studies, we have developed an online training course to meet the demand. The response to this course has been remarkable: as of January 30, 2024, 3,335 individuals enrolled in the course, 2,455 had completed the course and many obtaining certification by the end of March.

I would like to emphasize that this initiative is about self-education. People actively seek opportunities to educate themselves about responding to CRSV and supporting survivors, acknowledging the significance of this issue.

**—With whom do you collaborate in this endeavor?**

**Nataliia Aliushyna:**—We play a vital role within the government team responsible for developing and implementing policies to combat CRSV and address the repercussions. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration, led by Olha STEFANISHYNA, and the Secretariat of Government Commissioner for Gender Equality Policy of Ukraine headed by Kateryna LEVCHENKO, provide significant support in coordinating these initiatives. Furthermore, we engage in partnerships with diverse civil society and international organizations active in Ukraine, such as UN Women in Ukraine, UNFPA, the Dr. Denis Mukwege Foundation, and the Ukrainian Women Lawyers Association JurFem.

**—How do you structure your training initiatives?**

**Nataliia Aliushyna:**—The National Agency operates a General Department for Professional Development of Civil Servants and Local Government Officials. This department is responsible for shaping policies related to the professional growth of public servants. As part of its efforts, the National Agency created and launched the online Knowledge Management Portal platform. This platform serves as a centralized hub where all educational service providers place their offerings. Our users comprising more than 120,000 civil servants and local government officials can select educational courses or pathways tailored to their specific requirements.

The Advanced School places its offerings as well, offering a diverse range of unique programs that are unavailable elsewhere.

**Yuliia Lykhach:**—Our educational programs are conducted in various formats, both offline and online. When addressing CRSV in 2022, we chose online delivery to ensure safety measures were met. This year, we have received a government order for offline training, and we have secured support from the Mukwege Foundation and UNFPA to facilitate this endeavor. I am optimistic that our training will be highly effective.

Our training program primarily targets representatives from the regions. For instance, in 2024, we plan to train specialists from regional military administrations.

Given that the government order is for 203 individuals, the involvement of our international partners is essential to extend our reach to a larger audience.

Currently, we are planning a large educational project focused on training civil servants and officials from de-occupied territories. This project encompasses 15 programs, addressing various issues, including CRSV.

*“Today, we are facing a significant need to revamp our approach. Previous educational programs were tailored to peacetime needs. However, with the current Russian-Ukrainian war, crisis management takes on a new perspective. We now evaluate all potential risks through the lens of the war, including how to address challenges such as CRSV, navigate leadership in conflict settings, and meet the evolving requirements for civil servants and local government officials.”*

**—Which questions do you focus on the most during the training?**

**Nataliia Aliushyna:**—In our programs, we primarily focus on fundamental concepts, such as identifying signs of CRSV. We also highlight international standards for preventing, detecting, and responding to CRSV, along with the application of these standards within Ukrainian laws. Additionally, we discuss the importance of coordinating efforts in this field, various types and forms of assistance available to survivors.

Today, we are facing a significant need to revamp our approach. Previous educational programs were tailored to peacetime needs. However, with the current Russian-Ukrainian war, crisis management takes on a new perspective. We now evaluate all potential risks through the lens of the war, including how to address challenges

such as CRSV, navigate leadership in conflict settings, and meet the evolving requirements for civil servants and local government officials.

**—The topic of CRSV is highly sensitive and often considered taboo in society. How does your audience perceive it?**

**Yuliia Lykhach:**—At the Advanced School of Public Governance, we have established a Center for Human Rights, Gender Equality, and Non-discrimination. This decision reflects the growing interest in these issues in Ukraine over recent years. We are adopting European approaches and shaping the work styles of both central and local government representatives accordingly.

*“We typically present the topic of CRSV to a specialized audience, consisting of individuals who either already work with survivors or will do so in the future. Many of them have only basic knowledge of legislation, human rights, gender equality, etc. Our discussions often evoke strong emotional responses; when we share CRSV stories, people often cry.”*

Human rights now take center stage in almost all of our training programs. Just five-seven years ago, we primarily discussed these subjects theoretically. Nowadays, our emphasis is on practical implementation.

We typically present the topic of CRSV to a specialized audience, consisting of individuals who either already work with survivors or will do so in the future. Many of them have only basic knowledge of legislation, human rights, gender equality, etc. Our discussions often evoke strong

emotional responses; when we share CRSV stories, people often cry.

**—What challenges and obstacles do you anticipate in training personnel to assist CRSV survivors?**

**Yuliia Lykhach:**—Initially, we faced a shortage of experienced trainers in this field. However, last August, we collaborated with our partners from UN Women Ukraine, the Ukrainian Women Lawyers Association JurFem, and the Mukwege Foundation to train and equip 25 trainers with the necessary skills to address CRSV issues. These trainers are now fully prepared to engage in our activities.

The effectiveness of our training largely relies on the trainers' ability to effectively communicate information and engage their audience. This is why we recognize the importance of discussing sensitive topics like CRSV in face-to-face settings. Direct interaction between the audience and the trainer allows for a deeper connection, enabling the trainer to see the audience's emotions and provide additional explanations when needed.

Our first training sessions were conducted by experts from JurFem, who demonstrated a high level of professionalism in this area. They developed online courses for us.

**—Do we require coordinated approaches for conducting Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) response training?**

**Yuliia Lykhach:**—In May 2022, the Inter-Agency Working Group on Combating Sexual Violence Related to Russia's Armed Aggression Against Ukraine and Assistance to Survivors was formed, with Government Commissioner for Gender Equality Policy of Ukraine Kateryna

LEVCHENKO at the helm. This group comprises various working subgroups, one of which focuses on professional training. We oversee these efforts to ensure consistency in state-level approaches. We have developed a standard training program for the professional development of civil servants and officials of local government officials. However, we recognize that diverse audiences, such as judges and prosecutors, may have unique needs. While there are overarching legislative provisions, international standards, and interagency collaboration, tailored information and approaches are necessary for different target groups.

—**What requirements do you have for trainers?**

**Nataliia Aliushyna:**—Not everyone we train will go on to become exceptional trainers. Most will be competent, and that is still a positive outcome. However, around 20% of our trainers will reach a high level of proficiency.

*“Traumatic experiences leave lasting scars on the lives of individuals, especially those subjected to violence, including sexual, by Russian aggressors. While civil servants and officials may not be healthcare professionals, it is imperative for them to know how to support traumatized individuals and offer essential assistance.”*

While our programs are of high quality, they function as an introductory course. To deepen understanding, we enlist the expertise of specialized psychologists and even healthcare professionals who have experience with CRSV cases and can offer valuable insights. We also prefer in-person training sessions, as they enable participants to

engage with one another, share experiences and collectively find effective solutions.

Today, we stress the significance of international humanitarian law and standards, particularly in the realm of CRSV prevention and intervention. In times of conflict, this knowledge becomes essential, reminding people of their rights and fostering efforts to combat discrimination.

The end of a war does not mark the end of its impact. Repercussions will endure for years, affecting our entire society. Many have experienced crimes perpetrated by Russian occupiers firsthand. I will never forget the incident involving a crib rigged with explosives. Russian aggressors placed a plastic explosive device under a pillow in a baby's crib in our town of Bucha. Fortunately, the State Emergency Service responders, who were tasked with demining, discovered this booby trap. I extend my heartfelt gratitude to Serhii Kruk and his team, who handled the demining operations in the town at that time.

I mention this to underscore the enduring impact of such events. Traumatic experiences leave lasting scars on the lives of individuals, especially those subjected to violence, including sexual, by Russian aggressors. While civil servants and officials may not be healthcare professionals, it is imperative for them to know how to support traumatized individuals and offer essential assistance.

This is our approach to training civil servants. However, it is crucial for trainers to possess heightened empathy and a profound understanding of psychological aspects. Let me emphasize once again—we need practitioners.

*March 2024*

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Mykhailo Spasov

**CRSV IS A WEAPON FOR RUSSIAN  
AGGRESSORS, JUST LIKE  
THE MISSILES THEY LAUNCH  
ON UKRAINIAN CITIES**

*During an interview, this opinion was expressed by Mykhailo SPASOV, representative of the Commissioner for Equal Rights and Freedoms, Rights of National Minorities, Political and Religious Views in [Ukraine's parliament] the Verkhovna Rada, who is responsible for ensuring equal rights and freedoms for national minorities, for those with various political and religious views. We discussed the role of the Commissioner in restoring and ensuring the rights of persons who suffer from crimes perpetrated by Russian aggressors, in particular, from crimes of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV).*

**What is the role of the Commissioner in responding to CRSV cases?**

The Parliament of Ukraine's Commissioner for Human Rights continuously exercises parliamentary control over the observance of constitutional rights and freedoms of individuals, of citizens and protects the rights of everyone on the territory of Ukraine within their jurisdiction. We work with survivors of Russian aggression, including victims of CRSV. Through its efforts, the Office of the Ombudsman has earned the trust to receive reports on this stigmatized crime.

We are aware that we are dealing with sensitive information; therefore, the principle of confidentiality in our work is a constant. No information about the affected person is disclosed. We control the quality and timeliness of assistance at every stage after the initial appeal, so that the survivor receives comprehensive services to overcome the negative consequences of the experienced torture and assistance with the reintegration into an active social life. And only if a victim gives full consent can we forward the report of the violation to public authorities that record crimes connected with CRSV in order to establish the database of evidence required for an international tribunal and further bring the guilty to justice.

I should note that the system of protecting survivors of CRSV as a result of Russian aggression is still in the process of formation. The government, NGOs and international organizations are all involved in this work. There are many structures, such as victim hotlines (including those of our Office: 0800 501 720, 044 299 74 08), hotlines for psychological support. At the initiative of Deputy Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration Olha STEFANISHYNA and with the support of UNFPA, Ukraine launched a network of Survivor Relief Centers. These centers provide specialized assistance to people, particularly to survivors of CRSV.

Currently, relief centers function in 11 Ukrainian cities. There are stationary centers in Zaporizhzhia, Lviv, Dnipro, Kyiv, Chernivtsi, Mukachevo, Kropyvnytskyi, Odesa, Poltava and Kharkiv. There are also two mobile centers, in Kharkiv and Kherson.

The Commissioner's Office initiates cooperation between the Survivor Relief Centers and our reception areas in the regions. This is because survivors, most often, first approach the regional offices of the Commissioner.

### **Do many CRSV survivors turn to you?**

We started to receive reports from survivors of crimes committed by Russian military personnel immediately after the full-scale invasion began. The first reports were from people who survived captivity or occupation. And our Office primarily helped these people with obtaining the status of human trafficking survivors. This is an additional vector of our activity during martial law. While processing these reports and talking to people, we understood that an individual who was in captivity usually suffered sexual exploitation of one form or another.

*“Every Russian citizen is responsible for what is happening in our country, responsible for crimes against humanity, for war crimes, for CRSV. Their silence is also a stance. And when it comes to those individuals who came to our territory and were captured, I see no remorse in 99% of cases. I think they commit all this evil intentionally.”*

### **Why do you think the Russians engage in such cruelty?**

We encountered their crimes on our territory beginning in 2014. They have one goal—the destruction of Ukrainians, thereby Ukraine's statehood. I will simply speak as a citizen of Ukraine who has been observing Russian's actions over the past decade. For them, CRSV is a weapon of war, just like missiles they launch on our cities, just like killing civilians

to increase fear and despair. In Russia's understanding, the Ukrainian nation does not exist.

I don't think CRSV is about an intention to satisfy a sexual urge. We hear stories of depersonalization of victims from our colleagues at the Prosecutor General's Office—about men who have electric currents connected to their genitals, who undergo forced castration, about women who have electrodes attached to their breasts. This is not about sexual attraction, this is about torturing an individual, terminating their reproductive function, which also shows genocidal intentions towards Ukrainians.

Every Russian citizen is responsible for what is happening in our country, responsible for crimes against humanity, for war crimes, for CRSV. Their silence is also a stance. And when it comes to those individuals who came to our territory and were captured, I see no remorse in 99% of cases. I think they commit all this evil intentionally.

*“We have missiles launched at us, but we are not waiting for the end of the war to provide adequate assistance to survivors. This already sets us apart from most countries that have experienced conflicts.”*

### **How do you assess the current system of assistance to CRSV survivors in Ukraine?**

We are setting up this system from scratch, moreover, during the active phase of hostilities. We have missiles launched at us, but we are not waiting for the end of the war to provide adequate assistance to survivors. This already sets us apart from most countries that have experienced conflicts. We can point to the cohesion of government

agencies, non-profit and international organizations that work on these issues. We can hardly expect a full-fledged operation of a comprehensive compensation mechanism and reparations from Russia while the conflict is underway. That is why we focus on issues that we can address at this point—remedy to survivors, restoration of justice and payment of interim reparations.

Can we do it more, better, faster? We have gaps in legislation. Draft laws that have been developed and submitted to the Ukraine's parliament, the Verkhovna Rada, are still at the approval stage. This is why, even after two years of the full-scale invasion, CRSV is not defined in our legislation. I think we should combine our efforts and pay more attention to observing the rights of CRSV survivors.

**Does the Commissioner's Office have recommendations about this issue?**

In September 2023, at the initiative and leadership of Ombudsman Dmytro LUBINET'S, a working group was established to develop proposals regarding compensation for damage to individuals affected by the Russian armed aggression against Ukraine. The intention was that the initiative becomes a platform to develop a mutual vision concerning reparations to people affected by Russia's armed aggression. This working group includes legislators; representatives from the Supreme Court; the Prosecutor General's Office; the National Police of Ukraine; the Security Service of Ukraine. Included as well are central bodies of executive power, such as the Ministry of Health; the Ministry of the Development of Communities, Territories, and Infrastructure; the Ministry of Internal Affairs; the Ministry of Finance; the Ministry of Defense; the Ministry of Reintegration; the Ministry of Social Policy; the Ministry

of Veteran Affairs; the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; the Office of the Government Commissioner for Gender Policy, as well as non-governmental and international organizations. International partners include representatives of the Danish Refugee Council; the Norwegian Refugee Council; Office of the Council of Europe in Ukraine; Office of the International Organization for Migration in Ukraine; United States Agency for International Development, and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Today, this working group includes 40 people. We are trying to gather all stakeholders who can work with survivors, can document Russia's crimes in Ukraine, have financial and legal capacity to help survivors even before we win this war and then we can speak about reparation mechanisms and compensation directly from Russia.

**What results do you expect from the activities of the working group?**

Such platforms help develop common approaches, a common vision. We are analyzing the current situation in order to prepare a unified document with recommendations for government ministries, Ukraine's parliament and central executive authorities regarding the improvement of the national system of compensation to survivors of Russia's armed aggression, as well as recommend further provision of reparations at the international and national levels, along with the creation of an international Registry of Damage (Register of Damage Caused by the Aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine).

**What is the primary concern for the working group regarding CRSV survivors?**

For the working group, CRSV survivors and the issue of their protection is the specific focus. At the very first

meeting of the working group, MP Maryna BARDINA presented Draft Law 10132 “On the Status of Survivors of Sexual Violence Connected to Russia’s Armed Aggression against Ukraine and Immediate Interim Reparations” that she proposed. Among other things, this draft law proposes establishing a fund for the Payment of Immediate Compensations to CRSV survivors. The fund will be financed from sources apart from the state budget, including international assistance and funds obtained from the aggressor country in a certain form.

The working group participants discussed the issue of providing CRSV survivors with long-term or even life-long psychological and social support. In some cases, they spoke about financial aid due to the complexity of CRSV cases and the increased vulnerability of survivors. Of course, you cannot compare broken windows and even a destroyed house with the horrible crime that is CRSV.

*“Ukraine’s general position is currently based on statements that clearly declare that it is Russia as the aggressor country that violates international norms, violates bilateral and multilateral agreements, all provisions of humanitarian law, international human rights law must carry out full and final compensation of damages caused by its aggression.”*

### **How should reparations, including immediate and interim reparations, be provided to CRSV survivors?**

Ukraine’s general position is currently based on statements that clearly declare that it is Russia as the aggressor country that violates international norms, violates bilateral and multilateral agreements, all provisions of

humanitarian law, international human rights law must carry out full and final compensation of damages caused by its aggression.

At the same time, we have to be realistic. Hopes for possible cooperation with the aggressor country regarding compensation for the damage it caused are practically nonexistent. Therefore, the Office of the Ombudsman, together with other stakeholders, is actively working on the development of proposals regarding alternative compensation mechanisms.

We should particularly note the activities of our international partners. The Global Survivors Fund initiated the implementation of a pilot project for immediate interim reparations to CRSV survivors. The implementation of the pilot project began after a memorandum was signed between the Fund and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration Olha STEFANISHYNA, as well as Government Commissioner for Gender Policy of Ukraine Kateryna LEVCHENKO. The Ombudsman's Office is also involved in this activity. As a representative of the Office, I am a member of the supervisory board of this project. The purpose is to ensure the access of CRSV survivors to immediate interim reparations to prevent irreparable damage, as well as to develop a model that can be used in the future for full-fledged establishment of the National Compensation Program for CRSV Survivors and for other individuals affected by Russia's aggression.

The first stage of this pilot project will be limited to 500 CRSV survivors, each of whom will receive EUR 3,000 compensation.

**How important is Draft Law 10256 “On Accounting of Individuals Whose Life and Health Suffered Damage due to the Armed Aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine” developed by the Ministry of Social Policy?**

We welcome any legislative initiative aimed at restoring and ensuring the rights of survivors of Russian crimes, including CRSV. This is the purpose of the law to which you refer. At the same time, this law defines the legal and organizational basis of compensation only for damage caused to the lives and health of survivors. It does not cover numerous other categories of survivors, such as those who had their homes destroyed, who were forced into displacement, or who moved abroad fleeing the aggression.

The draft law also in no way corresponds to the formation of the international Register of Damage as the first step to introduce a comprehensive international compensation mechanism.

Due to such key shortcomings, the Ombudsman did not support this draft law when it was submitted to our office for approval. In his written position, the Ombudsman pointed out that the notion of individuals affected by Russia’s armed aggression against Ukraine and the formation of a clear list of categories of such individuals must be considered at the legislative level by means of a comprehensive draft law regarding the legal status of such individuals, regardless of the sphere in which Russia’s armed aggression caused damage to them.

At the end of 2022, the Ombudsman’s Special Report on observing the rights of individuals affected by Russia’s armed aggression included a recommendation to the Cabinet of Ministers to develop and submit to Parliament a draft

law on the legal status of all individuals affected by the armed aggression, providing them with social guarantees, classification of such individuals, as well as formation of a unified compensatory mechanism, including restitution, compensation, rehabilitation and satisfaction.

Currently, Draft Law 10256 is being amended. We sincerely hope that the Commissioner's remarks about the draft law were considered.

**What is the Ombudsman's position on Draft Law 10132 "On the Status of Survivors of Sexual Violence Connected to Russia's Armed Aggression against Ukraine and Immediate Interim Reparations"?**

The draft law proposes creating a state register of individuals affected by Russia's armed aggression to keep track of information about them. The draft law also included a proposal to create a commission for consideration of issues related to the recognition of persons as survivors and a fund for the payment of interim reparations and immediate compensation to persons affected by CRSV. The Ombudsman does support this initiative overall, but we have a number of comments, as well.

First of all, the definition of sexual violence connected with Russia's armed aggression, provided in Article 1 of this draft law, includes "sexual violence committed against any individual during Russia's armed aggression beginning with February 20, 2022" and lists the forms of this crime—rape, forced pregnancy, forced sterilization, forced abortion, forced prostitution, sexual exploitation, forced sexual intercourse with another individual, forced observation of sexual intercourse, sexual slavery, forced circumcision, castration, genital mutilation.

From the Ombudsman's perspective, this provision should be clarified. During the period specified in the draft law, there were crimes of sexual violence committed in Ukraine apart from those related to the war. Not all cases of rape, for example, if it occurred during martial law, but far from the area of active hostilities or temporarily occupied territories, can be compared to CRSV.

Article 13 of this draft law guarantees immediate compensation to affected individuals. Article 13, Par. 2 of the draft law provides for appointing increased immediate compensation in certain cases, such as sexual violence connected to the armed aggression committed against a minor, in the event that sexual violence results in pregnancy or childbirth, or if a pregnancy is terminated due to sexual violence committed against a person. The Ombudsman requested that the authors of the draft law provide justification of this list because we believe it may include other acts of similar gravity. Speaking about genocidal attitudes of Russia against our compatriots, this may include forced sterilization, castration, or genital mutilation, which we clearly see are aimed at the destruction of the Ukrainian nation.

The draft law stipulates that the Commission for Definition of the Status of Affected Persons can be addressed with an application by an individual in the interests of their deceased affected family member. Article 1, Clause 8 of the draft law lists individuals who are considered family members of the deceased affected person. This includes individuals who live as part of the same family with the affected person and who share a joint household on a permanent, uninterrupted basis, or who has a family or

marital relationship to such a person, including children. However, according to the Ukrainian legislation, orphans and children deprived of parental care, when they are placed in family forms of education with legal guardians or custodians, the adoptive parents become their legal representatives. Failure to include orphans and children deprived of parental care in the draft law actually violates their right to immediate compensation. We also proposed to change this provision.

Russian aggressors violate the rights of Ukrainian citizens *en masse* every day. The office of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Human Rights is not waiting until hostilities are over, but actively works to restore the rights of our compatriots and help them return to a normal life.

*April 2024*

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Serhii Kyslytsia

**THE TRAIN OF JUSTICE WILL  
CATCH UP WITH ALL RUSSIAN  
CRIMINALS IN THE TUNNEL  
OF RUSSIAN LAWLESSNESS—  
AND PUNISHMENT WILL BE  
INEVITABLE**

*Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the United Nations Serhii KYSLYTSIA firmly believes in the truth of this assertion. Our conversation covered the role of the UN in combating sexual violence as a weapon of war, which Russian aggressors use en masse against Ukrainians in order to subjugate the population.*

**In Ukraine, conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) is a high-profile issue. How is it perceived at the international level, particularly at the United Nations?**

Conflict-related sexual violence is always a high-profile and sensitive issue. All normal people are shocked and disgusted by these crimes. Almost every conflict in human history was, and probably still is, accompanied by manifestations of sexual violence. Earlier this shameful crime was viewed usually as an inevitable byproduct of war. There was no global response mechanism, and the fight was primarily at national levels and within regional initiatives. However, in 2009, the UN Security Council changed this paradigm of international attitude to CRSV, and established the mandate of the UN Special Representative of the

Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict. This mandate, included in UN Security Council Resolution 1820 (2008), for the first time addresses conflict-related sexual violence as a preventable and punishable crime under international human rights law and international criminal law.

In total, as of today, the UN Security Council has approved five resolutions (1820 (2008), 1888 (2009), 1960 (2010), 2106 (2013), 2467 (2019)) that recognize the devastating impact of CRSV on communities and the fact that these crimes undermine efforts to ensure peace and security and rebuild society in post-conflict situations. These resolutions emphasize the need to address CRSV from the very beginning of peacebuilding processes and mediation efforts; creates the mandate of the Special Representative for CRSV and their Office, defines the framework of their powers and tasks; calls for the creation of a rapid response team of forensic experts and improved mechanisms for monitoring and reporting on trends, early signs and typical patterns of attacks.

The UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict regularly participates in briefings and combating CRSV at a political level, while also heading the UN Action against Sexual Violence in Conflict that unites 21 different UN agencies.

The main function of the Special Representative's Office is drafting an annual report to the UN Secretary General regarding CRSV. The annual reports led to a historical public record of a crime that was previously invisible in official war and peace reports. The annual report also contains detailed information on the parties to armed

conflicts who are reasonably suspected of committing rape or other forms of sexual violence mentioned in the annex to the report—the so-called “list of shame.”

Parties listed as perpetrators are obliged to interact with the Office to develop specific commitments and action plans to put an end to violations. Effective fulfillment of such commitments is the main requirement for removing parties from the list. UN Security Council sanctions are automatically applied to parties that have been on the “list of shame” for three years in a row—they are prohibited from participating in UN peacekeeping operations.

Currently, thanks to the active work of the Special Representative and her team, encouraging changes in justice and accountability, as well as legislative changes, such changes have recently been adopted in the DRC, South Sudan, Central African Republic, Guinea, Iraq, and Colombia.

**As the Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the United Nations, you repeatedly raise the issue of CRSV during communication with your fellow diplomats at the UN and beyond. How do they respond?**

I do mention CRSV regularly because the international community should be aware of these shameful crimes committed by Russian occupiers. This subject is covered, among other things, during Security Council meetings regarding Ukraine, the debates of the General Assembly and its Third Committee, as well as the debates of the UN Security Council discussing the annual report to the Secretary General on CRSV. Let me remind you that in 2023, for the first time, the report General Secretary highlighted CRSV committed by Russian aggressors in Ukraine.

*“...in March 2022, a Group of Friends of Accountability was established in New York in the context of the Russian aggression against Ukraine, and is co-chaired by Albania, Denmark, Colombia, the Marshall Islands and the Netherlands. The Group includes 48 countries and the EU. This format is a platform to seek the most effective solutions to ensure that Russian perpetrators are brought to justice for all the crimes they committed against Ukrainian citizens and our country.”*

As one would expect, the very first reports of crimes committed by Russian occupiers in Irpin, Bucha, Kherson sparked shock and deep outrage of our partners. Expressing their maximum support, they also suggested various initiatives to increase pressure on the aggressor to terminate these crimes and to ensure bringing all the Russian perpetrators to justice.

For instance, in March 2022, a Group of Friends of Accountability was established in New York in the context of the Russian aggression against Ukraine, and is co-chaired by Albania, Denmark, Colombia, the Marshall Islands and the Netherlands. The Group includes 48 countries and the EU. This format is a platform to seek the most effective solutions to ensure that Russian perpetrators are brought to justice for all the crimes they committed against Ukrainian citizens and our country.

In November 2022, the UK initiated the establishment of an International Alliance on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict. This alliance aims to draw the attention of the global community to the issue of CRSV and to ensure justice for survivors and bringing the perpetrators to

accountability, providing comprehensive assistance and support to survivors of such violence. Ukraine became its member and holds the vice presidency during 2024.

*“I assure you that Ukrainian diplomacy is actively and effectively using the capabilities of the UN both to provide humanitarian aid and to ensure monitoring of the situation with violations of human rights and international humanitarian law.”*

**The UN remains a powerful platform for promoting Ukraine’s interests and resolving the problems that our country has been facing due to the Russian aggression. How actively and strongly do Ukrainian diplomats and authorities overall use opportunities provided by the UN, particularly in matters of CRSV?**

Today, the UN is the only international organization, comprising 193 countries of the world. I assure you that Ukrainian diplomacy is actively and effectively using the capabilities of the UN both to provide humanitarian aid and to ensure monitoring of the situation with violations of human rights and international humanitarian law. In particular, since 2014, at the invitation of the Government of Ukraine, the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission has been working in Ukraine, and since the beginning of the full-scale armed aggression of the Russian Federation, we have engaged additional mechanisms: the Human Rights Council created the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine in the context of Russian aggression, as well as two mandates of the UN Security Council “Children and Armed Conflict” and “CRSV,” which provide additional thorough monitoring and reporting on the relevant crimes.

In May 2022, the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General on CRSV, Pramila PATTEN, visited Ukraine, signing the Framework on Cooperation between the Government of Ukraine and the UN on prevention and response to CRSV. The Framework serves as the basis for a comprehensive implementation plan that is currently in progress.

Last year, for the first time, the report General Secretary highlighted CRSV committed by Russian aggressors in Ukraine.

In addition, the Independent Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine highlighted CRSV in both of its reports. This issue is also constantly highlighted in the reports of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. In particular, the recent reports indicate that in addition to CRSV being used as a weapon of war and a form of torture against prisoners of war and civilian prisoners, sexual violence is of a systemic, massive nature. The Commission report also states that more than a half of Ukrainian prisoners of war who returned from Russian captivity reported experiencing sexual violence.

**The UN has already adopted various international documents on measures to address CRSV. Do they need to be updated in view of Ukraine's experience in these matters? Has Ukraine put forward such initiatives?**

Let me remind you that the UN Security Council adopted a number of resolutions that define the objectives and powers of the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict and their Office. The last such resolution was adopted in 2019. Ukraine definitely has something to offer to improve the previous resolutions

on CRSV, but Security Council resolutions can only be put forward by a member of the Security Council and, more importantly, require approval of all permanent members. However, Russia, which occupied the place of the former permanent member, USSR, contrary to the UN Charter, now blocks any decisions of this agency concerning its criminal aggression against our country.

**Does the UN implement specific projects to combat CRSV in Ukraine? How effective are they?**

Naturally. I have already spoken about a joint implementation plan with the UN Agencies actively involved with this issue in Ukraine include the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), UN Women, and the International Organization for Migration (IOM). The first two agencies are headquartered in New York, so we are in constant communication with them. The IOM is based in Geneva. The projects cover the creation of centers to help survivors, psychosocial support programs, as well as building the capacity of Ukrainian law enforcement agencies in combating CRSV, administering justice and so forth. The UN has repeatedly reiterated that all the projects and programs are implemented at the request of, and in support of, Ukrainian government efforts.

**Why do you think the Russians engage in CRSV?**

War is concentrated violence. And speaking about Russians specifically, there are a few factors on top of that. First, these people live in a country that openly disrespects international human rights law—among other things, in 2017, Russia decriminalized domestic violence in legislation. Russian law stipulates that criminal prosecution

is applied only after the second or subsequent cases of domestic violence; the first case is grounds for a fine from 5,000 to 30,000 roubles. Remember their saying, “if he beats you, he loves you.”

Second, what can we expect from people who were rapists and murderers back in Russia, and who were given free rein to murder Ukrainians in Ukraine? Russian propaganda actively incites hatred and genocide against Ukrainians. This was additionally highlighted in UN reports, particularly the one by the Independent Commission of Inquiry.

*“These crimes do not have a statute of limitations, and even though, in the foreseeable future, I do not see Russia as a democratic and conscious country, I am absolutely convinced that the train of justice will catch up with all Russian criminals in the tunnel of Russian lawlessness. Today, Ukraine and our partners are making incredible efforts to speed up this metaphorical train. Punishment will be inevitable”*

**What international documents do the Russian military violate by engaging in CRSV? Is there responsibility under international law for a crime such as sexual violence during the war?**

It is easier to list documents that they *do not* violate. To be brief, they violate the following:

1. International humanitarian law, or the Geneva Conventions of 1949. These conventions contain provisions on the protection of civilians in time of war, the prohibition of torture and the unlawful use of force, including sexual violence.

2. Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court: sexual violence is classified as a crime against humanity, a war crime, and a form of gender-based violence, and thus it falls under the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court. Importantly, such crimes do not have a statute of limitations.

3. Convention on the Elimination All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). This convention calls for the protection of women from all forms of violence, including sexual violence as a weapon of war.

4. UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) and other subsequent resolutions on “Women, Peace, Security.” These resolutions call for the protection of women’s rights and the prevention of sexual violence during conflicts.

5. These are also the above-mentioned UN Security Council resolutions 1820 (2008), 1888 (2009), 1960 (2010), 2106 (2013), 2467 (2019), which established the mandate of the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict. I will remind you that Russia signed all these resolutions that it is now cynically violating.

International law provides for liability for such crimes. This includes criminal liability in international courts, such as the ICC. In addition, such crimes may be grounds for sanctions and other forms of international and national legal punishment.

**All wars end. We believe that the Russia-Ukraine war will end with our victory. Do you think, if that is the case, Russia will recognize the crimes of its military that committed CRSV, and will it extradite them to Ukraine for justice?**

We absolutely believe in our victory and are doing everything possible and impossible to bring it closer.

As for whether Russia will agree to recognize its crimes and extradite its criminals, this is not even a question. These crimes do not have a statute of limitations, and even though, in the foreseeable future, I do not see Russia as a democratic and conscious country, I am absolutely convinced that the train of justice will catch up with all Russian criminals in the tunnel of Russian lawlessness. Today, Ukraine and our partners are making incredible efforts to speed up this metaphorical train. Punishment will be inevitable.

*April 2024*

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## AFTERWORD FROM THE EMERGENCY BACKPACK OF SERHII AND OLENA HUBIN

We prepared these interviews from April 2023 to April 2024. Although only a year, yet what a year! An entire era in the life of our country. The difficult, frightening time of the war.

This afterward was written on the day when the 1000th air raid alert since the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion was announced in Kyiv. These signals always guided our work. Whenever we closed the laptop, we immediately put it into our emergency backpack in the entrance hall and copied all the new texts to a USB stick without fail. That was in case we had to run and take shelter—we had to bring the most necessary and the most important things with us. The collected interviews and this book are on that list.

We were encouraged to participate in the project “Resilient Together. Improving the System of Response to the Conflict-Related Sexual Violence (CRSV)” by Kateryna LEVCHENKO, Government Commissioner for Gender Policy, with whom we had been successfully working together for a long time. She knows a great deal about fighting against CRSV because she was among the first people who initiated work on this issue in Ukraine,

who develops the relevant public policies and works on their implementation. She is also well acquainted with professionals of various sectors that are on the first line of response—her professional advice significantly facilitated our work and made it easier to contact high-ranking officials. “People are working, accumulating experience, and we should share it,” said Kateryna LEVCHENKO.

We had a list of experts representing the Ukrainian authorities, the civil society, and international organizations. Most of them worked on issues of protecting human rights and combating domestic violence in all forms, including sexual violence, even in peacetime. Yet they still had to master practical skills in combating CRSV and helping survivors “on the go.” That is why we prepared questions for them carefully, consulted experts of La Strada-Ukraine, the Dr. Denis Mukwege Foundation and the Global Survivors Fund, as well as sent the questions in advance to the interviewees. Sometimes, an official would go on a business trip, often to the de-occupied territories, and our meeting would be postponed. Some questions became irrelevant and were replaced with others. The topic, on the other hand, never lost its relevance—new survivors of CRSV were found on the territories liberated from the Russian aggressors and required support and help.

Despite the busy schedule, despite the air raid sirens, not a single interview was canceled. It is a truly unique situation during such information campaigns. And this speaks in favor of the people who work on helping survivors of the Russian aggressors’ war crimes. These experts understand the weight of information that society needs.

Ahead of the meetings, we would often hear our interviewees say, “I have very little time, can we make it in half an hour or so?” And then everyone just forgot about time limits—they spoke as much as they needed to cover their subject comprehensively.

Take, for instance, the interview of Prosecutor General’s Office representatives Yurii Bielousov and Iryna Didenko, who worked on investigating war crimes, including CRSV. Such conversations are easier to start than to end. Our interlocutors constantly brought up new and new facts about the horrible crimes of the Russian occupiers. Notably, they were not acting detached or indifferent, you could feel they were genuinely concerned with the pain that affected many Ukrainians and sincerely made every effort to protect and support them. Sensing their feelings and mood, we even asked them at the end of the interview: how do prosecutors that oversee CRSV cases avoid traumatizing themselves? They shared that many of their colleagues leave the job for this very reason: it is hard to empathize with every single case of Russian crimes, but you also cannot stay detached. Survivors expect warmth and empathy from all of us. And this forces the prosecutor’s office to transform. Previously, the prosecutor focused on prosecuting the perpetrator, and today, they also act in the interests of the affected individual.

Communication with CRSV survivors was also long. We knew in advance it would be difficult, and some questions had to be avoided with representatives of SEMA Ukraine Iryna Dovhan and Liudmyla Huseinova; otherwise, we would inadvertently hurt them. They went through extraordinary hardships in the Russia-occupied

part of the Donetsk region, and they would understandably want to keep those memories buried as much as possible. Instead, we were impressed by the endurance and strength of spirit of these women, who themselves initiated the frank conversation. They spoke about horrible things, but the incredible twists and turns in their own stories, about the unexpected rescue that was a sort of compensation for the torture they endured.

After that conversation, for a long time, we could not bring ourselves to work on the material. We felt devastated. It took a few weeks for the emotions to settle. But once we got down to work, they came back in full force. At that moment, we thought: if we experience somebody else's pain like this, what do the actual survivors feel?

The project had a close-knit team. But during the implementation it turned out that our team was much larger than we thought. It was joined by fellow journalists from various parts of Ukraine. They used our interviews and thereby provided us with an opportunity to communicate with the broadest circle of Ukrainians. We do not know how many CRSV survivors we reached—working with a highly concealed crime, we cannot know for sure how many Ukrainians suffered this abuse and humiliation by the Russian occupiers. In our interviews, we tried to provide them with specific information on what support they can receive from the government, which civil society organizations participate in this process, how the international community perceives what is happening in Ukraine now and helping us resolve issues caused by the Russian aggression.

We actually reached a wide circle of information consumers. Those who are close to survivors, that is, family members, relatives, friends, representatives of local communities, also require support. Russian crimes cause a lot of pain in our society. And now it is important not only to heal these wounds, but also to reform public opinion. Society should show understanding and empathy to the survivors. They should not only receive a certain scope of medical, legal, social, and other types of aid, but also feel free and protected.

Forming these positive attitudes in society was one of our objectives.

We should also point out the great power of the Internet! Information that we shared with the media took on a life of its own in the online space and could be accessed not only by Ukrainians on the Ukraine-controlled territory, but also by those who were under occupation or those who moved abroad because of the war. One of our interlocutors remarked: Ukraine is lucky that now is the time of the Internet, which helps spread messages without restrictions. In the previous years, when Russia was at war with Ichkeria, was capturing Transnistria and Abkhazia, the Internet was not as developed as now, and information could be slowed down—therefore the general public did not find out the entire truth about the Russian crimes.

Our publications were of the greatest interest for those media that work in areas close to active hostilities. Our colleagues explained that this is connected with a large number of displaced people who ended up in their area and included CRSV survivors. There was a similar reaction from media representatives from other, safer

regions, where many internally displaced persons were also sheltered.

Information presented in a journalistic material is usually short-lived, quickly getting replaced with something new. A book, on the other hand, can be used for a long time. This is important to remember, given the fact that, based on international experience, Ukraine will need a lot more time to manage CRSV issues. And this is what makes this book so valuable.

*Serhii Hubin, Olena Hubina, Journalists*

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*Суспільно-політичне видання*

Серія “Фронтир”

## **УКРАЇНА НЕ МОВЧИТЬ**

**Хроніка протидії сексуальному насильству,  
пов’язаному з війною  
(2022–2024 рр.)**

*(Англійською мовою)*

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U31 **Ukraine Is Not Silent.** Chronicles of Fighting Against War-Related Sexual Violence (2022–2024) / Ukrainian Women’s Fund; Compiled by: K. Levchenko, S. Hubin, O. Hubina; Translators: O. Nevmerzhyts’ka, N. Slipenko; Designer: B. Kurkul. — Kharkiv: Folio, 2024. — 317 p. — (Frontier). ISBN 978-617-551-151-0 (Frontier) ISBN 978-617-8493-87-5

This book *Ukraine Is Not Silent: Chronicles of Fighting Against War-Related Sexual Violence (2022–2024)* consists of 25 interviews in which Ukrainian and international experts share information about the type of assistance provided to survivors of conflict-related sexual violence so that survivors can restore their former life, as well as explain how government structures, NGOs, and international donors participate in this process of restoration. The publication reflects the unique experience of combating CRSV that Ukraine has acquired during the russia-Ukraine war, experience that can be useful for other countries struggling with this issue.

The intended audience for this book includes civil servants, officials of local government agencies, representatives of social services, NGOs, and other experts who provide assistance to survivors and who organize survivor compensations and reparations, as well as scholars who are studying or will study this issue. The publication is also meant for an international audience to share information about the consequences of the russian aggression against Ukraine and the crimes committed by russian troops on the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine. The book has a practical focus and will be in demand among survivors, their loved ones, their communities, and other stakeholders.

We thank Irene Jarosewich, our colleague in the United States from the World Federation of Ukrainian Women’s Organizations, for her assistance with the English-language text of these interviews.

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У книзі, що складається з 25 інтерв'ю, українські та зарубіжні експерти розповідають про те, яку допомогу надають постраждалим від сексуального насильства, пов'язаного з війною, які державні структури, громадські організації та міжнародні донори долучаються до цього. У виданні також ідеться про унікальний досвід протидії СНПК, який Україна накопичила за час російсько-української війни та яким можуть скористатися інші держави.

Книгу орієнтовано на державних службовців, посадовців місцевих органів влади, представників соціальних служб, громадських організацій та інших фахівців, які надають допомогу постраждалим і забезпечують компенсаційні та репараційні виплати для них, а також на науковців, які вивчають це питання. Видання розраховане також на міжнародну аудиторію з метою її ознайомлення з наслідками російської агресії проти України. Книга має практичну спрямованість і буде запитаною серед самих постраждалих, їхнього оточення, громад й інших зацікавлених осіб.

This book *Ukraine Is Not Silent: Chronicles of Fighting Against War-Related Sexual Violence (2022–2024)* consists of 25 interviews in which Ukrainian and international experts share information about the type of assistance provided to survivors of conflict-related sexual violence so that survivors can restore their former life, as well as explain how government structures, NGOs, and international donors participate in this process of restoration. The publication reflects the unique experience of combating CRSV that Ukraine has acquired during the russia-Ukraine war, experience that can be useful for other countries struggling with this issue. The intended audience for this book includes civil servants, officials of local government agencies, representatives of social services, NGOs, and other experts who provide assistance to survivors and who organize survivor compensations and reparations, as well as scholars who are studying or will study this issue. The publication is also meant for an international audience to share information about the consequences of the russian aggression against Ukraine and the crimes committed by russian troops on the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine. The book has a practical focus and will be in demand among survivors, their loved ones, their communities, and other stakeholders.

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