

Today I have the honour and responsibility to speak and testify as part of civil society organizations, who stand for the protection of independence and freedom of Ukraine from the invasion by Russia. Organizations who consolidate the efforts at the national, regional and community level, with state and individuals, women and men, adults and children. Who provide assistance, help to save lives of civilians, often the most vulnerable ones, collect evidences and testimonies of survivors of the war crimes committed by Russia in Ukraine. To document these and to help to bring justice.

I speak as a women rights activist, as a specialist, as a mother and since February 24 - as a displaced person.

With the full scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia, the whole population of the country is under life threat. Women and children, as it often happens during the wartime, are the most vulnerable ones.

I will focus on 4 aspects related to the impact of Russia's aggression on them:

- 1. Women and children are the biggest part of internally displaced persons and refugees who left the country trying to save their lives.** Often becoming vulnerable to the risks of gender based violence and exploitation.

Very often during evacuations, with clearly indicated signs of being civilian, unarmed, carrying children - they are brutally killed by Russian troops:

- Hitting of a railway station in Kramatorsk where civilians – mostly women, children and elderly were waiting for an evacuation train (April, 8). The city, where our colleagues - women rights activists put so many efforts to promote the 1325 Resolution and its spirit.
- Hitting of maternity and child hospitals, kindergartens. Bombing of a theatre building in Mariupol, where women, children were sheltering and where signs: "CHILDREN" were visible from the sky. The city that always connected us with sisters and colleagues in the Donetska and Luganska oblasts.
- We received calls from women in Mariupol informing us about the forced deportation of civilians, including unaccompanied children, by Russian troops to Donetsk and further to Russia. So called "evacuation". Women - under the threat of rape and killing.

2. **Women in local administrations, self-government bodies** – Exposed to the threat of kidnapping, torture and killing:

- The *head* of the Motyzhyn village (Kyivska oblast) Olga Sukhenko was found dead in April 2022 together with her husband and son after being taken by Russian troops who occupied the village. Severely tortured and killed. For staying with her community and performing her duties – organizing support, medicine, food to people.
- The deputy of Zaporizska oblast administration Leyla Ibragymova was kidnapped from her home.
- Director of the kindergarten in Kyivska oblast (Larysa Osypenko), killed by occupants because of her profession: "you should not rise nazists" they said.

This tragic list of crimes committed by thousands of **ordinary** Russians, soldiers claiming they do or didn't know where they are, can be continued.

3. Women are the important actors of peace and security sector in Ukraine and their contribution during the war is incredible. Together with activists, volunteers, journalists they become the target for the occupants.

- Ukrainian volunteer-medic Julia Payevska (Tyra). Many years was saving the lives of people on the occupied by Russians territories on the east of Ukraine. Captivated by Russian troops while organizing assistance for civilians in Mariupol. A video with captivated Tyra was shown, she was forced to call to “find the solution of the situation”. There is no information about her condition and situation now.
- Women-prisoners of war (exchange, April, 2022) . Exposed to torture, including sexual violence, undressed in front of the male groups, harassed, shaved.
- Journalists – kidnapping - 2 female journalists in Zaporizska obl. (Viktoria Roschina, hromadske, released later and Iryna Dubchnko) and killing (Oleksandra Kuvshynova, FoxNews, near Kyiv) while performing their professional duties.

4. Women and girls are particularly vulnerable to sexual violence and rape during the war time. A number of facts and cases already revealed and reported. Unfortunately, it’s just a small part of the iceberg. Many survivors remain in the situation of a life threat, on occupied territories, cut off from for help and connection.

We receive such calls to the National hot lines run by La Strada. For today - 9 cases of rape by Russian soldiers in the temporary occupied towns and villages, 12 women and girls suffered. Reports from Kyivska, Khersonska and Chernigivska oblast. Reported by survivors themselves and by witnesses. Rape by group of occupants. Multiple times. With the life threat to survivors, their children and family members, in front of the family members and other people. Real cases, real people, real facts.

We see extreme traumatization, fear for life, not readiness to talk about what had happened. Those who manage to get to safer places – are too traumatized to report. Need support, therapy and recovery first.

We know that many of these cases will hardly or never be disclosed. Many of those suffered are killed already by Russian invaders.

We know and see, and we want you to hear our voice - violence and rape is used as a weapon of war by Russian invaders in Ukraine.

5. At the same time the war also shows **the important role that women** play in standing for Ukraine, in the process of restoring the peace, strengthening and development of the country and democracy processes. We do not want you to look at us only as victims of the Russian military aggression.

Women in peace and security sector, volunteers, activists, journalists, human rights defenders are an integral part of the progress and development in Ukraine. We have knowledge, skills, expertise, strength. But we need to be saved and protected now!

We call to all members of the Security Council, international institutions and governments to stop the war and demonstrate your solidarity in the concrete and practical actions. To find and use the tools to stop Russian aggression and ensure your decisions are not blocked or ignored. We call to ensure security of children, women and men of Ukraine.

Thank you!