

UN report confirms Ukrainians' use of civilians as "human shields"

Jason Melanovski
18 July 2022

A recent UN report from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has confirmed that the Ukrainian Army, as it battles Russian forces for control of the eastern Donbass region, is purposefully putting civilians in harm's way as "human shields."

In March, the Ukrainian government blamed Russian forces for the deaths of more than 50 elderly and disabled residents of a care home in the village of Stara Krasnyanka in the eastern province of Lugansk. According to Ukrainian officials, a fire broke out in the facility following a supposedly unprovoked attack on the innocents by Russian forces.

In reality—in a case the report found to be "emblematic" of the war—on March 7, days before the attack, Ukrainian forces had taken up positions within the care home "as it had strategic value due to its proximity to an important road." Previous requests by the facility to local Ukrainian authorities to evacuate residents were denied due to the fact that Kiev had mined the surrounding area and blocked roads, thereby preventing anyone from fleeing.

Two days later on March 9, as Russian forces approached the care home, the two sides exchanged fire. "It remains unclear which side opened fire first," states the OHCHR.

On March 11, 71 patients with disabilities and 15 staff remained in the facility with no access to electricity or water, despite the continued presence of Ukrainian forces. They apparently made no effort to evacuate them in the face of an impending battle. During the morning, Russian forces, clearly aware by this time of the presence of Ukrainian military within the building, attacked with "heavy weapons," causing a fire to break out. Some staff and residents were able to flee to a nearby forest and were later "met by Russian

affiliated armed groups, who provided them with assistance," reports the OHCHR.

The section of the report on the case of Stara Krasnyanka concludes by stating, "According to various accounts, at least 22 patients survived the attack, but the exact number of persons killed remains unknown."

As the UN document clearly demonstrates in the case of Stara Krasnyanka, it was the Ukrainian forces "who took up positions either in residential areas or near civilian objects, from where they launched military operations without taking measures for the protection of civilians present." Such tactics are specifically prohibited by Article 28 of Geneva Convention IV and Article 51(7) of additional Protocol I and constitute a war crime.

But despite the role played by Kiev in these situations, civilian deaths in these contexts are described as the product of the "indiscriminate" violence of Russian "orcs." They are widely publicized in Western corporate news outlets as further examples of an engrained Russian barbarity, which allegedly can only be prevented by sending billions more in weapons and aid to Ukraine's government.

During the Russian siege of Mariupol, civilians accused Ukrainian forces from the neo-Nazi Azov Battalion of deliberately shooting at fleeing cars and kidnapping residents in order to have them serve as human shields while they bunkered within the Azovstal plant.

In May, Natalia Usmanova, a former employee of the Azovstal plant who had taken refuge there from the fighting with her children and her husband, told Germany's *Der Spiegel* that Ukrainian forces had forbidden them from leaving and later hid behind the trapped Azovstal civilians as fighting broke out.

“They (Ukrainian soldiers and Azov fighters) kept us in the bunker. They hid behind the fact that they are supposedly concerned about our safety. They shouted at us (when we tried to escape) and said go back to the bunker!” Usmanova told *Der Spiegel* in a video that was later taken down. A full interview with Usmanova can still be viewed here on YouTube.

As of July 12, the UN’s OHCHR has recorded 5,024 killed and 6,520 injured during the course of the NATO-provoked war.

Kiev is currently preparing a counter-attack with newly supplied Western weapons in the country’s now occupied territories in the south and east. The Ukrainian government acknowledges that ordinary people are in harm’s way.

Speaking on national television this past week, Ukraine’s Deputy Prime Minister Iryna Vereshchuk warned civilians in the Russian-occupied southern region of Kherson to evacuate or risk being killed by Ukrainian forces.

“It’s clear there will be fighting, there will be artillery shelling ... and we therefore urge (people) to evacuate urgently,” Vereshchuk said. She added, “I know for sure that there should not be women and children there, and that they should not become human shields,” making it clear that any deaths from US-supplied Ukrainian missiles and bombs will also be blamed on Russia.

For over eight years, starting in 2014 the NATO-backed governments of former President Petro Poroshenko and later Zelensky carried out a war against the separatist Donbass region. During the course of regular shelling and bombing , upwards of 14,000 people were killed. Both successive Ukrainian governments, with US and NATO support, brazenly refused to carry out the agreed-upon Minsk peace accords, which called for a negotiated settlement.



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)