

My name is Oleksandra Matviichuk. For over 20 years I have been defending human rights in Ukraine and OSCE region. The recent 8 years I have been documenting war crimes. Since Russian full-scale invasion, we have united dozens of organizations into the “Tribunal for Putin” initiative. Only in 6 months of Russian aggression, jointly we have documented over 18 000 episodes of war crimes.

This is the reason why I can confidently assert the following.

First, Russia uses war crimes as a method of warfare. Russia attempt to break people’s resistance and occupy Ukraine by means of what I call “the immense pain of civilian people”.

This is the conscious policy of the Russian leadership. Russian military intentionally ruin residential dwellings, churches, hospitals, schools, critical civil infrastructure. They apply indiscriminate weapons in densely populated regions. Russians facilitate filtration camps system and commit massive deportations of Ukrainian population. Russian army terrorizes people aiming to keep its control over the occupied territories. Russians abduct, torture, rape and kill civilians. They intentionally exterminate local active people: mayors, journalists, civil activists, lawyers, volunteers, priests, artists and others.

A week ago, Ukraine liberated part of the occupied territories. Just like in Buch in the Kyiv region, now in the small town of Izyum in the Kharkiv region, torture chambers and mass burials of the murdered were found. The whole families were killed there. Several generations of the Stolpakov family died in Izyum - 33-year-old Dmytro and his wife, 31-year-old Elena. Their daughters Lesya and Sasha, who were 5 and 8 years old. As well as their grandparents and their mother's younger sister.

Second, this situation in Ukraine is the consequence of impunity for the previous crimes, which Putin’s regime committed. Russia has been using war as a tool of achieving its geopolitical interests. For decades, Russian military have being committing war crimes in Moldova, Georgia, Syria, Mali, Libya and other countries. They have never been held accountable for this. Russians are convinced that they are free to do anything they want. I have interviewed more than a hundred of civilians, who survived in Russian captivity. They told me that they had been beaten, raped, caged in wooden boxes; their limbs had been cut off, and electricity had been sent through their genitals, one woman told me how her eye had been torn out with a spoon.

If we do not stop Putin in Ukraine now, he will move further on. This is the logic of the aggressive authoritarian regime, which strives to dominate the world.

Third, the national legal system of Ukraine is facing a difficult challenge. The Office of the Prosecutor General has opened over 33 thousand criminal proceedings. It is clear, that even the world most powerful legal system would not be able to cope with such a great number of crimes during the war. Unfortunately, we can not load this task over the International Criminal Court. ICC actions are extremely important, but the Court focuses only at the top officials and limits itself only up to several selected cases. Investigation of the rest of the dozens of thousands of criminal proceedings and their perpetrators remains within the responsibility of Ukrainian investigative and court authorities.

Thus, there appears an extremely acute question: who will be able to ensure justice for numerous thousands of war crimes victims?

We have a chance to break this impunity circle of lasting for decades war crimes, committed by Russia.

To achieve this:

1. Ukraine requires long-range weapons in sufficient amount. Currently, the entire UN system is unable to release at least one person from the Russian captivity. As a result, Russian military will continue to kill and torture civilians.
2. Ukraine requires assistance to investigate and hold accountable for war crimes. The USA and other countries could alter their legislation and take required decisions so to assist to preserve evidence and protect war crimes witnesses, to efficiently investigate the activity of suspected Russian war criminals.
3. The world should win this war in the dimension of value. This is not the war of two countries, this is the war of two systems. Putin is attempting to convince that freedom, democracy and the rule of law are the fake values as they are unable to protect anyone. He asserts that only authoritarianism and force matter. We will win this war in the dimension of value, when we establish the international tribunal to hold Putin and other Russian war criminals accountable. Thus, we will prove that justice is possible, even though delayed in time.