

# Investigation of Criminal Offenses of Illegal Detention of Ukrainian Citizens (Civilian Prisoners of War) in the Times of War: Analysis of Efficiency and Ways of Improvement

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## Abstract

The paper highlights the results of a study on the investigation of criminal offenses related to the illegal detention of Ukrainian citizens (civilian prisoners of war) in the territory of the Russian Federation and the temporarily occupied territories. The author analyzes the activities of law enforcement agencies of Ukraine in terms of the effectiveness of pre-trial investigation, in particular, making procedural decisions, conducting investigative (search) actions and collecting evidence, as well as bringing to criminal responsibility those responsible for the illegal detention of Ukrainian citizens. Based on the results of the analysis of practical cases, conclusions have been formulated and suggestions have been developed to improve the activities of law enforcement agencies of Ukraine in order to bring the Russian military and representatives of the occupation authorities to criminal responsibility for war crimes and crimes against humanity.

**Keywords:** war, illegal detention, civilian prisoners of war, hostages, places of detention, preventive arrest, torture, pre-trial investigation, war crimes, crimes against humanity, prosecution

## 1. Introduction

There are thousands of Ukrainian civilian prisoners of war, and this number is constantly changing exponentially. The Prosecutor General noted that Ukraine is investigating the illegal deprivation of liberty by Russia of more than 14,000 civilians. At the same time, more than 170 torture chambers have been identified, and virtually everyone who has returned from Russian captivity has been subjected to various forms of violence. The Ombudsman's Office has given different figures, the latest one being in the range of 40 thousand people. The numbers are appalling and it is obvious that it is impossible to negotiate about such a large number of people at the same time, but each case of illegal detention must be properly investigated by the law enforcement agencies of Ukraine. Civilian prisoners of war are subjected to both physical and psychological violence. Among them are various categories of Ukrainian citizens, including the elderly, those in need of medical care, or clergy (religious figures), nuclear power plant workers, etc. However, thousands of Ukrainians are waiting for help at this very moment and time.

Russian troops and security forces continue to torture and ill-treat Ukrainian prisoners of war and civilians in Russian custody. Most detainees are held in poor conditions, without access to adequate food and medical care. In October, the UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry concluded that "Russian authorities have committed torture against Ukrainian civilians and prisoners of war as a crime against humanity." In particular, about 80 percent of former prisoners of war reported sexual violence while in Russian captivity [1].

The methodological basis of this paper is the systematic application of the historical and legal method, as well as the methods of analysis and synthesis, and the use of both quantitative and qualitative indicators. Such a multifaceted approach made it possible to establish legal facts which are important when assessing the quality of investigation by pre-trial investigation authorities of criminal offenses concerning the illegal detention of *civilian prisoners of war* on the territory of the Russian Federation and the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine. Thus, it is possible to understand in detail the difficulties faced by the law enforcement agencies of Ukraine in investigating these crimes and the state of protection of the rights and freedoms of civilian hostages during the armed conflict. The purpose of the analysis provided in *the paper* is focused on *scrutinizing* the quality of the investigation and the identification of persons involved in the illegal detention of civilian prisoners and other

related crimes, including torture, murder, unlawful prosecution of Ukrainian citizens for their pro-Ukrainian position and preservation of Ukraine's territorial integrity by falsifying investigation materials and extorting confessions of terrorism or work for Ukraine's special services.

The study, *through the analysis of practical cases*, proves the systematic falsification of criminal prosecution against Ukrainian citizens by the entire law enforcement machine of the Russian Federation, which thus strives to break the resistance of Ukrainian citizens in the temporarily occupied territories, as well as to physically destroy (kill) the resistant and the unbreakable.

The issue of civilian prisoners of war has been the subject of study at different times by a number of scholars, but in their research they did not raise the issue of investigating illegal detention and prosecution. This study should be regarded as a continuation of the study of legal protection of civilian prisoners, which was previously published. [2].

The paper analyzes the algorithm of actions to establish the facts of illegal detention of Ukrainian citizens, as the *supreme authorities of the Russian Federation* take measures to conceal such facts and uses "Nazi" methods against Ukrainian citizens by applying "preventive arrests" without any charges and without legal grounds for deprivation of liberty.

The study describes the real state of work of pre-trial investigation bodies in investigating the disappearance of persons in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine, illegal detention of civilian prisoners in places of captivity, *while also* providing substantive suggestions for improving the work of law enforcement agencies of Ukraine *regarding the investigation of such cases*.

*Besides*, the paper examines the specific *circumstances* under which the pre-trial investigation bodies of Ukraine operate, *implying occasional absence of the corpses of persons held captive and/or returning of the bodies after a long period of time, thus resulting in putrefactive changes in the corpse*. Consequently, the organic structures of the corpse decompose and, accordingly, it is extremely difficult to establish the cause of death based on the results of a forensic medical examination. *Investigators and prosecutors have to work in these difficult conditions while being provided with limited procedural tools for conducting an efficient investigation of the crimes*. The paper also points to other negative circumstances that impede *proper investigation* of this category of crimes.

The paper substantiates the need to change the approach to the investigation of the above category of crimes *and emphasizes the need to enhance the professional training of investigators and prosecutors*. Suggestions are made with a view to address the negative situation regarding the inadequate *legal protection of civilian prisoners of war and the necessary steps are proposed to ensure effective documenting of war crimes and crimes against humanity, as well as to bring the perpetrators to criminal responsibility for committing such crimes*.

Despite the lack of awareness about the fate of civilian prisoners of war and the commission of crimes against them during recent armed conflicts, this topic deserves attention. *Unfortunately, the situation of Ukrainian prisoners in Russia is a "textbook case."* *Occurring in real time, these cases highlight the way in which the norms of international humanitarian law, at least according to available sources, are applied only selectively. Nevertheless, whatever the outcome of this war (Russian-Ukrainian), it is important to start thinking about the prisoners of war immediately, especially given the timeline for humanitarian stakeholders to document the situation, discuss and think about remedies, as well as protection and assistance tools.* [3].

Moreover, the goals of securing human rights and *international humanitarian law* coincide. Both *international humanitarian law* and human rights are designed to limit the power of state authorities in order to protect the fundamental rights of individuals. However, *international humanitarian law* applies only during an armed conflict (a war). Its provisions are formulated to take into account the special circumstances of warfare. They cannot be canceled under any circumstances [4].

The Russian Federation and the occupation authorities ignore the norms of International Humanitarian Law governing international armed conflict. These norms always apply in the case of occupation of all or part of the territory of a state, even if this occupation does not meet any armed resistance [5].

## **2. Current State of Investigation of Criminal Offenses Related to Illegal Detention of Ukrainian Citizens (Civilian Prisoners of War)**

Currently, about 55,000 Ukrainians are listed in the Unified State Register as missing. At least 16,000 are listed as civilians, and 1,700 have been missing since 2014. When comparing the available statistics on the number of civilian prisoners of war (40 thousand people) and prisoners of war (10 thousand people) held in temporary detention facilities in the territory of the Russian Federation and the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine, the ratio is 4 to 1. This shows that the focus of the repressive machine of the Russian Federation is directed at pro-

Ukrainian citizens, in particular Crimean Tatars. The impressively higher number of civilian prisoners points to an extremely important area of activity for Ukraine's law enforcement agencies.

Relatives and friends of civilian prisoners of war and missing persons in the temporarily occupied territories are increasingly turning to lawyers and human rights defenders to protect their rights and freedoms, while they are not as active in contacting state authorities and law enforcement agencies for objective and subjective reasons.

Thus, relatives and friends need to file a report on the disappearance of a person and, if possible, clearly describe the circumstances of the disappearance and the individual characteristics of the person. The report is submitted to the territorial unit of the National Police of Ukraine. It should be noted that each case of a missing person is unique, so the investigator or prosecutor should take this into account when communicating with the victims.

Upon submission of a report in accordance with Article 214 (commencement of pre-trial investigation) of the Criminal Procedure Code of Ukraine, the investigator, inquirer, prosecutor shall immediately, but not later than in 24 hours after submission of the report, enter the relevant information into the Unified Register of Pre-trial Investigations. From this moment on, a pre-trial investigation of a criminal offense under Part 1 of Article 115 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine, namely, premeditated murder with the note "missing" and "missing under special circumstances", is initiated.

After that, the applicant must receive confirmation of the initiation of criminal proceedings and the commencement of a pre-trial investigation in accordance with Article 60 of the Criminal Procedure Code of Ukraine [6], that is, to obtain from the investigator of the National Police of Ukraine an extract from the Unified Register of Pre-trial Investigations, which indicates initiation of criminal proceedings on the fact of a person's disappearance under special circumstances or those of captivity.

For an effective investigation, the pre-trial investigation body must collect complete and exhaustive information about the person who went missing and/or is in captivity, including information about personal data, place of work, military service, profession, physical condition and chronic diseases, scars and tattoos, medical reports or examinations, other special characteristics and personal belongings that the person may have had at the time of the disappearance, etc. This can be performed by submitting a request from the victims to attach a biographical certificate, copies of documents (passport, identification code, birth certificate, etc.), photos and videos to the criminal proceedings, or during the conduct of such investigative (search) actions as interrogation of the victim. In addition, the investigator or prosecutor needs to find out the last known whereabouts of the missing person and the phone numbers used by the missing person. Thus, during the pre-trial investigation, this information will help to establish the place of disappearance or location of a person by applying to the court for temporary access to belongings and documents to obtain information from mobile network operators, giving orders to conduct investigative (search) actions to operational units, for example, to the Department (departments in the regions and the city of Kyiv) of Cyber Police and Criminal Analysis to review and monitor the World Wide Web and social networks to search for information about a missing person or video recordings and photographs depicting the person, the place of his or her detention.

Thus, the investigator or prosecutor will be able to use the data obtained during the interrogation of the victim and the results of the completed orders in further pre-trial investigation. For example, to order a portrait examination to determine whether the person depicted in the photo or video is a missing person or a civilian prisoner of war in respect of whom criminal proceedings have been initiated.

In addition, the investigator or prosecutor is obliged to take DNA materials from at least two biological relatives (if any) for molecular genetic analysis, or to obtain (seize) personal belongings of the missing person that may contain DNA materials, such as a toothbrush, razor, shoes, etc. This is due to the fact that some civilian prisoners of war are killed in detention as a result of systematic torture, lack of medical care and improper detention. As of December 2024, at least 15 civilians had died in Russian custody. Although human rights activists estimate that the actual number of deaths is much higher. The DNA profiles of biological relatives, missing persons or civilian prisoners included in the register of human genetic traits during forensic biological examination allow to identify the deceased in a place of detention after the body is returned to the territory of Ukraine.

However, given the large number of missing persons, the small number of expert institutions (one research forensic center of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine in the region) with a small staff of experts who can perform this type of examination, the entry of DNA profiles of individuals into the register of human genetic characteristics and subsequent comparative examinations takes a long period from the moment of collecting biological samples. These processes are also slowed down by violations of the collection procedure by investigators.

Another problem with the investigation is the frequent refusal by pre-trial investigation bodies to enter information into the Unified Register of Pre-trial Investigations or to provide an extract from the Unified Register of Pre-trial Investigations (hereinafter – the URPTI) after entering such information. It should also be noted that there is a lack of effective communication between the victims and the National Police investigators tasked with investigating the criminal offense. Accordingly, it is extremely difficult to obtain information on the progress of criminal proceedings in relation to missing relatives and those held captive by the aggressor country.

*One of the main sources of evidence is the testimony of military and civilian prisoners of war (hostages) returned as a result of exchanges. Their testimonies are extremely important, as all the information received is accumulated and processed using modern technologies.* Therefore, open-source data, OSINT searches, information from civil society organizations and Ukrainian citizens in the occupied territories are used to document crimes. Forensic medical, psychological and psychiatric examinations are also important, as they can provide objective evidence in the case and confirm the testimony of Ukrainian prisoners.

It is worth noting that the current procedure for determining territorial jurisdiction in criminal proceedings concerning missing persons and civilian prisoners of war in the territory of the Russian Federation and the temporarily occupied territories has led to an extremely difficult situation with an increased workload for investigators of the National Police of Ukraine in certain regions where hostilities are taking place (Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions). This is because all proceedings concerning persons who went missing in the combat zones were transferred to the regions where they were recorded. As a result, one investigator has hundreds or even thousands of criminal proceedings of various categories under investigation. Therefore, the effectiveness of such investigations is out of the question.

Although the National Police of Ukraine has recently recognized this problem and announced changes to the procedure for determining jurisdiction in cases of missing persons and civilian prisoners of war, there is evidence of a significant workload for investigators, especially in areas where active hostilities are ongoing. In addition, investigations are slowed down by logistical difficulties and the time required to transfer materials between regions. This complicated the interaction of families of missing persons with investigators – quite often the procedure for finding the person responsible for the case took months [7].

Another problem that currently exists is the use of “preventive arrest” by the Russian Federation against some civilian hostages [8], which significantly complicates the process of protecting the rights of civilian prisoners of war, since they are not charged with a crime and are held in places of detention to prevent possible crimes. Thus, civilian prisoners of war subjected to “preventive” arrest have no procedural status and cannot enjoy the rights provided for by the Criminal Procedure Code of the Russian Federation, *i.e. they are hostages*.

It should be noted that enforced disappearance includes the following elements: 1) such arrest, detention or abduction was carried out by a state or political organization with their support or authorization; 2) the refusal to recognize the deprivation of liberty or to provide information about the fate or whereabouts of such person was expressed by such state or political organization. The main difference from the definition set forth in the Convention is that the Rome Statute adds another subject of the crime – a political organization. Besides, it defines the motive – deprivation of liberty by structures supposed to enforce law. Thus, the international legal protection of persons from enforced disappearance is carried out through the recognition, both at the regional and universal level, of the right of a person not to be subjected to enforced disappearance, as well as the absolute nature of this right, and the recognition of enforced disappearance as a crime against humanity [9].

Thus, taking such civilians as prisoners is expressly prohibited by the provisions of *International Humanitarian Law*. This is not only a gross violation of international humanitarian law and fundamental human and civil rights and freedoms, but also a repetition of the Nazi policy of targeting individuals based on race and nationality.

This is supported by the report, which confirms cases of arbitrary detention, torture, including sexual violence, and enforced disappearances of civilians in the occupied territory. Several recent cases documented by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights indicate ongoing arbitrary detention and torture. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has also documented cases of arbitrary detention where the occupying authorities detained people for what appeared to be legitimate exercises of freedom of expression or religion or belief. In some cases, the victims shared information with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on a confidential basis, fearing that publicizing the details of their cases could lead to negative consequences [10].

The most common method of torture of Ukrainian civilian prisoners of war is torture by electrocution. This method is described in detail in the Manual on the Effective Investigation and Documentation of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (2004). Thus, electric current is delivered through electrodes

placed on any part of the body. Such parts of the body are most often the hands, feet, fingers and toes, ears, nipples, mouth, lips and genital area. For example, if the electrodes are placed on the toe of the right foot and genital area, pain, muscle contractions and cramps occur in the muscles of the right thigh and calf muscle of the right leg. Unbearable pain in the genital area. Often, torturers use water or gels to increase the effectiveness of torture, expand the area of electric current entry on the body and avoid visible electric burns. All of this can be heard from civilian prisoners of war who have experienced the consequences of such torture in places of detention located in the Russian Federation and the temporarily occupied territories.

In her speech, Ambassador Barbara Woodward, Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom to the United Nations, emphasized that Russia's use of torture against prisoners of war and civilian prisoners constitutes crimes against humanity, and their reports are horrifying. Among them are reports that detainees were subjected to beatings, psychological pressure, prolonged stressful positions, and mock executions. The reports show that interrogations are often accompanied by the worst forms of torture, including burns and electric shocks, enhanced by water [11].

Thus, it is the results of the investigation that are an indicator of the effectiveness of investigators and prosecutors, so there is every reason to assert the need to intensify the pre-trial investigation of missing persons and civilian prisoners of war.

Here is an analysis of the cases of civilian prisoners of war that have attracted special attention at both national and international levels.

For example, on December 4, 2024, the Zaporizhzhia Military Administration reported that Russia had returned the body of Yevhen Matveiev, the mayor of Dniprovdne, Zaporizhzhia region, killed in captivity. The mayor had been in captivity for 2 years and 8 months. He was elected to the mayor's office three times. In this position, he met the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia. In March 2022, he was informed that the Russian military had detained a bus with employees of the Zaporizhzhia Iron Ore Plant's shift at a checkpoint. The mayor went to the scene. The miners were released, but the mayor was detained. His fate was not known for a long time. The mayor's body was returned to Ukraine in November 2024, but he died in Russian captivity in February 2024. His body was returned with signs of fatal injuries. Law enforcement officers opened a criminal investigation over his death in captivity under Part 2 of Article 438 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine (violation of the laws and customs of war, combined with premeditated murder). The investigation is ongoing, and the necessary investigative (search) actions are being carried out, but no one has yet been formally charged by the law enforcement agencies of Ukraine with committing this crime.

In 2024, it became known that Ukrainian journalist Viktoriia Roshchyna, who went missing during a trip to the occupied territories and was held in Russia, died in Russian captivity. She was held in the Taganrog Pre-trial Detention Center No. 2 in the Rostov region of the Russian Federation and in the penal colony No. 77 in the occupied Ukrainian city of Berdiansk, Zaporizhzhia region, where prisoners are tortured and held in inhumane conditions. The Russian military first detained Roshchyna in Berdiansk in March 2022, when she was reporting for the media in the temporarily occupied territories. The journalist was released after being forced to record a video message saying that she had no complaints against the Russian military. Roshchyna returned to the government-controlled territory, but in July 2023, she went back to the occupied territories. She disappeared on August 3, 2023, and after some time, official information was received that she was in captivity.

However, on October 10, 2024, it became known that journalist Viktoriia Roshchyna had died in Russian captivity. It was later revealed that she had been prepared for a prisoner exchange, but she did not live to see it. Ukrainian law enforcement authorities classified this event as a war crime combined with intentional murder. The criminal proceedings initially launched over her disappearance were additionally reclassified under Part 2 of Article 438 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine (violation of the laws and customs of war combined with intentional murder). As of now, Viktoriia Roshchyna's body has been returned to Ukraine. It is currently not possible to determine the exact cause of her death, but a preliminary examination of her body indicates that she was subjected to torture and electric shocks. This provides grounds to state that her death was either the result of intentional killing or a consequence of cruel treatment and/or violence [12].

On February 26, 2024, the city of Tokmak, Zaporizhzhia region, was occupied by Russian troops. Russian troops forced all the clergy of the Berdiansk diocese to sign documents demanding the transfer to the Russian Orthodox Church. The priest Kostiantyn Maksimov was also repeatedly forced to sign these documents, but he refused every time. Not only did he not sign these documents, but he also did not commemorate Patriarch Kirill of the Russian Orthodox Church during church services, for which he was reprimanded by the rector of the church. Subsequently, it was for this reason that he was detained by the Russian military in the city of Tokmak and placed in the so-called

“pit”. After some time, the rector of the church suspended Kostiantyn Maksimov and sent him to serve in the village of Molochansk. Due to systematic pressure, he was forced to leave the occupied city of Tokmak, Zaporizhzhia region, for the occupied Autonomous Republic of Crimea. On the same day, he told his friends that he had arrived at a checkpoint (probably Chongar). Since then, he has been out of contact. Only from Kostiantyn's letters it became known that since his detention he had been held for 9 months in the occupied city of Melitopol, Zaporizhzhia region, and was placed in a “basement”. During all this time, he was severely beaten by the Russian military, electrocuted and mocked. In February 2024, he was transferred to the Melitopol Pre-trial Detention Center, and only in March 2024 did it become known about his whereabouts from his note. The note said: “Mother, I am alive, I am being tried under Article 276 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation. Only an exchange will save me. Take care of yourself.”

Thus, for almost a year there was no information about him and his whereabouts, and only in May 2024, through a Russian lawyer, was it established that K.V. Maksimov was being held in the Pre-trial Detention Center No. 2 in Simferopol. His health condition deteriorated as a result of his detention. In June 2024, a response was received to a request from the Russian lawyer regarding the detention of K.V. Maksimov in the Pre-trial Detention Center No. 2 in Simferopol, grounds: the decision of the Zaporizhzhia Regional Court of 18.04.2024, a preventive measure in the form of detention). In July 2024, the Zaporizhzhia Regional Court sentenced him to 14 years in prison. The sentence was appealed to the court of appeal, but upheld. He was subsequently transferred to a penal colony in the Russian Federation. His health condition is currently critical. His imprisonment and further stay in detention poses a real danger to his health and life. The law enforcement agencies of Ukraine have initiated criminal proceedings and are also investigating this fact of torture, illegal deprivation of liberty and criminal prosecution.

These are all examples of war crimes and violations of international humanitarian law by the military and officials of the Russian Federation. In the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine, the Russian Federation persecutes clergymen who actively opposed cooperation with the occupiers. Repressions similar to those in Soviet times have returned to the Ukrainian territories temporarily occupied by Russia. Thus, Father Kostiantyn was illegally detained in the occupied territories, held for almost a year even without a properly formalized procedural detention. In the end, they organized a demonstrative illegal trial against him and sentenced him to 14 years in a strict regime penal colony.

All these facts call for not only registering, but also taking criminal prosecution measures by the law enforcement agencies of Ukraine in order to bring to justice the officials of the occupation authorities and the military of the Russian Federation involved, even in terms of a special investigation (*in absentia*).

### **3. Ways to Improve The Investigation of Criminal Offenses Related to the Illegal Detention of Ukrainian Citizens (Civilian Prisoners of War)**

To develop a methodology for investigators of the National Police of Ukraine to investigate the illegal detention of Ukrainian citizens on the territory of the Russian Federation and the temporarily occupied territories, which should include a section on the investigation of murder both with and without a corpse present. To involve representatives of the Office of the Prosecutor General, the National Police of Ukraine, the Security Service of Ukraine, the National School of Judges of Ukraine, representatives of the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights, lawyers specializing in this category of cases, human rights defenders and academic institutions in the work on this methodology.

It can be stated that there is a lack of proper communication between such participants in the criminal process as investigators, relatives and lawyers of the victims, which is one of the problems that hinders the effective investigation of the illegal detention of Ukrainian citizens in the Russian Federation and the temporarily occupied territories. There are systemic cases when the National Police investigators expect full and comprehensive information from lawyers about the course of events and facts, procedural decisions in cases conducted by investigators of the Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation as well as information from lawyers defending civilians in the Russian Federation, in particular, about the physical condition and health of civilian prisoners of war, the process of investigation, case consideration and whether a guilty verdict has been reached. In addition, information on the transfer of already convicted civilian prisoners of war to penal institutions in the Russian Federation is extremely important. This is crucial for ensuring the rights and freedoms of civilian prisoners of war, as sending inquiries to such institutions is an effective means of minimal control over their health and conditions of detention (even reducing the number of cases of placement in a punishment cell or cases of torture). The above is reasoned by objective and subjective factors, a significant workload of investigators and lack of special knowledge in investigating this category of criminal offenses and limited opportunities to use procedural tools.

Investigators of the National Police of Ukraine should be aware of the circumstances that negatively affect the course and outcome of the pre-trial investigation when investigating the illegal detention of Ukrainian citizens. The authorities of the Russian Federation are taking active countermeasures to conceal the facts of systemic violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, in particular, *detention of civilian prisoners of war (hostages)* on the territory of the Russian Federation, the use of systemic measures of coercion and torture against them, humiliation of honor and dignity, detention in inhumane conditions, failure to provide adequate medical and legal assistance.

#### 4. Conclusion

The Ukrainian state must do everything possible to find and release civilian prisoners of war and bring to justice those who commit war crimes and crimes against humanity. The law enforcement agencies of Ukraine play an important role in this process, and they must work together. The practice of investigating criminal offenses related to the illegal detention of civilian prisoners of war (*hostages*) showed that investigators of the National Police of Ukraine and their procedural supervisors, prosecutors, were not ready for such cases. Therefore, it was only during the years of war that the need to make changes to the organization of pre-trial investigations *and introducing amendments to the regulatory acts that govern the same* was recognized. Therefore, at the moment, it can be stated that no systematic work is being done to bring Russian military and occupation authorities, including investigators, prosecutors, judges and penitentiary system officials to criminal responsibility for war crimes and crimes against humanity. Criminal prosecution is a guarantee of ensuring the effectiveness of international humanitarian law and fundamental human rights.

At the same time, to intensify work in this field, joint investigative teams should be created from among representatives of various law enforcement agencies such as the National Police of Ukraine, the Security Service of Ukraine, the State Bureau of Investigation and the Office of the Prosecutor General. Furthermore, it is necessary to establish effective interaction between investigative bodies and investigative journalists who have experience in searching for information according to certain criteria. Due to the fact that the investigative journalists have proven their professionalism and ability to search for information in complex cases with minimal data, as evidenced by the documentaries “Take No Prisoners”, Slidstvo.Info, 2023, and “Shadows on the Left Bank: Terror in the Russia-Occupied Territories”, The Kyiv Independent, 2024.

It is also essential to provide advanced training for investigators of the National Police of Ukraine and prosecutors acting as procedural supervisors in the investigation of cases of missing persons and civilian prisoners of war. The developed methods of investigating these crimes *and the gained experience* should be improved with the involvement of experts from non-governmental organizations and human rights defenders.

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