



Guidance for talking to the public about Amnesty International's work on the conflict in Ukraine

When holding events to raise funds for our work protecting human rights in Ukraine, you may have questions from the public. The Russian invasion of Ukraine has been a prominent news story for most of the year and many people feel passionately about it. This document aims to give you the confidence to answer some of the questions you might get and to clarify Amnesty International's position on the conflict. This is not for external distribution - please do not distribute copies at your events. The purpose of this document is to inform local group members who will be representing Amnesty International at public-facing events.

Please remember, you do not need to engage in any conversation that makes you feel uncomfortable. If you find yourself in this position, you can redirect the person or people engaging with you to the Amnesty International UK Supporter Communications team (sct@amnesty.org.uk.)

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How Does Amnesty's Crisis Evidence Lab Work?

Amnesty International's Crisis Evidence Lab plays a vital role in remotely documenting human rights abuses and ensuring that we receive accurate information from conflict areas. Our Crisis Evidence Lab is crucial to our gathering evidence, particularly in areas where it is too dangerous for our investigators to be on the ground.

Since the Russian invasion, our Crisis Evidence Lab has been working to collecting audio-visual evidence from Ukraine which may contain evidence of violations of International Humanitarian Law (the laws of war). This includes indiscriminate attacks on civilian areas, use of banned weapons such as cluster munitions, or strikes on protected places such as hospitals and schools. For example, we verified that a Russian 'dumb bomb' air strike had killed civilians in the Ukrainian city of Chernihiv.

We receive evidence from several sources, including eyewitnesses in Ukraine, which is called 'user generated content'. We then apply tests to ensure that it is what it claims to be, such as confirming where the video / photo was taken and who took it. We do that by crosschecking it with satellite imagery, and other publicly available information such as weather reports and street level data. For example, we look at the landscape, trees, buildings, streets, etc in the images and match them with ground level photography like street view or satellite images to check the location.

Amnesty International also have expertise in modern weapons. That allows us to verify what weapons are being used, be that from images of the weapons in use or from the impact that the weaponry has had.

Our Crisis Evidence Lab works to provide documentation which can be used to hold perpetrators of human rights violations accountable. It tells the stories of civilian people being directly affected by conflict, including the conflict in Ukraine.

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What is Amnesty International's position on the crime of aggression?

Amnesty International has determined that Russia's invasion of Ukraine is a manifest violation of the UN Charter and an act of aggression that is a crime under international law. We therefore call for all those involved in this crime to be held accountable for those violations. Amnesty International calls for accountability for the crime of aggression because interventions characterised by the commission of the crime of aggression will almost inevitably lead directly (or indirectly) to human rights violations - characterised by unimaginable harm and suffering - as well as crimes under international law.

Amnesty International will call on the international community to urgently consider how the perpetrators of all crimes of aggression, including in Ukraine, may be held individually accountable. Amnesty International will call on States to put in place systems to ensure individual accountability in a way that avoids the selectivity and double standards currently reflected in many proposals on accountability for the crime of aggression committed against Ukraine. This is important in that, for the first time in our 70 years, Amnesty International has taken this position i.e. that the invasion is a manifest violation of the UN Charter and an act of aggression that is itself a crime under international law.

What are your key calls for international justice in Ukraine

Amnesty International calls for all perpetrators, from all sides of the conflict, to be brought to justice through independent, impartial, and fair trials for all crimes under international law, including the crimes of aggression. The rights of victims of crimes under international law must be at the forefront of investigations and prosecutions, and victims must be able to fully realise their rights to truth, justice, and reparations. All national and international institutions with jurisdiction over the crimes committed in Ukraine, including the national authorities in Ukraine and the International Criminal Court (ICC), must take immediate steps to ensure that evidence is collected and preserved so that those most responsible are brought to account in fair trials.

What does Amnesty International say about reports that Ukrainian Fascists / 'Nazis' / Extremists are persecuting minorities and committing other human rights violations in Ukraine?

President Putin, the media in Russia (which is under near-total state-control) and the entire state propaganda machinery have asserted that Russia has launched a "special operation" to "de-Nazify" Ukraine. There is, to put it simply, no basis behind this claim, and Amnesty International views this as an attempt to justify Russia's aggression against Ukraine in the eyes of its own people and the rest of the world.

Amnesty International is concerned about all forms of racism, and any incidents of advocacy of discrimination or violence, wherever they occur. We have been outspoken on these issues, the evidence of which is in all our latest Annual Reports, and many other publications. However, the Russian authorities' claims regarding the scale and severity of this issue in Ukraine is manifestly disingenuous, as is their choice of wording ("fascists", "Nazis", etc.). They serve the purpose of justifying Russia's aggression in Ukraine and are a clear case of misinformation and disinformation.

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What is Amnesty International's position on arms transfer to Ukraine?

Russia is subject to a comprehensive EU and US arms embargo, with other western countries adopting similar measures. It is largely provisioned by its own substantial domestic defence industry. Ukraine has been receiving arms and military assistance from EU member states, Australia, Canada, Turkey, the UK, and the US. Over the past few years, the US has provided \$2.7 billion in training and equipment. The EU has agreed to provide 450 million euros for weapons for Ukraine and 50 million euros for non-lethal equipment from the European Peace Fund.

Amnesty International does not advocate for arms transfers. We would, however, oppose arms transfers if there was a substantial risk that arms would be misused for serious violations of international human rights or humanitarian law - a position that we are not currently taking in relation to Ukraine. All arms export authorisations must be subject to strict human rights risk assessments – including assessments of the risks of diversion to unauthorised end-users - as set out in national, regional, and international law. This is particularly relevant in relation to transfers of small arms and light weapons and related ammunition which have had devastating conflict and post-conflict human rights impacts in many parts of the world. As with all arms transfers, it is incumbent upon states who transfer or authorise weapons transfers to ensure that a robust oversight mechanism is in place so that it is possible to trace where and how the weapons are used. Authorisations should be periodically reassessed considering new information, especially in a fast-evolving situation such as Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

What is Amnesty International's position on the forced conscription of men aged 18-60 in Ukraine

No-one should be compelled to engage in military service contrary to their conscience, religion, or belief.

Conscientious objectors should be exempted from military service and suffer no punishment for exercising their right to freedom of conscience. The authorities must at least ensure conscientious objectors have the alternative of working within a civil defence force, for example in rescue, first-aid, or similar emergency services.

The authorities must also address concerns of individuals at particular risk of violence within the military, for example in relation to their sexual orientation and gender identity.

Does Amnesty International have a position on foreign fighters who travel to Ukraine to fight against Russian forces?

Foreign fighters, like anyone directly participating in hostilities, must respect international humanitarian law. Ukraine is responsible for violations committed by any forces fighting under its command. And there must be independent and impartial investigations into allegations of violations, and if merited, suspects must be prosecuted in fair trials.



Why has Amnesty International criticised Ukrainian forces?

Independence, impartiality and evidence are the core principles underlying all Amnesty International's work, and all our research is based on objective reporting of the evidence.

Between April and July, Amnesty International researchers investigated Russian strikes in Ukraine and concluded that many of those strikes amounted to serious violations of international law, including war crimes.

In the course of our investigations, we also found evidence of the Ukrainian military's practice of locating itself in civilian areas and heard from Ukrainian civilians who had been affected. This practice in no way justifies Russia's routine violations; but nor do Russia's violations relieve Ukraine of its obligations under international law.

These obligations mean Ukrainian forces [must avoid](#), to the extent feasible, locating military objectives in densely populated areas. The failure to take such precautions poses unnecessary risks to civilians.

Amnesty International's findings on Ukrainian violations come in the context of our continued condemnation of Russia's invasion. We continue to call for Russian forces to be held accountable for serious violations of international humanitarian law and war crimes.

Amnesty International will never ignore human rights violations. We will continue to call them out whenever and wherever they occur, and no matter who is responsible for them.

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Further Questions

These are a selection of topics that you may receive questions on, and not a comprehensive summary of all of our work on human rights in the context of the invasion of Ukraine. Please contact sct@amnesty.org.uk if you have any other questions about our work.