



IZOLIATSIIA
FROM
CULTURE
TO
TORTURE

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Abbreviations

“DPR”	“Donetsk People’s Republic”
EoC	Elements of Crimes
ECtHR	European Court of Human Rights
FSB	Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation
ICC	International Criminal Court
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
ICTY	International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia
IHL	International Humanitarian Law
“LPR”	“Luhansk People’s Republic”
MIHR	Media Initiative for Human Rights
MIA	Ministry of Internal Affairs of the “Donetsk People’s Republic”
MSS	Ministry of State Security of the “Donetsk People’s Republic”
UNHRMMU	UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine
OHCHR	UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
OSINT	Open-Source Intelligence
RS	Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court
UN	United Nations

A Note on Terms

The terms “Donetsk People’s Republic” and “Luhansk People’s Republic,” their acronyms, as well as in references to their structures, such as the “DPR” Ministry of State Security and Ministry of Internal Affairs, are placed in quotation marks throughout this report to reflect their self-proclaimed and unrecognized status. The use of these terms is for identification only and does not imply recognition of the entity, its purported institutions, or its claimed authority.¹

Unless directly quoting from a source or using an exhibition name, when written with quotation marks, “Izoliatsiia” refers to the detention site. Izoliatsiia written without quotation marks refers to the site as an industrial plant and later an art foundation. The Art Foundation refers to the site as “Izolyatsia;” this report uses the spelling “Izoliatsiia,” except when quoting source language.

Executive Summary

Twelve years ago, on June 9, 2014, armed fighters from the Russia-backed “Donetsk People’s Republic” (“DPR”) seized the Izoliatsiia cultural center in Donetsk, Ukraine. That seizure set in motion the site’s brutal transformation from a prominent cultural center into a place of violence and repression. In the days that followed, armed groups took control of the cultural center, vandalized property, and stripped the site of both its artistic purpose and civic meaning. The seizure marked more than the loss of a cultural institution. From that point onward, Izoliatsiia symbolized the destruction caused by occupation authorities when places of creativity and public life are transformed into an instrument of fear.

This report examines the establishment and operation of the illegal detention facility known as “Izoliatsiia.” Drawing on 30 survivor testimonies, institutional interviews, prior human rights reporting, documentary material, and open-source investigation, it finds reasonable grounds to conclude that the violence at “Izoliatsiia” formed part of a systematic attack against a civilian population. The report identifies four crimes that the evidence supports most strongly—imprisonment, enforced disappearance, torture, and sexual violence—and demonstrates how these abuses followed repeated patterns, operated through a structured system of control, and continued over more than a decade. On that basis, the available evidence supports the conclusion that these categories of conduct may qualify as crimes against humanity in this case.

Ukraine’s 2024 legal reforms create an important opening for accountability for crimes committed at “Izoliatsiia.” By adding crimes against humanity and command responsibility to domestic law,

Ukraine has given domestic prosecutors stronger tools to address the long-running, organized pattern of unlawful imprisonment, torture, sexual violence, and other inhumane acts documented at “Izoliatsiia.” The legal analysis supports future case building by helping Ukrainian prosecutors assess possible crimes against humanity charges. It may also assist prosecutors in other countries considering universal jurisdiction cases where domestic law allows.

The report places “Izoliatsiia” in the wider context of the international armed conflict in Ukraine. The first chapter traces the origins of the conflict to Russia’s armed occupation of Crimea and its decisive military, political, and operational control over armed groups in eastern Ukraine from 2014 onward. It establishes the context in which “Izoliatsiia” emerged as a site of detention and violence and situates the crimes committed there within the broader structure of Russian occupation and control.

The second chapter explains the historical, cultural, and social transformations of the Izoliatsiia site from 1955, when it began as an insulation materials factory, to later becoming a prominent contemporary art and cultural center. It then explains how in June 2014 Russian-controlled forces converted the site into a multifunctional military and security facility for illegal detention and how occupation authorities destroyed and repurposed a socially and culturally important space into one of violence, fear, and humiliation.

The next chapter maps how official authority over “Izoliatsiia” evolved after its seizure. It traces control from early armed formations and *ad hoc* struc-

tures to the so-called “Ministry of State Security” (MSS) of the “DPR” with further links to the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation (FSB) and other Russian officials or representatives. The chapter shows that the crimes at “Izoliatsiia” unfolded within a system of command, supervision, and institutional support.

The chapter on patterns of violence and their impact on survivors forms the factual basis of the report. It documents violence at the time of arrest, abuse during transfers and interrogations, inhumane detention conditions, repeated physical torture, sexual violence, psychological coercion, and the long-term physical and psychological consequences that many survivors continue to suffer. Survivors describe arrests at gunpoint, beatings, electrocution, stress positions, mock executions, threats against relatives, rape and other forms of sexual violence, forced nudity, severe humiliation, prolonged isolation, denial of medical care, and conditions designed to break them physically and psychologically. The chapter demonstrates repetition, method, and consistency across accounts.

The legal chapter examines how the evidence meets the Rome Statute (RS) requirements for crimes against humanity. It analyzes the contextual elements of Article 7 and applies them to imprisonment, enforced disappearance, torture, and sexual violence. The report finds that, based on available facts, the abuses at “Izoliatsiia” followed repeated patterns and operated through organized structures. Taken together, the evidence supports the conclusion that these crimes formed part of a widespread or systematic attack against a civilian population and may amount to crimes against humanity.

The chapter on alleged perpetrators identifies the main categories of actors that future investigations should prioritize. It focuses on those who may have exercised strategic, institutional, or supervisory control over “Izoliatsiia;” personnel associated with the MSS, MIA, or other *de facto* security bodies who allegedly coordinated arrests, transfers, interrogations, detention decisions, and concealment of detainees; facility leaders and on-site managers who controlled daily detention conditions; recurring direct perpetrators and specialist personnel involved in torture, punishment, interrogation, sexual violence, or

other core crimes; and Russian security structures, including FSB-linked actors. The chapter shows that accountability should not stop with guards or direct perpetrators. Instead, it should examine how the facility operated within a wider apparatus of detention, coercion, concealment, and institutional control.

Available open-source information, supported by corroborating testimony from former detainees released recently, indicates that the “Izoliatsiia” complex remained active in 2025. Satellite imagery shows infrastructure work, construction materials, vehicle presence, and signs of heating in the buildings. Although this material does not establish the nature of every activity on the “Izoliatsiia” site, it strongly suggests that the danger of ongoing abuse remains real.

The crimes at “Izoliatsiia” reveal how occupation authorities seized and desecrated a socially and culturally important space to sow terror and repression. The documented violations show why accountability is needed at both the individual and command levels. The findings and analysis underscore the importance of full accountability to deliver justice for survivors, and affirm the Russian Federation’s responsibility for grave violations of international humanitarian law. Justice remains essential to exposing, disrupting, and ending the system of repression at “Izoliatsiia.”

Recommendations

To the Prosecutor General's Office of Ukraine, the Security Service of Ukraine, the National Police of Ukraine, and other competent Ukrainian investigative authorities:

- Enhance investigative efforts into crimes committed at "Izoliatsiia" as part of an organized system of abuse, and build cases that reflect the full scale and coordinated nature of the conduct, including imprisonment, enforced disappearance, torture, rape, and other forms of sexual violence. Evidence should be assessed with a view to bringing crimes against humanity charges where the facts support them.
- Pursue responsibility across the full chain of command. Investigations should target not only guards and direct perpetrators, but also those who ordered, enabled, coordinated, supervised, or concealed abuses at the facility, including individuals linked to the *de facto* administration of the site, the MSS and MIA, and Russian officials or representatives associated with its operation and oversight.
- Develop a coordinated prosecutorial strategy for "Izoliatsiia" and comparable detention sites in occupied territory. That strategy should connect repeated abuses over time, identify recurring perpetrators and structures of control, and use linkage evidence to prove the organized and systematic nature of the crimes.
- Ensure that survivors can participate safely and meaningfully in accountability processes. Strengthen witness protection, trauma-informed interviewing, confidential referral

pathways, and long-term psychosocial support, including for survivors of sexual violence and torture.

- Preserve and organize evidence now for future domestic and foreign proceedings, including survivor testimony, open-source material, imagery, records, communications, and evidence relevant to command structures and the cultural property violations.
- Investigate the destruction, looting, seizure, and desecration of cultural objects and the former art space at "Izoliatsiia" as violations in their own right.

To the Prosecutor General's Office, and international partners providing rule-of-law and accountability assistance to Ukraine:

- Provide specialized support to help Ukrainian prosecutors and investigators build crimes against humanity cases arising from "Izoliatsiia" and similar detention sites. That support should include sustained training on Article 7 crimes, the contextual elements of crimes against humanity, linkage evidence, modes of liability, and case-building strategies that capture patterns rather than isolated incidents.
- Support multidisciplinary investigation teams that combine prosecutors, investigators, analysts, open-source specialists, psychologists, and experts on conflict-related sexual violence, detention systems, and cultural property to build integrated pattern analysis and survivor-centered investigative practice.

- Expand access to analytical and technical support needed for large-pattern international crimes cases, including tools and personnel able to map perpetrators, timelines, detention structures, chains of command, and recurring methods of abuse over many years.
- Ensure that assistance to Ukrainian prosecutors also covers crimes against cultural property, including documentation standards, evidentiary strategies, and legal pathways for accountability and restitution.

To foreign prosecutors, specialized war crimes units, and national authorities able to exercise universal or other extraterritorial jurisdiction:

- Open or advance structural investigations into crimes committed at "Izoliatsiia" where domestic law allows for prosecution of torture, enforced disappearance, sexual violence, war crimes, crimes against humanity, or related offenses on the basis of universal or other extraterritorial jurisdiction.
- Prioritize cases against suspects who travel, reside, or hold assets abroad, and coordinate closely with Ukrainian authorities and documentation groups to preserve evidence and avoid duplication.

To states supporting accountability efforts in Ukraine, the European Union, the Council of Europe, and other international donors:

- Provide long-term financial, technical, and political support for investigations and prosecutions relating to "Izoliatsiia" and similar detention sites in Russian-occupied territory. Accountability for crimes against humanity requires sustained institutional backing, beyond short-term project support to Ukraine's justice sector.
- Directly support the specific capacities Ukrainian prosecutors need to bring crimes against humanity cases effectively, including Article 7 expertise, linkage analysis, survivor support, secure evidence systems, and co-

ordination between teams working on detention-related crimes, sexual violence, and cultural property violations.

- Support joint efforts by prosecutors, investigators, and civil society to document and analyze the organized nature of abuse at detention sites in occupied territory, including the role of command structures and the long-term physical and psychological impact on survivors.

To the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and relevant United Nations bodies:

- Continue to request prompt, regular, and unimpeded access to any detainees held at "Izoliatsiia" and to the facility itself, and publicly report any denial of such access, in order to increase the potential for scrutiny of ongoing abuses.

To United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO):

- Publicly condemn the destruction, looting, and desecration of cultural property at "Izoliatsiia."
- Support efforts to document, verify, and preserve evidence relating to artworks, installations, archives, and other cultural objects associated with "Izoliatsiia" including through records of loss and technical assistance that could support future restitution and accountability efforts.

To non-governmental organizations and academics:

- Continue documenting "Izoliatsiia" and similar detention sites as organized systems of abuse, including through pattern evidence that can support crimes against humanity charges and cases against those highest in the chain of responsibility.
- Deepen research on conflict-related sexual violence, coercive detention practices, enforced disappearance, torture, and the

long-term physical and psychological consequences of abuse in detention in occupied territory.

- Document the cultural dimension of abuses at "Izoliatsiia" with rigor, including the ideological destruction of Ukrainian art, the seizure or disappearance of cultural objects, and the broader erasure of civic and cultural life under occupation.
- Research the diversity and duration of the consequences of crimes committed by the occupation forces of the Russian Federation on the mental health of survivors.

To organizations supporting survivors:

- Provide sustained, trauma-informed medical, psychological, and legal support to former detainees of "Izoliatsiia" and their families, including survivors of torture and sexual violence. Help ensure that survivors can engage in documentation and accountability efforts safely, voluntarily, and with appropriate protection against retraumatization.

CHAPTER 1

METHODOLOGY

The methods employed during the preparation of this report include a combination of documented testimonial evidence, analysis of the pre-existing materials, institutional consultation, and open-source investigation and monitoring.

FIRST-HAND TESTIMONIAL EVIDENCE: Survivor testimonies form the foundation of this report and describe nearly a decade of violations. These include 9 first-hand accounts from witnesses and survivors gathered in the late 2010s and 13 new testimonies obtained during interviews conducted in 2025–2026 with survivors released from captivity after the start of the full-scale invasion, in particular with the majority of those released in 2025.² Before interviews, Truth Hounds explained the purpose of the interview, gave interviewees the option to maintain anonymity, and explained their right to determine how the information provided would be used. In addition, the report draws on 8 testimonies collected by the Media Initiative for Human Rights (MIHR), within the Ukraine 5 AM coalition.

Based on analysis of first-hand testimonial evidence, the authors identified at least 127 survivors who had been subjected to the violence discussed. To protect survivors and witnesses and preserve their anonymity, this report cites their testimonies using anonymized reference codes, with each individual assigned a unique number.

REVIEW OF EXISTING REPORTS AND INVESTIGATIVE FINDINGS: To contextualize and corroborate testimonial evidence, we conducted a thorough analysis of previous reports and reputable investigative reporting. We paid particular attention to the findings of the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UN OHCHR),³ the work of the ECR Group⁴ and the MIHR,⁵ and other relevant organizations whose reporting has contributed to the broader contextual understanding. We also referred to the investigative findings of Ukrainian criminal justice agencies that investigated crimes committed on the territory of “Izoliatsiia.” These sources offered essential comparative material, enabling cross-validation of facts and pattern identification across time periods.

INSTITUTIONAL AND CONTEXTUAL INTERVIEWS: We also conducted four interviews with representatives of the non-governmental platform for cultural initiatives, Izolyatsia Foundation, which provided important institutional and local perspectives. These interviews shed light on the art platform’s founding vision, the exhibits, and their subsequent fate under militant control. These

contributions added a cultural dimension to the violations at “Izoliatsiia.”

OPEN-SOURCE RESEARCH AND MONITORING: Open-source research and monitoring played a substantial role in this report, both in identifying responsible individuals and alleged direct perpetrators and in situating events at “Izoliatsiia” within their broader context. We examined publicly accessible digital material, including photographs, videos, internal documentation, social media activity, archived online content, media reporting from Ukrainian, Russian, and international outlets, official statements, and blog posts. These materials helped verify identities, establish timelines, connect specific individuals to particular actions, corroborate other sources, and track developments relevant to the events described in this report.

Taken together, these multiple sources ground the report in credible information while preserving the depth and nuance necessary to represent the experiences of the witnesses and survivors.

CHAPTER 2

BACKGROUND ON THE OUTBREAK OF THE INTERNATIONAL ARMED CONFLICT IN UKRAINE

This chapter examines the origins of the international armed conflict in Ukraine by tracing events that unfolded from late 2013 onward, assessing their legal and factual significance. It situates the outbreak of hostilities within a broader pattern of Russian strategic planning, covert operations, and escalating military involvement, beginning with the takeover of Crimea and extending to the consolidation of control over separatist forces in eastern Ukraine. This background contextualizes the conditions in which Russian and separatist forces seized and repurposed “Izoliatsiia” as a site of detention, repression, and abuse.

Unless otherwise indicated, this chapter relies primarily on the European Court of Human Rights’ findings in *Ukraine v. Russia (re Crimea)* and *Ukraine and the Netherlands v. Russia*.⁶ Those decisions drew on substantial evidentiary records and set out detailed findings on the broader context of Russia’s actions, control, and involvement in Crimea and eastern Ukraine. While neither decision turned on formal classification of the situation as an international armed conflict, the Court’s findings on Russian military intervention, effective control, and decisive influence strongly support that conclusion.

By late 2013, Russia had quietly laid the military groundwork for an operation in Ukraine. It assembled new, modernized units, placed them under the Southern Military District’s command, and moved them discreetly within Russia toward Crimea.⁷ Pro-Russian paramilitary groups, including the Crimean Self-Defense Forces, mobilized across the peninsula at the same time.

A former FSB officer whose involvement would later be central to violence in Donbas played a key role at this time.⁸

Despite agreements limiting Russia’s military presence in Crimea to specific bases and troop levels, Russia began deploying additional personnel and equipment in January and February 2014. Troops arrived by air and by sea, bringing unauthorized

contingents into Crimean ports.⁹ On the night of February 22-23, 2014, President Vladimir Putin declared his decision to begin efforts to return Crimea to Russia.¹⁰ Within hours, Russian paratroopers began mobilizing from Black Sea Fleet ships.¹¹

Early on February 27, the operation shifted to open action when over 100 heavily armed Russian special forces, later notoriously known as “green men,” stormed the Crimean Parliament and other government buildings. They cut communications, expelled or intimidated Ukrainian officials, and raised the Russian flag.¹² That resort to armed force between states (i.e., Russian forces against Ukrainian officials) is widely considered to mark the start of the international armed conflict in Ukraine.¹³ From that moment, international humanitarian law (IHL) applied in the whole territory of Ukraine, and will continue to apply beyond a cessation of hostilities until a general conclusion of peace is reached.¹⁴

Under the Russian forces’ coercive control, a group of parliamentarians assembled without a quorum and voted to dismiss the Crimean government, appoint a new prime minister aligned with Moscow, and called for a referendum on Crimea’s future status.¹⁵ At the same time, Russian troops and associated paramilitaries blockaded Ukrainian military units throughout the peninsula, took control of airports, ports, and highways, and sealed Crimea off from the mainland by occupying key access points.¹⁶

By the evening of February 27, 2014, Russia had effectively removed Crimea’s legitimate authorities, replaced them with a subordinate administration, and established effective military and political control. Russian forces immobilized Ukrainian units, blocked reinforcements, and continued to expand deployments without authorization.¹⁷ After the so-called Crimea ‘referendum’ on March 16, 2014,¹⁸ and Russia’s announcement of Crimea’s incorporation on March 18, the momentum of separatist activity grew across Ukraine’s eastern regions.

On April 7, 2014, separatists occupied the Donetsk Regional Administration and declared the “Donetsk People’s Republic” (“DPR”). On May 11, separatist authorities held so-called “independen-

⁶ “Donbas” is a portmanteau of the Donets Basin, referring to the Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts of Ukraine.

¹³ International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), *Prosecutor v. Tadić*, Case No. IT-94-1-A, Appeals Chamber, Judgment on Appeal, Oct. 2, 1995, para. 70: “[A]n armed conflict exists whenever there is a resort to armed force between States or protracted armed violence between governmental authorities and organized armed groups or between such groups within a State.”

dence referendums” in separatist-controlled areas of Donetsk and Luhansk and announced results in favor of secession from Ukraine.¹⁹

Russian-backed forces used armed coercion and territorial control to run both referendums, which had no legal basis under Ukrainian law and lacked basic democratic safeguards. The international community widely condemned the referendums as unlawful and undemocratic, even as the Russian Federation publicly endorsed them. Shortly thereafter, the new “authorities” formalized separatist political structures and filled key leadership positions predominantly with Russian nationals.²⁰

From this point forward, Russia’s influence deepened into direct operational control. By mid-May 2014, evidence from intelligence assessments, communications intercepts, and later judicial findings demonstrated that Russia exercised decisive influence over the command structure of the separatist entities. Russian officials helped appoint senior “DPR” figures, and Russian forces regularly and systematically coordinated with “DPR” units.²¹ It was within this broader context of Russian intervention and control in eastern Ukraine that Izoliatsiia, located in Donetsk, was seized and transformed into an illegal detention facility.

Russia deployed growing numbers of troops along the border. From early July 2014, independent investigations and intelligence reports confirmed that Russian artillery units fired from Russian territory into Ukraine. These cross-border strikes, supported by satellite imagery, vehicle tracks, and intercepted conversations, demonstrated not only Russian participation but coordinated joint operations between “DPR” fighters and Russian military personnel. Russian units also crossed into Ukrainian territory, conducted fire missions, and returned across the border. Communications between “DPR” commanders in mid-July explicitly referenced Russian involvement, including requests for Russian fire support and confirmation that Russia had begun direct attacks on Ukrainian positions.²² As such, by mid-2014, the Russian Federation was openly providing financing, manpower, heavy weaponry, training, and direct operational coordination,²³ as well as exercising decisive control over separatist lead-

ership.²⁴ This active fighting persisted in varying forms between 2014 and 2021.

In February 2022, the conflict entered a new and overtly interstate phase. Following a dramatic rise in ceasefire violations reported by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the separatists’ announcement of mass evacuations, Russia formally recognized the “DPR” and “LPR” as “independent,” signed “treaties” with them, and ordered Russian troops into the territories under the guise of “peacekeeping” on February 21, 2022.²⁵

By February 23, 2022, approximately 190,000 members of the Russian Armed Forces had been deployed along the border with Ukraine and in Crimea. The following day, Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine from multiple directions, including through Belarus, accompanied by airstrikes and ground offensives throughout the country.²⁶

A statue of a deer on the "Izolyatsia" slag heap, which was transformed into a firing position during the occupation.



CHAPTER 3

HISTORICAL TRAJECTORY OF THE IZOLIATSIIA SITE IN DONETSK

This chapter traces the history of the Izoliatsiia site from industrial enterprise to cultural institution and, later, to a place of occupation and eventually detention and torture. It describes how shifts in power, ideology, and armed conflict remade the site itself and its place in the social and cultural life of Donetsk.

3.1. Establishment and Operation of the Izoliatsiia Factory

In spring 1955, a raw mineral wool factory²⁷ opened on Svitloho Shlyakhu Street on the outskirts of Donetsk.²⁸ It was part of the region's post-war reconstruction and industrial expansion.²⁹ The plant, later known as Izoliatsiia, started with two production lines and 80 employees, and later grew substantially.³⁰

The plant's mineral wool was used in thermal power engineering, the military-industrial complex, aviation, shipbuilding, and the space industry. In the 1970s, the factory reached its peak, supplying products to other Soviet republics and exporting to Finland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary. The plant was also home to important social infrastructure, including a kindergarten, a club, an orchestra, and a sports team.³¹ "Since childhood, I learned to understand what 'social responsibility' means: when a healthy community becomes the foundation of society. I inherited this from my father, and I am very grateful to him for that," says Lyubov Mikhailova, daughter of the plant's last director. She later founded the Izolyatsia Foundation, an art center.³²

The factory's social infrastructure helped turn its workforce, which reached about 1,000 employees at its peak, into a community with shared interests and activities beyond work.³³ The factory club played a particularly important role. In Soviet society, especially during the thaw³⁴ and perestroika,³⁵ workers' clubs often served not only as instruments of party indoctrination but also as spaces for socializing and self-expression.³⁶ After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Izoliatsiia factory gradually went bankrupt.³⁷ Its closure in 2005 brought the company's 50-year history to an end.

3.2. First Transformation: Conversion into a Cultural and Art Space

In 2010, Lyubov Mykhailova gave Izoliatsiia's walls a new purpose by founding the Izolyatsia Foundation. She privatized the former factory and transformed the industrial site of workshops, slag heaps, and underground premises into a cultural art space for local, national, and international audiences.³⁸ Without major reconstruction, the site shifted from industrial production to exhibitions and performances that drew directly on its industrial history and mining culture.³⁹

The first exhibition, *Izolyatsia 2.0*, signaled a new chapter for the space while staying connected to its industrial past.⁴⁰ Curated by Adam Nankervis, it brought together five Ukrainian artists to explore the theme of transformation and the relationship between industrial heritage, contemporary art, and the urban environment.⁴¹

Izoliatsiia's most important artistic event came in summer 2011, when Chinese artist Cai Guo-Qiang staged a solo exhibition there. Known for using gunpowder in his work, Cai immersed himself in the industrial landscape of Donbas: he descended 1,040 meters into local mines, walked more than 1,000 meters through underground tunnels, and climbed the Izoliatsiia slag heap to take in panoramic views of industrial Donetsk.⁴²

With nine local artists,⁴³ Cai Guo-Qiang created his central installation, *Monuments on Shoulders*, in public and mounted the finished works on frames modeled on those used for portraits of Soviet leaders in propaganda parades. The project resonated strongly with the local community: miners featured in the portraits came with their families and colleagues, and many took pride in seeing their work and lives transformed into art.⁴⁴ In this way, Cai highlighted the dignity of local labor and working culture.

²⁸ The city of Donetsk has had a complicated history of renaming. Initially, the settlement, founded in 1869 by Welsh metallurgist John Hughes, was called Yuzivka, then it became Stalino, and in 1961 it became Donetsk.

³⁴ "Thaw" refers to a period of liberalization introduced by Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev from 1953 to 1964 that eased Soviet repressions and censorship.

³⁵ "Perestroika" refers to the program introduced by Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev in the 1980s to reform Soviet political policy and improve the economic situation.



Portrait of miner Serhii Ampilogov by Dmytro Sergeev and Cai Guo-Qiang as part of the powder painting installation *Monuments on Shoulders*.⁴⁵

In 2012, the Foundation and the Italian gallery Continua launched *In Search of Time*, a group project that included Cameroonian artist Pascale Marthine Tayou.⁴⁶ After engaging with Donetsk residents, Tayou drew inspiration from women's role in rebuilding the city after the war and created *Make up... Peace!*, a five-meter lipstick installed on the factory's tallest boiler-room pipe.

The work brought themes of women, the body, and sensuality into Donetsk's industrial heritage for the first time.

In just 4 years, Izoliatsiia became one of Ukraine's leading contemporary art centers, second only to the PinchukArtCentre in Kyiv. It combined deep engagement with the local community with an ability to attract internationally renowned artists, bringing Donetsk into the global contemporary art scene. Unlike Kyiv's more formal galleries, Izoliatsiia offered an ambitious but less conventional model of a cultural institution, which drew growing international attention.

One of the Foundation's core ideas was to show Donbas's diversity of voices. It gave space even to people whose views stood far from those of

contemporary art. For example, Donetsk writer Fedir Berezin, author of *Red Stars over Maidan* and later deputy minister of defense of the "DPR," spoke at the center.⁴⁷ Today, references to the many voices of Donbas carry a tragic weight. Russian occupation policy instrumentalized a single authoritarian voice that claimed the right to speak for the entire region.

Izoliatsiia's first transformation made it a symbol of a new era in Ukrainian culture, as contemporary art confronted the post-Soviet past as memory and critique. But war and political upheaval in 2014 eclipsed that moment and the expressions of the region's diversity. The Foundation and most of its staff relocated to Kyiv and opened IZONE, at the Kyiv Shipbuilding and Ship Repair Plant,⁴⁸ while history returned to Donetsk in its most brutal form.

3.3. Second Transformation: Seizure and Repurposing under Occupation

On April 7, 2014, militants seized the Donetsk Regional State Administration building, while Russian flags were raised all over the city. Even then, Izoliatsiia remained a rare refuge, continuing to host artistic and cultural events. This included the first Ukrainian literary festival on April 23, bringing together writers, artists, and filmmakers from all over Ukraine and foreign guests. The festival was the last cultural event before the occupation took hold.⁴⁹ On June 9, 2014, militants of the self-proclaimed "DPR" seized Izoliatsiia, ostensibly to facilitate "humanitarian aid" arriving from Russia.⁵⁰

A significant part of the Izolyatsia Foundation team was outside Donetsk at the time and did not return home after learning about the seizure. "We had to run immediately," Mykhailo Hlubokyi later recalled. "That is, people from our team were on the lists of those who had to be caught and put 'in the basement.' No one wanted to take any risks."⁵¹ Militants briefly detained staff who were in Donetsk on the day of the seizure but later released them.⁵²

The new occupiers of the Izoliatsiia site were in possession of almost all the artwork accumulated over the 4 years of the Foundation's operations,

including large-scale installations and works by international artists and workshop equipment.⁵³ Foundation staff managed to relocate only what could fit into a single car, constituting a small part of the Foundation's property. It was impossible to evacuate everything quickly. "These are not just paintings or drawings that can be taken down and carried away," Lyubov Mykhailova later explained. "There are complex objects there, the dismantling of which can take from several days to several weeks. The people who are now stationed on the territory of Izoliatsiia, the military, are far from art, especially contemporary art, and I am afraid that all of this will be mostly destroyed."⁵⁴

Since then, the "DPR" Ministry of State Security has used the site to store military equipment and weapons, train militants, and illegally detain civilians.⁵⁵

For the armed groups that had just established control over Donetsk, the former factory proved to be extremely convenient. The underground bunkers, designed by Soviet engineers to protect against nuclear strikes, were ideal as bomb shelters or for hiding weapons and military equipment.⁵⁶ The site's large workshops could house barracks, and the fenced-off 7.5-hectare grounds made it possible to control access and avoid scrutiny.

Ideology mattered as much as military convenience. After seizing the Izoliatsiia site, representatives of the self-proclaimed "DPR" targeted symbols of Ukrainian and international cultural life that did not fit their worldview. Between June 10 and 15, militia members vandalized the property and destroyed the art collection that Izoliatsiia workers had not managed to save.⁵⁷

In the fall of 2014, the occupiers blew up the five-meter-high installation *Make up... Peace!*, destroying the boiler room's chimney along with it. Upon learning of the destruction, the artist, Tayou, said: "I laughed, then I was lost for words and shocked. I don't know what drives them if they see this as perversion, but there is no room for hatred in my heart."⁵⁸

Leonid Baranov, a representative of the so-called Special Committee of the Russian Occupation Administration, explained the motives for the

seizure with rare candor: "Considering what kind of art it was, it was impossible not to seize it, because I do not consider these things, which were reproduced here for the purpose of corrupting the people of the republic, to be art, and they cannot be art. These are sick people filming and showing it to other sick people, so it will never be art."⁵⁹

The installation's destruction put one of Baranov's threats into practice: "on the territory of the Donetsk Republic, this kind of art will be punished."⁶⁰ His words echoed the "degenerate art" narrative used to justify cultural repression in the last century.⁶¹ Once again, authorities cast contemporary art as corrupt and diseased, and framed its destruction as moral purification. The seizure of Izoliatsiia thus served two purposes. It gave occupying forces a strategically important facility with existing infrastructure, and it removed a cultural institution that had spent 4 years offering a different vision of the region. A site that once explored Donbas's diverse identities became a space of enforced uniformity.



Screenshot from a video story about Leonid Baranov.⁶²

View of *Make up... Peace!* from
the factory slag heap.
Image by Dmytro Sergeev.



CHAPTER 4

CONTROL AND OVERSIGHT OF "IZOLIATSIIA" UNDER OCCUPATION

This chapter provides a chronological overview of the control and oversight of the “Izoliatsiia” site following the 2014 seizure. The analysis identifies the key actors and structures responsible for the site, from the initial occupation, through the establishment of the so-called “DPR” Ministry of State Security (MSS), to eventual oversight by Russian FSB authorities. By examining the succession of control, this chapter highlights how authority evolved into a formalized chain of command that enabled systematic detention and abuse.

Between June and early July, members of the Russian military intelligence from the “Vostok Battalion” seized control of the site.⁶³ This marked the beginning of “Izoliatsiia” as an unofficial detention center. From July until late fall 2014, a “Special Committee” reportedly controlled “Izoliatsiia.” The committee, tasked with ‘investigating and punitive functions,’ used part of the site to detain people.⁶⁴

Some sources indicated that in October or November 2014, the MSS took over “Izoliatsiia.”⁶⁵ At the same time, personnel from the Russia-backed, Donbas-based military unit “Oplot Formation” operated there,⁶⁶ further entrenching the pro-Russia military presence.⁶⁷

The OHCHR reported first cases of illegal detention of civilians by the militia of the self-proclaimed “DPR” on the territory of the plant in July and August 2014.⁶⁸ The formal establishment of the “DPR” MSS in mid-July 2014 laid the groundwork for institutionalized detention practices. In early August the Council of Ministers of the “DPR” issued a decree authorizing detentions of up to 30 days without judicial oversight, effectively legalizing arbitrary detention.⁶⁹ In late October, the MSS formally appointed one of their representatives as the facility’s head,⁷⁰ marking a shift toward a more structured, though still extralegal, command hierarchy.

From late 2014, the prison came fully under the control of the MSS. Task forces associated with the Ministry, reportedly under the supervision of Russian FSB operatives, began detaining people and reports of abuse began.⁷¹ By late 2016, according to victim testimony, the head of the MSS Special Operations Center personally carried out

detentions,⁷² and throughout 2016 and 2017, according to some witness accounts, an MSS officer tortured detainees.⁷³

In early 2017, the Special Operations Center continued to oversee the facility, with its head reportedly directing beatings and other acts of violence, including in March of that year.⁷⁴ A year later, a judge in the occupied territory publicly described “Izoliatsiia” as an MSS official pre-trial detention facility.⁷⁵ Around February 2018, the Head of the Reserve Unit of the MSS Special Operations Center took over the prison’s leadership, which formalized the chain of command.⁷⁶

By May 2022, internal documents named the facility as “Izolyator №1 of Donetsk City,” underscoring its administrative recognition within “DPR” carceral infrastructure.⁷⁷ That same year, former Parliamentary Commissioner for Human Rights Lyudmila Denisova reported that the site was functioning as a transit point and unofficial FSB pre-trial detention center, for filtering “especially dangerous” Ukrainian citizens.⁷⁸ According to Ukrainian officials, since the beginning of the full-scale invasion, captors have taken most captured soldiers and law-enforcement officials to ‘Izoliatsiia.’⁷⁹ On December 31, 2022, the Russian Federation formally established an FSB department for the “DPR” and transferred “Izoliatsiia” to FSB control, fully absorbing the facility into the Russian security apparatus.

Control over “Izoliatsiia” moved from informal militant occupation to formal oversight by state-backed security structures. Local battalions and committees gave way to institutionalization under the “DPR” MSS, followed by integration into Russian security operations under the FSB. Each stage reflects an increasing level of organizational structure and operational capacity, consolidating the site’s function as a detention facility and instrument of repression. This progression shows how “Izoliatsiia” became part of the occupation apparatus and how successive actors exercised authority over both detainees and the facility itself.

⁶⁶ The 5th Separate Guards Motor Rifle Brigade, also known as the “Oplot Brigade,” is a motorized rifle formation of the Russian Ground Forces attached to the 51st Guards Combined Arms Army. Originating as a volunteer unit in Donetsk in 2014 amid the outbreak of conflict, it operated under the “DPR” until formal integration into Russian forces on January 1, 2023.

Chronological overview of the control and oversight of the "Izoliatsiia" site

LATE OCTOBER 2014

The MSS formally appointed one of its representatives as the facility's head, marking a more structured command hierarchy

AUGUST 8, 2014

The "Council of Ministers" of the "DPR" issued a decree authorising detention for up to 30 days without judicial oversight, effectively legalising arbitrary detention.

JUNE 9 – JULY 2, 2014

Members of Russian military intelligence from the "Vostok Battalion" seized control of the site, beginning its use as an unofficial detention center

JULY 2 – EARLY FALL 2014

A special committee reportedly controlled "Izoliatsiia" and used part of the site to detain people

JULY–AUGUST 2014

OHCHR reported the first cases of illegal detention of civilians by the militia of the self-proclaimed "DPR" on the territory of the plant

OCTOBER OR NOVEMBER 2014

Some sources indicated that the MSS took over "Izoliatsiia", while personnel from the Russian-backed "Oplot Formation" also operated there

JULY 17, 2014

The "DPR" established its so-called "Ministry of State Security" (MSS), creating the basis for institutionalized detention practices

LATE 2016

According to the direct victim's testimony, the head of the MSS's Special Operations Center personally carried out detentions

JANUARY 2017

The Special Operations Center continued to oversee the facility, and its head reportedly directed beatings and other acts of violence

LATE 2014 ONWARD

The prison came fully under the control of the MSS, and task forces associated with the Ministry, reportedly under the supervision of Russian FSB operatives, began detaining people

2016–2017

According to some witness accounts, an MSS officer tortured detainees

MARCH 2017

The head of the Special Operations Center reportedly directed beatings and other acts of violence

2018

A judge in the occupied territory publicly described "Izoliatsiia" as an MSS official pre-trial detention facility

MID-FEBRUARY 2018

The Head of the Reserve Unit of the MSS Special Operations Center took over the prison's leadership, formalizing the chain of command

DECEMBER 31, 2022

The Russian Federation formally established an FSB department for the "DPR" and transferred "Izoliatsiia" to FSB control

SINCE THE BEGINNING OF THE FULL-SCALE INVASION

Ukrainian officials stated that captors took most captured soldiers and law-enforcement officials to "Izoliatsiia"

MAY 2022

Internal documents named the facility "Izolyator №1 of Donetsk City," showing its administrative recognition within the "DPR" carceral infrastructure

2022

Lyudmila Denisova reported that the site was functioning as a transit point and unofficial FSB pre-trial detention center for filtering "especially dangerous" Ukrainian citizens

CHAPTER 5

PATTERNS OF VIOLENCE AND THEIR IMPACT ON SURVIVORS

The occupying authorities used extreme violence against survivors from the moment of their detention, wherever that occurred. The harm continued through interrogations, searches, and their time at "Izoliatsiia." Many also suffered lasting physical and psychological effects after their release.

5.1. Forms of Physical and Psychological Violence

This section provides a systematic overview of the violence documented based on survivors' testimonies. These findings build on and corroborate the substantial existing record of credible reporting that has already documented torture, sexual violence, and other serious abuses at "Izoliatsiia."⁸⁰ While not exhaustive, this section describes the violence and the impact on survivors' physical and mental health.

5.1.1. Arrest, Initial Abuse, and Concealment of Detention

For most survivors, the initial point of entry into the punitive system of the so-called 'DPR' varies. The arrests most commonly took place at checkpoints.⁸¹ However, the occupying authorities also carried them out at workplaces,⁸² in people's homes,⁸³ and even on the streets,⁸⁴ with survivors subsequently being transferred to detention facilities. Regardless of the initial contact, occupying authorities detained people at gunpoint.⁸⁵ Authorities also used violence during arrests, in some cases, knocking survivors to the ground,⁸⁶ pulling bags over their heads,⁸⁷ and beating them.⁸⁸ Authorities forced handcuffs on by stepping on survivors' hands or tying their hands with rope.⁸⁹ Sometimes, these assaults caused serious injuries, including head trauma and broken ribs.⁹⁰ Authorities did not inform survivors why they had detained them.⁹¹ After arrest, authorities could transport survivors to several different locations. Authorities took some detainees to the building of the "DPR" MSS before transferring them to "Izoliatsiia."⁹² Some victims said authorities first took them to their homes and searched them.⁹³ During these searches, officers often damaged property and seized items, including computers.⁹⁴ Some people never received their personal belongings later, or, if they did, items were damaged or broken.⁹⁵ Authorities also beat and threatened family members during searches when they were present.⁹⁶

In some instances, operatives took survivors to the forest and severely beat them and fired live ammunition near them, before taking them to the MSS building or "Izoliatsiia."⁹⁷

Once inside the walls of the MSS, operatives interrogated detainees, often while beating them. In some instances, arresting authorities told survivors the reasons for their detention or the specific crimes they were suspected of committing. These crimes included suspicion of espionage, committing a terrorist act, aiding terrorist activities, and collaborating with the special services of foreign states.⁹⁸ For example, authorities told one survivor the reasons for their detention only two months after detention.⁹⁹ Several survivors were forced to sign a waiver of their right to a lawyer.¹⁰⁰ In other cases, representatives of the so-called "law enforcement agencies" refused survivors' requests to contact relatives and lawyers.¹⁰¹

Authorities routinely concealed the detention, including transfer to "Izoliatsiia," from survivors' families. In many cases, survivors' partners and relatives had no access to information about their whereabouts or fate.¹⁰² For some, this uncertainty lasted for the first few weeks or months;¹⁰³ for others, authorities kept them disappeared for years,¹⁰⁴ until their release. One survivor was under investigation for 6 years without a right to correspond with his relatives for the first 4 years.¹⁰⁵ Another survivor lamented, "My mother died without ever finding out where I was."¹⁰⁶

In most cases, relatives simply did not understand who to contact to locate their loved one, as no information was shared with them. Families and partners sometimes asked the MSS directly about a missing person. In at least 2 instances documented by Truth Hounds, MSS officials lied and said the person was 'not listed' as detained, even while holding them in the agency's building.¹⁰⁷ One witness recounted, "I heard my wife's voice asking if I had been detained. The detective who had detained me came out and told her that I hadn't. They told her, 'Madam, you're mistaken, go away.'"¹⁰⁸

In some cases, the MSS responded to families' queries, but the information provided was inaccurate.¹⁰⁹ For example, for one survivor, official documentation recorded their release from the occupied territory of the Donetsk Oblast. However, they never actually entered territory controlled by Ukraine, but, according to one survivor, ended up "lost in the grey zone," where it was unclear who controlled the territory.¹¹⁰ This uncertainty allowed

the occupying authorities to deny responsibility for the survivor's fate. In other cases, family members considered the survivors dead. In one case, the occupying authorities not only told a family member the survivor had been transferred to a detention site in Olenivka,¹¹¹ but they even summoned the survivor's close relatives to identify the body following a missile strike on the site.¹¹²

Since no one except the guards who worked at "Izoliatsiia" and MSS employees had access to the prison territory, it was relatively easy to conceal the real circumstances of what transpired there. Neither investigators, defense attorneys, nor humanitarian organizations had physical access to the place of detention. Therefore, it has been absolutely impossible to accurately determine who has been held at "Izoliatsiia" at any given time until they are released or fellow detainees who are released can attest to their whereabouts.

5.1.2. Physical Abuse and Ill-Treatment in Detention

This section examines the coercive measures used against detainees at "Izoliatsiia" and during periodic visits to the MSS for so-called investigative actions, including interrogations. Because these abuses took many forms, this section groups them thematically to convey the realities of daily life at "Izoliatsiia."

5.1.2.1. Detention Conditions

Detention conditions were inhumane, both in the more "mundane" aspects and in the cruel treatment survivors suffered on a daily basis. Part of the problem was structural: the building was never designed to hold detainees, which meant freezing basement cells in winter and extreme heat during summer.¹¹³ Even so, prison management took no steps to adapt the premises or bring conditions up to basic standards, despite the obvious harm to detainees' health and wellbeing.

Staff at "Izoliatsiia" deliberately maintained inhumane detention conditions. They kept bright lights on in the cells around the clock, and guards beat detainees who turned them off.¹¹⁴ The bright lights caused sleep deprivation and sleep disorders among survivors.

Guards and prison management used basic needs as tools of further abuse. For example, guards deprived certain cells of food, intentionally starving detainees.¹¹⁵ Where guards provided food, it was often deliberately inedible and lacked basic nutritional value. Survivors described porridge with worms and rotten fish.¹¹⁶ Some survivors, during their 2 years and 7 months in detention, were periodically denied water, or given water that was not safe to drink.¹¹⁷

"Izoliatsiia" lacked even basic infrastructure for maintaining hygiene. Detainees were allowed to bathe about once every 10 days, mostly in cold water and under the direct supervision of guards.¹¹⁸ One survivor recalled, the authorities denied survivors even these rare opportunities to wash as punishment for disobedience.¹¹⁹ In other cases, after taking a cold shower, guards forced survivors to return to cold, damp cells in the basement without allowing them to dry off.¹²⁰ During the cold season, guards deliberately doused some detainees with ice water while naked outdoors or forced them to walk outside naked.¹²¹

There were no toilets in the cells; survivors relieved themselves in plastic bottles with no privacy.¹²² The guards and management also adopted a method the survivors dubbed "toilet torture," in which survivors were denied anything that they could use as a toilet.¹²³

5.1.2.2. Physical Violence

The authorities forced detainees to stand motionless for 1-2 days and beat them if they moved.¹²⁴ In isolated cases, detainees were held in a special cell in the basement for up to 7 months.¹²⁵ The cell's design was such that, due to its small size, a detainee could only stand or sit, without any possibility to lie down.¹²⁶

Guards forced many survivors to perform strenuous physical labor regardless of their health or the injuries the beatings caused, sometimes merely

¹¹¹ A missile struck Olenivka Prison in occupied Donetsk in July 2022, killing at least 50 Ukrainian prisoners of war detained there. Russia and Ukraine accused each other of being responsible for the attack, although subsequent investigations point to Russia as the most likely culprit.

as punishment for alleged disobedience.¹²⁷ On one occasion, guards forced detainees to work near a live-fire range during tactical exercises.¹²⁸ Militant units carried out these exercises from time to time on the grounds of "Izoliatsiia."

The authorities frequently beat the detainees with varying regularity and duration, and using various implements. Guards beat detainees both individually, mainly during interrogation calls at "Izoliatsiia" or in the MSS building, and collectively, by randomly beating everyone in a cell. Guards also used beatings as collective punishment if a detainee violated any of the prison "rules." Such beatings could last from a few minutes to an hour.¹²⁹

Guards beat detainees indiscriminately or targeted specific body parts. Survivors describe blows to the head, ribs, and chest.¹³⁰ In one especially brutal practice, guards forced detainees to press their chest against the small window in the cell's iron door and then beat them repeatedly, sometimes every day. Guards called this routine "fluorography," a mocking reference to chest X-ray screening.¹³¹

Guards and prison administration officials inflicted beatings with their fists and elbows, as well as shovels, sticks, and pipes. One survivor recounted, "they hit me in the ribs and shouted, 'You don't know where you are yet, we'll make you suffer!' And then they beat me again. They hit me with water bottles, or held the bottles against my ribs and hit me through the bottle, and it turned out that all my internal organs were damaged."¹³² In some cases, the authorities would use detainees for their combat training, resulting in severe injuries to detainees.¹³³

During the beatings, people sometimes had their teeth knocked out.¹³⁴ In some instances guards deliberately filed down detainees' teeth,¹³⁵ cut them on the torso and legs,¹³⁶ or pulled out their fingernails.¹³⁷

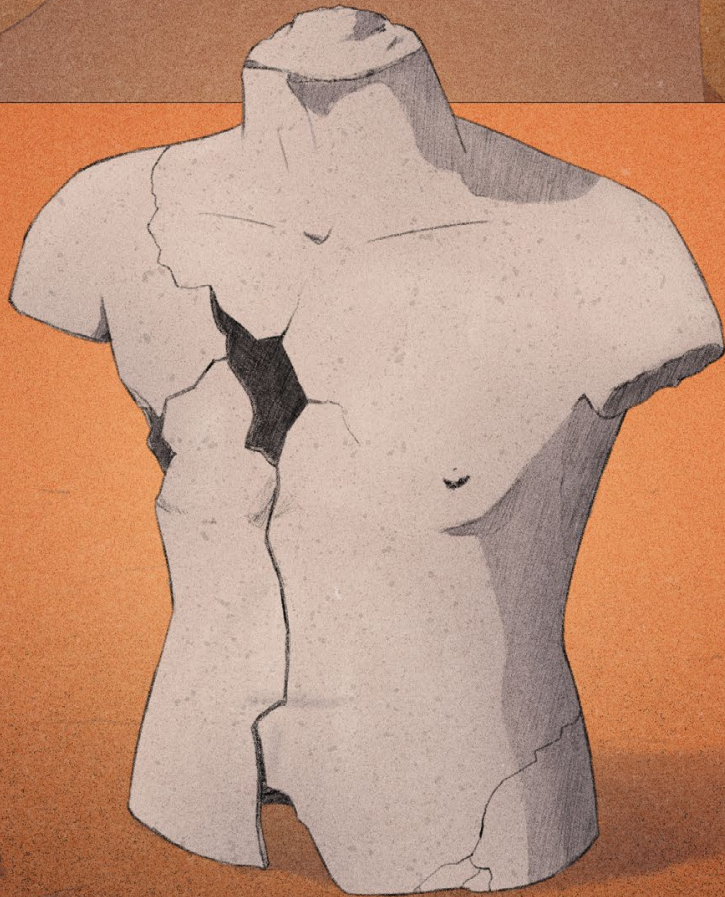
Guards also beat some survivors for complaining that their health was getting worse. In several cases, requests for medical assistance led to further beatings. Indeed, there was a broader, systematic practice of denying medical care. Guards frequently ignored or beat those who requested

treatment of both pre-existing health conditions and injuries or illnesses sustained during captivity. Medical neglect extended to basic interventions, such as access to medication, wound care, or sanitary facilities, exacerbating pain and suffering.¹³⁸

One type of brutal beating was the so-called "black dolphin" technique, referring to the severe beating of male genitals using sticks, batons, and pipes.¹³⁹ The beatings were so intense that the genitals turned black with bruises, and in some cases, the skin peeled off. In many cases, beatings resulted in survivors losing consciousness, losing mobility in the short term, breaking bones, especially ribs, and being unable to eat for several days.¹⁴⁰ At least 4 survivors described that they saw guards beat other detainees to death, during their 2 years in detention on average.¹⁴¹

Guards also used electric shocks, often with a Soviet TA-57 field telephone known as a "tapik." Guards immobilized survivors by tying them to iron tables for increased conductivity. For an "additional effect," guards doused survivors with water to increase the flow of electricity.¹⁴² Guards attached the device's wires to various parts of the survivors' bodies, including toes and fingers, earlobes, and the survivors' genitals.¹⁴³ The latter method was used mainly on male prisoners and involved connecting the current directly to the genitals or to the anus. This could go on for several hours at a time,¹⁴⁴ and, on one occasion, for 8 consecutive hours.¹⁴⁵

One survivor described the experience: "They woke me up at night, dragged me to the basement, and tied me to the table with tape in a star shape, as they usually did. They electrocuted my toes, beat my kidneys, and beat my heels with a rubber baton. They untied my legs, but when I tried to lift them, they beat them with a rubber truncheon so that I couldn't walk."¹⁴⁶ During this torture, survivors suffered burns and skin peeling, often in intimate areas.¹⁴⁷ Many lost consciousness.¹⁴⁸ To keep the torture going, prison staff often brought in a "doctor" to revive survivors, including with ammonia.¹⁴⁹ In some cases, survivors reported that these "doctors" gave them direct injections of adrenaline into the heart to revive them.¹⁵⁰ Compared to electric shock, some survivors describe "ordinary beatings" as a respite.¹⁵¹



The authorities also used stress positions such as forced standing and the so-called “crucifixion.” Detainees were forced to stand close to a wall with their legs apart and their arms raised. This could last for 3 or 4 days in a row without sleep or food. If the detainee moved or fell from exhaustion, they were punished with severe beatings.¹⁵² In the “crucifixion,” guards handcuffed survivors to metal structures in a cross and forced them to remain there for hours. One survivor recalled, “Ropes were attached to these screws, and they tied us to them, like on a crucifix, and we had to stand there for hours, tied to the rack with ropes. They would come up and hit us in the ribs, on the head, ask us questions, but usually it was just insults. We just stood there and they beat us.”¹⁵³

5.1.2.3. Sexual Violence

While survivors are generally reluctant to share information about sexual violence the guards inflicted, they report numerous rapes at “Izoliatsiia,” affecting both men¹⁵⁴ and women.¹⁵⁵ These included oral, vaginal, and anal rape, sometimes using objects such as batons. Guards also forced detainees to perform sexual acts on each other. One survivor, having spent almost 3 years in detention, recalled, “I know that people were forced to put each other’s genitals in their mouths. This is one form of intimidation – if a person disagreed with the interrogators or operatives and they could not be ‘broken’ with electric shocks, then they were ‘broken’ in this way.”¹⁵⁶ According to available accounts, prison guards also committed sexual violence against minors, including forced nudity and different types of rape.¹⁵⁷

In some cases, the rapes were so brutal they resulted in prolonged bleeding and damage to survivors’ intestines. One survivor shared that “there was a case when something was inserted into a man’s anus, damaging his intestines. He

THE ILLUSTRATION depicts electric shock torture: guards strapped survivors to a metal table with adhesive tape and applied current to various parts of the body. It also references Maria Kulikovska’s plaster sculpture series ‘Army of Clones’, which militants used as shooting targets after seizing the Izolyatsia Foundation’s territory.

Illustration: Maksym Filipenko / @maksymdraws

developed an infection. No one came to his aid. He suffered through screams and pain and later died in his cell.”¹⁵⁸

Prison staff regularly forced some women held at “Izoliatsiia” to provide sexual services to prison staff, with promises of “better treatment,” such as less torture and less humiliation.¹⁵⁹ Some prison staff attempted to force survivors to rape other detainees. Survivors recall staff offering them sweets in exchange for raping their cellmates. When they refused, staff warned them that next time, other prisoners would be offered the same sweets in exchange for raping them.¹⁶⁰

Beyond the physical abuse itself, the suffering inflicted at “Izoliatsiia” caused severe psychological harm. One of the former captives shared a story about how, after being raped by a group of men at “Izoliatsiia,” a female captive hanged herself.¹⁶¹

Some survivors held at the “Izoliatsiia” facility suffered sexual humiliation. Both during their arrest and detention, MSS forced survivors to strip naked and, in some cases, recorded their tattoos, scars, and bruises.¹⁶² Guards also forced survivors to strip naked and remain naked outside during the cold winter months.¹⁶³ Male guards also forced female detainees to partially undress while they watched.¹⁶⁴

5.1.3. Psychological Abuse and Coercion in Detention

Psychological abuse formed one of the central parts of the coercive regime at “Izoliatsiia.” Alongside physical violence, guards and other personnel deliberately targeted detainees’ sense of time, privacy, dignity, safety, and connection to others. They did so both through the conditions of daily confinement and through specific acts designed to humiliate, isolate, intimidate, and break detainees mentally. These measures amplified the impacts of the physical abuse, reinforced control over detainees, and caused severe and lasting psychological harm.

The windows in detainees’ cells were painted over. This arrangement, combined with a strict ban on approaching the painted windows¹⁶⁵ and round-the-clock bright lights,¹⁶⁶ contributed to the sur-

vivors gradually losing track of time and being disoriented.

Round-the-clock visual¹⁶⁷ and audio¹⁶⁸ surveillance had a significant impact on survivors' mental health. The constant surveillance limited their ability to build interpersonal relationships and communicate with each other, as this always carried the risk of severe punishment for anything they said.¹⁶⁹ In the context of video surveillance, female detainees noted that the video camera was installed in such a way that it was impossible to even relieve themselves without observation.¹⁷⁰ Thus, women were permanently exposed to monitoring by male guards.

Guards forced survivors to collect their own biological waste in plastic bottles and to dispose of it themselves.¹⁷¹ Staff only let them empty the bottles once they were completely full. This had two consequences. First, detainees lived in unsanitary conditions and were constantly exposed to terrible smells. Second, prison guards would deliberately push survivors transporting the overflowing bottle, leaving them covered in excrement. The unsanitary conditions and the lack of medical treatment following beatings also meant that survivors had to sleep on old mattresses soaked with urine and blood.¹⁷²

Authorities imposed social restrictions that deliberately harmed detainees' mental well-being. Survivors were completely deprived of access to any information about life and events taking place outside the walls of "Izoliatsiia," placing them in a kind of vacuum.¹⁷³ Some survivors were completely isolated from contact with other detainees through prolonged solitary confinement.¹⁷⁴ In some cells, the prison management and guards recruited detainees to torment their cellmates, on the orders of "Izoliatsiia" representatives. In such cases, guards prohibited survivors from communicating between themselves and from using the toilet without permission.¹⁷⁵

The guards and detainees they had 'cultivated' adopted a practice of designating some survivors as "oppressed" ("*opushcheni*"), drawing on Russian prison-culture hierarchy that assigns detainees a degraded status.¹⁷⁶ At "Izoliatsiia," guards barred detainees labeled as "oppressed" from touching others, sitting at the same table,¹⁷⁷ or

eating from the same dishes.¹⁷⁸ As a result, other detainees could not help those individuals after brutal beatings.¹⁷⁹ Survivors also reported that guards forced "oppressed" detainees to clean up blood and other bodily fluids after torturing other detainees. One survivor said, "They 'oppressed' him to the point that he was forced, after [the perpetrator] beat someone half to death, there was a lot of blood, it's impossible to describe in words...they could send him there to wash and clean up."¹⁸⁰

Guards and detainees who had been "cultivated" verbally abused and insulted survivors, degrading their honor and dignity. In addition to "simple insults," some survivors were forced to stay under the bunks,¹⁸¹ bark on command,¹⁸² or eat near the shared "toilet."¹⁸³ Survivors were subjected to almost daily coercion to learn and perform patriotic Russian songs and the anthem of the "DPR."¹⁸⁴ Any disobedience was punishable by beatings.

Constant threats also exerted psychological pressure on survivors. Detainees were threatened with physical violence, gang rape or shooting;¹⁸⁵ prison staff sometimes simulated such shootings.¹⁸⁶ The authorities also threatened the survivors' relatives or partners with dismemberment or rape, individually and collectively, in order to put pressure on the detainees.¹⁸⁷ One witness commented, "People have sick imaginations, they did all sorts of things, either you told them everything or they threatened to bring my wife. They threatened my mother, so I agreed, but I didn't write down everything I knew."¹⁸⁸ In several cases, survivors' children were the subject of threats. One survivor was threatened with their children's heads being cut off.¹⁸⁹ Another survivor, who was pregnant at the time of her arrest and detention, was explicitly threatened with beatings to cause a miscarriage.¹⁹⁰

Inside "Izoliatsiia" a harsh rule applied to the vast majority of prisoners: if the cell door opened, the detainee had to immediately put a bag or sack over their head and stand next to the bed.¹⁹¹ Guards forbid survivors under any circumstances from seeing who was entering the cell. If anyone failed to comply, everyone in the cell was severely beaten. Prison staff would also bang on the doors with batons, imitating the sound of opening, causing them to jump up from their bunks in fear and stand with a bag over their heads repeatedly dur-

ing the day and night.¹⁹² At such moments, people are naturally overcome by fear of the unknown, unsure about what will happen, and their bodies habitually prepare for the worst-case scenario of another brutal beating.

Survivors report that the psychological abuse aimed to strip away social norms and relationships. Some came to the understanding that they had no control over anything in their lives, except the option to end them.

5.2. Consequences of Torture

Prolonged exposure to torture, inhumane conditions of detention, and severe psychological pressure had profound and enduring effects on survivors' health and wellbeing. Testimonies of former detainees indicate that the harm inflicted did not end with their release, but instead translated into long-term physical injuries, chronic health conditions, and lasting psychological trauma.

Many survivors report ongoing pain, physical limitations, sleep problems, anxiety, depression, and symptoms consistent with post-traumatic stress. These lasting effects show the severity of the abuse and confirm that detainees suffered sustained long-term harm to their physical and mental health.¹⁹³

5.2.1. Psychological Consequences of Ill-Treatment

Survivors report sleep disorders, which appeared not only in reaction to severe emotional trauma, but also as a result of the conditions of detention in the cells, namely, bright lights around the clock.¹⁹⁴

Some survivors used the term "iron door syndrome" or "door-opening syndrome" in their accounts.¹⁹⁵ Coined by the survivors, these terms refer to the psycho-emotional reaction and intense stress that survivors felt when they heard the sound of someone touching and potentially opening the door from outside the cell. The reaction developed because, much of the time, the

iron door opening meant either immediate brutal beating right in the cell or that one of the prisoners would be taken to another room at "Izoliatsiia" that served as a torture chamber.

Survivors further report the onset of recurrent panic attacks.¹⁹⁶ These episodes, often triggered by reminders of captivity or occurring without an identifiable external stimulus, have persisted for years after release. The continued presence of such symptoms illustrates the long-term psychological impact of detention-related abuse and reflects the depth and durability of the trauma inflicted during confinement.

Tragically, there is evidence to suggest that a person held in the detention center was driven to take their own life while in detention, as they could no longer endure the cumulative physical and psychological abuse inflicted upon them.¹⁹⁷ The suicide reflects the extreme and enduring impact of the inhumane treatment experienced.

5.2.2. Physical Consequences of Ill-Treatment

The violence and neglect survivors endured at "Izoliatsiia" left serious physical consequences, both during detention and after release. Beatings, electric shocks, sexual violence, prolonged stress positions, inadequate food and water, denial of medical care, and inhuman detention conditions caused lasting injuries, chronic pain, and other long-term health problems.

The most horrific physical consequence of torture for victims of "Izoliatsiia" was death as a result of brutal torture and beatings.¹⁹⁸ Some detainees died during the torture itself, while others died later due to severe bodily injuries and lack of access to medical care.¹⁹⁹

In several documented cases, survivors reported experiencing cardiac arrest during acts of torture, particularly in connection with the use of electric shocks. These incidents amounted, in medical terms, to episodes of clinical death,²⁰⁰ requiring urgent resuscitation.

Repeated beatings caused a wide range of acute and long-term injuries. Survivors suffered perma-

ment damage to their hands,²⁰¹ as well as temporary loss of sensitivity in their thumbs due to excessively tight handcuffs or other restraints placed on their hands.²⁰² Former detainees also experienced temporary loss of limb mobility,²⁰³ and sometimes even complete immobilization for several days after the beatings.²⁰⁴ Some survivors experienced temporary vision disorders after being beaten on the head with plastic water bottles.²⁰⁵ The same circumstances of the beatings also led to more long-term consequences. For example, one victim noted that they had experienced constant ringing in their ears for more than five years.²⁰⁶ Others developed long-term liver and/or kidney problems as a result of the beatings.²⁰⁷

Survivors also suffered broken bones—often ribs—and damaged joints. One survivor said guards broke his ribs at least 6 times during beatings while they held him in custody.²⁰⁸ A long-term problem with damaged bones and joints is that the survivors were not provided with the necessary medical care for proper treatment, so the tissues healed inconsistently and, years later, still causes them pain.

Some survivors also note that during the torture, they broke their teeth when forced to bite a stick to muffle their screams.²⁰⁹ Others lost teeth as a result of direct physical impact from beatings.²¹⁰

Some described the onset of persistent headaches following sustained beatings,²¹¹ while others developed hemorrhoidal conditions linked to prolonged physical strain during severe beatings.²¹²

Prolonged hunger and nutritionally poor food caused lasting gastrointestinal problems for some survivors.²¹³ These conditions still affect their daily lives long after release, showing the long-term physical harm caused by sustained deprivation in detention.

Several survivors indicated that prolonged exposure to unsanitary conditions led them to contract serious infectious diseases, including hepatitis C.²¹⁴ Such accounts highlight the severe health risks inherent in the detention environment and underscore the authorities' failure to ensure even the most basic standards of hygiene and medical care.

THE ILLUSTRATION shows a guard beating a hooded prisoner with a stick – authorities forbade prisoners from seeing staff, hence the sack. In the background, a slag heap bears the Izolyatsia Foundation's signature metal deer sculpture.

Illustration: Maksym Filipenko / @maksymdraws



CHAPTER 6

LEGAL QUALIFICATION OF THE ALLEGED CRIMES

This chapter provides a legal analysis and proposes classifications of the acts described in the previous chapter, drawing on survivor testimonies and corroborating material collected by Truth Hounds. Prior assessments have largely framed the conduct at “Izoliatsiia” as war crimes, including the Eastern Coalition Group,²¹⁵ the OHCHR,²¹⁶ and the MIHR, which also focused on sexual violence, psychological abuse, and the cumulative impact of detention conditions.²¹⁷

Those qualifications provide an important foundation. However, the report's findings on the duration of the violations, their repeated and organized character, and their continuation over more than a decade justify a focused assessment of crimes against humanity.

This assessment is especially timely in light of legal developments in Ukraine in mid to late 2024. On August 21, 2024, Ukraine ratified the Rome Statute (RS).²¹⁸ Less than two months later, on October 9, 2024, Ukraine amended the Criminal Code and Criminal Procedure Code to implement that step.²¹⁹ Most importantly, the reforms introduced a standalone crimes against humanity provision in the Criminal Code.²²⁰ The reforms also added a command-responsibility provision and made related changes to jurisdiction, limitation periods, and criminal procedure.²²¹ These reforms provide Ukrainian prosecutors with a new and clearer domestic basis than previously existed to pursue crimes against humanity charges where the evidence warrants them.

For abuses such as those documented at "Izoliatsiia," this is a critical development. The evidence set out in this report and others points not to isolated or sporadic abuse, but to a long-running pattern of unlawful imprisonment, torture, sexual violence, and other inhumane acts carried out within an organized system of detention and coercion. Ukraine's 2024 reforms therefore create an important opportunity to frame such conduct, where the facts and applicable law permit, as possible crimes against humanity.²²² As such, this legal analysis speaks directly to a strengthened accountability framework that now exists in Ukraine.

This analytical framework may also assist prosecutors in other jurisdictions who are considering whether the conduct documented at "Izoliatsiia" could support crimes against humanity charges in proceedings brought under universal jurisdiction, where domestic law allows. By organizing the evidence around the contextual elements of Article 7 of the RS and the underlying crimes

most strongly supported by the record, the chapter may help prosecutors begin to assess pattern and linkage evidence, and responsibility beyond isolated acts.

The chapter therefore examines whether the facts set out in this report meet the RS requirements for crimes against humanity. It assesses the contextual elements, including the existence of a widespread or systematic attack directed against a civilian population, the presence of a State or organizational policy, and perpetrators; knowledge of the attack. It then applies that framework to four underlying crimes that the evidence most strongly supports in this context: imprisonment,²²³ enforced disappearance of persons,²²⁴ torture,²²⁵ and sexual violence.²²⁶ The findings reinforce the need for accountability that reaches direct perpetrators and those who enabled, supervised, or sustained this system.

6.1. Contextual Elements

To be qualified as crimes against humanity, the underlying acts need to be proven to have been committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against any civilian population, pursuant to or in furtherance of a State or organizational policy to commit such attack. A further element is that the perpetrator must have had knowledge of the attack.

6.1.1. Meaning of "attack"

Under Article 7(2)(a) of the RS, an "attack" means a course of conduct involving the multiple commission of underlying acts referred to in paragraph 1. For the purpose of crimes against humanity, an "attack" does not need to be a part of a military operation.²²⁷ However, the requirement that the acts form part of a "course of conduct" indicates that Article 7 of the RS is meant to cover a series or overall flow of events, as opposed to a mere aggregate of random or isolated acts.²²⁸ The existing ICC jurisprudence states that "the commission of the acts referred to in Article 7(1) RS constitutes the "attack" itself and, beside the commission of the acts, no additional requirement for the existence of an "attack" should be proven."²²⁹

²²² See Law No. 4012-IX of October 9, 2024, introducing Criminal Code article 442-1 on crimes against humanity; for the factual basis regarding "Izoliatsiia," see [Chapters 4-6](#) of this report.

In the case of "Izoliatsiia," as well as in the broader context of Russian forces occupation of eastern Ukraine, including their seizure and conversion of the art space into an illegal detention facility, it is evident that an attack was carried out through a series of different forceful measures directed at the civilian population, including the acts committed at "Izoliatsiia."

6.1.2. Meaning of "civilian population"

"Civilian population" refers to a population that is predominantly civilian, i.e., people who do not take a direct part in hostilities, including those who are placed hors de combat, namely those who are not fighting because they are wounded or otherwise incapacitated.²³⁰ Civilians who take direct part in hostilities retain civilian status, as long as they do not become a part of an organized armed force or group. Those civilians only lose the special protection afforded by their civilian status "for such time as they take a direct part in hostilities," nevertheless remaining civilians and part of the civilian population.²³¹ At the same time, the presence of some non-civilians within the population does not deprive that population of its civilian character.²³²

Detainees at "Izoliatsiia" are predominantly civilians who lived in or were present in Donetsk Oblast, or the city of Donetsk in particular, at the time of their detention. There are specific grounds for understanding that a small percentage of survivors in certain episodes of their stay in the occupied regions may have performed specific tasks in support of Ukrainian forces, thus directly participating in hostilities. However, as previously determined, such actions did not deprive them of their civilian status, and in any case, the presence of non-civilians does not necessarily deprive the population of its civilian character, especially in such small numbers.

6.1.3. Meaning of "directing"

The key aspect in determining whether an attack is directed against a civilian population is the intention of targeting and not the result.²³³ The civilian population must be the "primary object of

the attack," and not just an incidental victim.²³⁴ In this case, the occupying authorities targeted civilians directly, with no discernible military or other advantage that would suggest the civilian population was an incidental victim.

6.1.4. Meaning of "systematic"

To fulfill the chapeau elements for crimes against humanity, an attack needs to be either widespread or systematic; it does not have to be both. As the ICTY Appeals Chamber noted in *Kunarac*, "The requirement that the attack be 'widespread' or 'systematic' comes in the alternative. Once it is convinced that either requirement is met, the Trial Chamber is not obliged to consider whether the alternative qualifier is also satisfied."²³⁵

The "systematic" nature of the crimes refers, in essence, to the organized nature of the acts and the improbability of their random occurrence,²³⁶ i.e., the non-accidental repetition of similar criminal conduct on a regular basis.²³⁷ Therefore, an attack is systematic when it is "thoroughly organized and following a regular pattern on the basis of a common policy involving substantial public or private resources."²³⁸ Repetition over time, the organized execution of the attack, hierarchical structures enabling its implementation, and the targeting of a specific group show that the conduct forms part of a systematic attack.²³⁹

In the case of "Izoliatsiia," the findings in this report indicate that these attacks against the civilian population began in the summer of 2014. Imprisonment, enforced disappearances, torture, and sexual violence were inflicted upon the survivors in a manner that suggests the existence of an organized apparatus responsible for carrying out this attack. The existence of the organized apparatus is borne out by the existing organizational and institutional hierarchy described in the chapter on alleged perpetrators. Finally, the attack mainly targeted individuals the occupation authorities perceived as having pro-Ukrainian opinions, as highlighted in survivors' testimonies.

6.1.5. Meaning of “state or organizational policy”

Finally, Article 7(2)(a) RS requires that the attack be carried out pursuant to or in furtherance of state or organizational policy. Such a plan or policy does not need to be explicitly stated or formally adopted; it can instead be inferred from the overall circumstances, including the systematic nature of the crimes.²⁴⁰ In *Katanga*, the ICC Trial Chamber clarified that the “systematic” requirement pertains to the organized nature of unlawful actions. While such attacks against a civilian population imply the existence of a policy by a State or organization, the Chamber emphasized that the two terms should not be treated as synonymous.²⁴¹

Similarly, the ICC has recognized that a “state or organizational policy” does not need to be fully formulated or expressly articulated in advance.²⁴² Rather, such a policy may crystallize progressively through the implementation of coordinated acts, becoming discernible only as the course of conduct unfolds. The existence and content of the policy can therefore be inferred retrospectively from the overall pattern of actions carried out against a civilian population, assessed in light of their organized, sustained, and non-accidental nature. This understanding reflects the reality that a State or organizational policy may operate as an ongoing process, the precise modalities of which are not necessarily predetermined at the outset but are nonetheless evidenced by the manner in which the acts are executed and coordinated over time.

The concept of an “organization” for the purposes of crimes against humanity must be understood broadly and functionally, rather than through formal or institutional criteria.²⁴³ What is decisive is not whether the entity resembles a State or possesses a rigid hierarchical structure, but whether it has sufficient resources, means, and capacity to carry out an attack involving the multiple commission of acts against a civilian population. The organizational element may therefore be satisfied where an entity maintains structures or mechanisms capable of coordinating such conduct. Importantly, the jurisprudence recognizes that attacks against civilians may be perpetrated by private or hybrid entities that are

not formally institutionalized, provided they can promote, encourage, or sustain the attack through effective coordination, particularly in the context of modern asymmetric warfare. This approach allows the assessment of organizational policy to reflect the realities of contemporary conflicts, in which violence against civilians is often carried out by entities operating outside traditional state frameworks.

In the case of “Izoliatsiia,” there was a recurring pattern of violence stretching for over a decade, repeatedly employing similar means of abuse, as described in this report. At the same time, the responses of those in charge at various times, including both members of the “DPR” and individuals linked with the Russian state, was remarkably similar, either in denying the detention of individuals, or in refusing to provide information about the detainees’ fate or whereabouts. The systematic nature of the violations, coupled with the institutional response, allows for the inference of an organizational, if not state, policy or plan.

6.2. Conduct Constituting Imprisonment

Under the RS, the elements of the crime against humanity of imprisonment are that the perpetrator has imprisoned or otherwise severely deprived of physical liberty one or more persons; that “the gravity of the conduct was such that it was in violation of fundamental rules of international law;” and that the perpetrator was aware of the factual circumstances establishing such gravity.²⁴⁴ ICTY jurisprudence specifies that this crime is to be understood as contemplating arbitrary imprisonment, i.e., the deprivation of liberty of the individual without due process of law.²⁴⁵ The key factors for this crime are the absence of any legal basis for the deprivation of liberty, deprivation of liberty resulting from the exercise of specified rights and freedoms (political prisoners), and the gravity of the total or partial non-observance of the international human rights norms relating to the right to a fair trial.²⁴⁶

The alleged perpetrators, predominantly representatives of the MSS, imprisoned multiple persons over the course of more than a decade. Survivors

were routinely detained by the use or threat of physical violence, not informed of the reasons for their detention, subjected to severe violence, ill-treatment, and other forms of abuse during detention, and not brought before any judicial institution. The arbitrary nature of their detention is demonstrated by the total absence of fair trial guarantees recognized under customary IHL. This includes determining whether detainees were held on the basis of a valid arrest warrant or legal authority, whether they were formally charged or notified of the reasons for their detention, and whether they were informed of procedural rights, such as the right to challenge the detention, to access legal counsel, and to appear before a competent judicial authority. The fact that the alleged perpetrators repeatedly denied these safeguards underscores the arbitrary nature of the detention and the systematic removal of detainees from the protection of the law.²⁴⁷

The gravity of this conduct is established by its severity, scale, and sustained nature, as well as the systematic deprivation of fundamental rights, including freedom from arbitrary detention, access to due process, and protection from cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment.

Such acts exceed the threshold of ordinary criminality, representing a deliberate and prolonged violation of core principles of international law.

Each of the acts described above took place in the context of a systematic attack against a civilian population, pursuant to an organizational, if not state, policy thereby establishing the crime against humanity of imprisonment.

6.3. Conduct Constituting Enforced Disappearance of Persons

The crime against humanity of enforced disappearance of persons is a continuing crime that begins when a person has disappeared, and ends only when their fate or whereabouts become known.²⁴⁸ As such, the disappearance of a person at the hands of a state or organizational authority, and the refusal of that authority either to acknowledge the disappearance, or give

information about the victim, are essential components of the crime.

Under the RS, a perpetrator can be responsible for enforced disappearance in one of two ways.²⁴⁹ In the first scenario, the perpetrator can arrest, detain, or abduct one or more persons, i.e., deprive that person of their freedom. In that case, the deprivation of freedom must be followed or accompanied by a refusal to acknowledge the detention or to provide information on the fate or whereabouts of the detained persons.

In addition, it must be shown that the perpetrator was aware that such deprivation of liberty would, in the ordinary course of events, be accompanied by the refusal to acknowledge it or to provide information on the victims. In the second scenario, a perpetrator may not be directly involved in the deprivation of liberty but may be the one refusing to acknowledge the arrest, detention, or abduction of one or more persons. In that case, the refusal must have accompanied or followed the deprivation of liberty, and the perpetrator must have been aware of that fact.

In both scenarios, the RS requires that the arrest, detention, or abduction, as well as the subsequent refusal to acknowledge it, was carried out by, or with the authorization, support, or acquiescence of, a State or a political organization.²⁵⁰ Finally, it must be established that the perpetrators intended to remove the victims from the protection of the law for a prolonged period of time.²⁵¹ The term “political organization” is not defined in the RS or its Elements of Crimes (EoC), but its ordinary meaning is a group structured to pursue political goals. In the context of crimes against humanity, drawing on the discussion of the meaning of “organization” earlier in this chapter, assessing whether a group constitutes an “organization” likely includes factors such as its ability to exercise authority and control over the victims.

At “Izoliatsiia,” people were arrested, detained, and abducted in a variety of settings, including on the street. It was a common practice to conceal the very fact of detention, as well as subsequent detention at “Izoliatsiia,” from the survivors’ family members. The vast majority of survivors note that their partners and relatives had no access to information about their whereabouts or fate in

general. For some, this uncertainty lasted for the first few weeks or months; for others, this pattern of disappearance was characteristic of the entire period of illegal detention until their release or exchange after several years. Given this pattern, it is likely that the individuals who arrested, abducted, or detained survivors knew that a refusal to acknowledge the detention or provide information would follow in the ordinary course of events. In light of the tight organization at the illegal detention facility, it is likely that the person refusing to provide such information would have known about the arrest, abduction, or detention at the time they refused to provide information. The evidence indicates that these acts were carried out within the authority structure operating at "Izoliatsiia."²⁵² Finally, the length of the detentions, the conditions of detention, and the denial of information about detainees all point to the intention to remove the victims from the protection of the law for a protracted period of time.

Each of the acts described above took place in the context of a systematic attack against a civilian population, pursuant to an organizational, if not state, policy, thereby establishing the crime against humanity of the enforced disappearance of persons.

6.4. Conduct Constituting Torture

Torture, for the purpose of crimes against humanity analysis, is "the intentional infliction of severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, upon a person in the custody or under the control of the accused."²⁵³ The conduct described in [Chapter 5](#) indicates a wide range of instances in which occupation authorities intentionally inflicted severe physical and mental pain and suffering on victims through a range of physical and psychological abuse.

Torture can be distinguished from ill treatment or other forms of bodily or mental harm by the intensity of the pain and suffering; the ICC has described this as an "important degree" of pain and suffering that should be assessed according to the circumstances as a whole.²⁵⁴ Those circumstances include subjective factors like the effect

on an individual victim, their age, sex, or overall state of health.²⁵⁵ It is not necessary for the perpetrator to have concluded a value judgment as to the severity of the pain inflicted.²⁵⁶ In some cases, conduct constituting other crimes, such as rape, can also constitute the crime of torture, where other elements are satisfied.²⁵⁷ The ICTY convicted *Furundžija* of torture for acts during an interrogation, including sexual threats, rapes, and forced nudity, inflicted on the victim for purposes of intimidation, humiliation, and extracting a confession.²⁵⁸ Furthermore, the mental suffering of an individual forced to watch the severe mistreatment of another person could reach the level of gravity required for the crime of torture. In *Kvočka*, the ICTY noted that when a person is forced to watch serious sexual attacks inflicted on an acquaintance, this could amount to torture both for the person being attacked (heightened by the presence of onlookers) and for the forced observer.²⁵⁹

"Intentional infliction" encapsulates the conduct when the alleged perpetrators meant to bring about the pain and suffering or were aware that it would occur in the ordinary course of events.²⁶⁰ Under Article 7(2)(e) RS, torture does not include pain or suffering arising only from, inherent in, or incidental to, lawful sanctions. The concept of "custody and control" is broad, as it refers not only to "formal detention," but also situations where the alleged perpetrators bear a *de facto* power over the survivors by threatening physical force.²⁶¹

Detainees at "Izoliatsiia" suffered harsh individual and collective beatings in different forms, with varying regularity and duration, and using various implements. Perpetrators subjected victims to electric shocks and stress positions. Survivors were also constantly subjected to verbal abuse and insults, forced into social isolation, and forced to watch torture and ill treatment of other survivors.

²⁵² For more detail, see "Control and Oversight at 'Izoliatsiia'" and "Perpetrator Categories and Linkage Evidence."

²⁵³ RS, Art. 7(2)(f). The crime against humanity of torture in the RS does not require a specific purpose for the infliction of pain or suffering, like "obtaining information or a confession, punishing, or intimidating or coercing," which is an element of both war crimes (ICC EoC, Art. 8(2)(a)(iii)-1), The Convention Against Torture, and jurisprudence from the *ad hoc* tribunals. The requirement of the victim being in custody or control of the perpetrator is, however, novel to the RS.

According to available testimonies, survivors were unarmed and defenseless against the armed multiple offenders, who in turn were restraining the survivors' liberty and threatening them with firearms. The pain and suffering were inflicted amid an ongoing occupation, exposing all the survivors to serious injuries or death in any case of resistance. As such, all survivors were clearly under the alleged perpetrators' custody and control. None of the pain and suffering inflicted arose only from, inherent in, or incidental to, lawful sanctions. Survivors were subjected to torture as a result of unlawful imprisonment, during arbitrary interrogations, and without the sanction of any regularly constituted legal body.

Each of the acts described above took place in the context of a systematic attack against a civilian population, pursuant to an organizational, if not state, policy, thereby establishing the crime against humanity of torture.

6.5. Conduct Constituting Sexual Violence

The RS provides an extensive list of sexual violence crimes that can constitute crimes against humanity, including rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilization, or any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity.²⁶²

Rape refers to the penetration of any part of the victim's body with a sexual organ, and the penetration of the anus or genitals with any object or any other part of the body.²⁶³ The general provision of "other forms of sexual violence" refers to the perpetrator committing an act of a sexual nature against a victim, or forcing someone to do it to someone else, through force, threats, or coercion, including taking advantage of a coercive environment (thereby negating consent).²⁶⁴ An example of such an act is forced nudity.²⁶⁵

The element of "force or threat of force or coercion" should be interpreted broadly, to cover both physical force and mental pressure. In this context, threats, intimidation, extortion, and other forms of duress that prey on fear or desperation; coercion may also be inherent in certain circum-

stances, such as armed conflict or military presence.²⁶⁶ In general, the circumstances prevailing when crimes against humanity are committed are usually coercive in nature, which implies that genuine consent of the victim is not possible.²⁶⁷

There are numerous cases at "Izoliatsiia" where detainees were subjected to oral, vaginal, and anal penetration, sometimes with a foreign object, such as a baton. Guards coerced some women into providing sexual services, with promises of treats (such as sweets) or better treatment. Other conduct contained elements of a sexual nature. Both men and women were forced to undress completely, sometimes outside during the cold season. Some torture techniques employed a sexual element, like the "black dolphin technique," where men's genitals were beaten with sticks, batons, or pipes, or electrocution, where wires were attached to male a detainee's genitals and anus. Survivors were subjected to regular threats of sexual violence, whether against them or family members. All of these acts reach the level of seriousness required to satisfy the element that the conduct in committing these acts was of a gravity comparable to the other types of sexual violence listed in the RS, due to both their physical and mental impact on victims. Virtually none of the survivors consented in any way to these acts; in any case, all of this took place in detention in an atmosphere of fear and intimidation, creating conditions in which genuine consent was impossible.

Each of the acts described above took place in the context of a systematic attack against a civilian population, pursuant to an organizational, if not state, policy, thereby establishing the crimes against humanity of rape and other forms of sexual violence were committed at "Izoliatsiia."

6.6. Conclusion

On the basis of the factual findings and legal analysis set out above, there are reasonable grounds to believe that the conduct perpetrated at the "Izoliatsiia" meets the contextual and material elements of crimes against humanity under Article 7 of the RS. The evidence indicates a course of conduct involving the repeated commission of

prohibited acts against a predominantly civilian population over a prolonged period. Acts including arbitrary imprisonment, enforced disappearance, torture, and sexual violence were not isolated or incidental, but formed part of a recurrent and organized pattern of abuse. Their continuity, repetition, and structural organization, together with the hierarchical command structures described above, support the conclusion that the conduct was carried out pursuant to or in furtherance of an organizational policy within the meaning of Article 7(2)(a) of the RS.

Second, the material elements of specific crimes against humanity are met.

- The deprivation of liberty of detainees at "Izoliatsiia" constitutes imprisonment or other severe deprivation of physical liberty under Article 7(1)(e), as such detention was inherently arbitrary, carried out without legal basis, procedural safeguards, or judicial oversight, and accompanied by the systematic denial of fundamental fair-trial guarantees.
- The concealment of the fate and whereabouts of detainees from relatives, the refusal to acknowledge detention and the intentional removal of victims from the protection of the law for prolonged periods satisfy the elements of enforced disappearance of persons under Article 7(1)(i).
- The intentional infliction of severe physical and mental pain and suffering upon persons in custody, through beatings, electrocution, stress positions, mock executions, threats against relatives, and other methods, satisfies the definition of torture under Article 7(1)(f), particularly given the absence of any lawful sanction and the total control exercised over detainees.
- Acts including rape, genital beatings, genital electrocution, forced nudity, coercion to perform sexual acts, and threats of sexual violence reach the threshold of other forms of sexual violence of comparable gravity under Article 7(1)(g)(6), taking into account both the physical and psychological suffering inflicted and the inherently coercive detention environment.

Third, the mental element is supported by the organized and repetitive nature of the conduct, the operational structures enabling its continuation, and the perpetrators' awareness that their acts formed part of a broader attack against a civilian population. The duration, scale, and coordination of the abuses strongly support the conclusion that they were neither spontaneous nor isolated.

Accordingly, the totality of available evidence provides reasonable grounds to conclude that the acts committed at "Izoliatsiia" may amount to crimes against humanity, namely imprisonment, enforced disappearance, torture, and sexual violence, perpetrated as part of a systematic attack directed against civilians in the context of the occupation of eastern Ukraine.

CHAPTER 7

PERPETRATOR CATEGORIES AND LINKAGE EVIDENCE

Thus far, prosecutions for crimes committed at “Izoliatsiia” have been very limited due to several factors. Ukrainian criminal justice agencies are unable to conduct investigations in the occupied territories. External actors do not have access to the territory of “Izoliatsiia” and occupying authorities consistently conceal information related to detention at “Izoliatsiia.” There have also been only a limited number of witnesses and survivors who were detained at this facility and have since been released. A further important limitation is the obligation of Ukrainian criminal justice professionals to comply with national rules on evidence admissibility, which restricts the use of extra-procedural measures.

There has been one successful prosecution. On January 3, 2024, the Shevchenkivskiy District Court of Kyiv convicted Denys Kulykovskiy of participation in a terrorist organization, participation in a paramilitary formation not provided for by Ukrainian law, and cruel treatment of civilians combined with violations of the laws and customs of war.²⁶⁸ The court found that, after joining the “DPR” structure in August 2014, Kulykovskiy served as head of the “Izoliatsiia” detention facility and issued orders concerning the escort, guarding, and forced labor of persons unlawfully deprived of liberty. On October 28, 2024, the Kyiv Court of Appeal dismissed the defense appeal and upheld the judgment and confirmed a final sentence of 15 years’ imprisonment and confiscation of all property.²⁶⁹

Given the scale and duration of crimes committed at “Izoliatsiia,” a great deal of investigative and prosecutorial work remains. The preceding chapters set out the factual and legal basis for concluding that the abuses committed at “Izoliatsiia” may amount to crimes against humanity, including imprisonment, torture, sexual violence, enforced disappearance, and other inhumane acts. This chapter does not make findings of individual criminal liability, nor does it identify specific individuals as criminally responsible for particular acts. Instead, it identifies the categories of actors whose roles should receive further investigative attention because they may help explain how the detention and abuse system at “Izoliatsiia” was created, maintained, supervised, and used over time.

This is especially important in the context of possible crimes against humanity. Such crimes are not limited to isolated acts by individual perpetrators. Investigations should therefore examine the actors who may have ordered, coordinated, enabled, supervised, concealed, or institutionalized the system of unlawful detention at “Izoliatsiia.”

As is detailed in the preceding chapters, “Izoliatsiia” operated through several overlapping layers of responsibility. These included personnel who exercised strategic or institutional control over the facility; personnel who organized arrests, transfers, interrogations, detention conditions, and access to detainees; personnel who managed or staffed the facility on a day-to-day

basis; and direct perpetrators who allegedly carried out violence, intimidation, humiliation, or other abusive conduct. In investigating under a crimes-against-humanity framework, the highest investigative priority should fall on those who appear to have exercised authority over the system or enabled its continuation, not only those who were physically present at the site.

7.1. Investigative Prioritization

Prosecutors and investigators should prioritize those whose conduct, authority, or position may connect individual acts of abuse to the wider system of detention and repression.

The following factors may help guide prioritization:

- a) whether the person exercised formal or practical authority over “Izoliatsiia” or over personnel operating there;
- b) whether the person was involved in decisions to detain, transfer, interrogate, isolate, punish, or release detainees;
- c) whether the person had repeated or sustained involvement in the facility’s operation;
- d) whether the person coordinated with MSS, MIA, FSB, military, or other security structures;
- e) whether the person had the ability to prevent, stop, conceal, or report abuse;
- f) whether the person allegedly participated in repeated or especially serious acts, including torture, sexual violence, enforced disappearance, or coercive interrogation;
- g) whether the person’s role helps demonstrate the organized or systematic nature of the crimes.

This prioritization does not exclude lower-level perpetrators from accountability. Rather, it re-

²⁶⁸ The Kyiv Court of Appeal reported that, on Oct. 28, 2024, it dismissed the defense appeal against the Jan. 3, 2024 verdict of the Shevchenkivskiy District Court of Kyiv, which had convicted Denys Kulykovskiy of participation in a terrorist organization, participation in a paramilitary formation not provided for by Ukrainian law, and cruel treatment of civilians combined with violations of the laws and customs of war. The court further reported that Kulykovskiy had served as head of the “Izoliatsiia” detention facility and had given orders concerning the escort, guarding, and forced labor of persons unlawfully deprived of liberty; that he was acquitted of the separate human trafficking charge; and that the final sentence, after partial joinder with a prior sentence imposed by the Chervonohvardiiskiy District Court of Makiivka, Donetsk Oblast, was 15 years’ imprisonment with the confiscation of all property.

flects the need to build cases that capture the organized nature of the abuse and identify those most responsible for making the system function.

7.2. Strategic and Institutional Control

The first priority for further investigation should be actors who may have exercised strategic, institutional, or supervisory control over “Izoliatsiia” and its connection to the broader detention and security apparatus in occupied Donetsk.

Available information indicates that control over “Izoliatsiia” evolved over time.²⁷⁰ In the early period after the seizure of the site, armed formations and *ad hoc* structures exercised authority over the facility. Later, the site became increasingly linked to the MSS and other *de facto* security structures. After the full-scale invasion, available information suggests deeper integration into Russian security structures, including the FSB-linked system of control.

Future investigations should focus on actors who may have:

- a) established or authorized the use of “Izoliatsiia” as a detention facility;
- b) incorporated the site into *de facto* security or detention structures;
- c) exercised supervisory authority over personnel operating at the site;
- d) provided orders, instructions, resources, or institutional cover for the facility’s operation;
- e) participated in decisions concerning categories of detainees, methods of interrogation, detention conditions, or transfers;
- f) integrated “Izoliatsiia” into a wider system of detention, filtering, interrogation, or repression.

This category is central to any crimes-against-humanity analysis because it shows that abuses at “Izoliatsiia” were not the result of misconduct by

²⁷⁰ See Chapter 4.

²⁷¹ On December 11, 2025, the National Police of Ukraine informed Truth Hounds that Ukrainian criminal justice agencies have issued notices of suspicion for at least 23 individuals of these ranks for alleged crimes committed in “Izoliatsiia.”

individual guards or interrogators. Rather, they occurred within an organized structure that sustained arbitrary detention, concealment, coercion, and violence over time.

7.3. Operational Coordinators and Supervisory Personnel²⁷¹

The second priority should be personnel who allegedly coordinated the operational functioning of the detention system. This includes actors associated with the MSS, MIA, or other *de facto* security bodies who may be linked to arrests, interrogations, transfers, detention decisions, and concealment of detainees’ fate or whereabouts at “Izoliatsiia.”

Available information indicates that MSS personnel moved detainees between MSS premises and “Izoliatsiia,” and conducted interrogations, visits to the facility, and took decisions that affected the conditions or duration of detention. Some victims understood MSS personnel to have played a decisive role in detainees’ fate and conditions.²⁷²

For investigative purposes, this group is critical because they connect the physical site to the wider apparatus of repression. Future investigations should therefore include those who:

- a) selected, identified, or approved persons for detention;
- b) organized or carried out transfers to and from “Izoliatsiia;”
- c) coordinated interrogations inside or outside the facility;
- d) controlled access to detainees by relatives, lawyers, investigators, or humanitarian actors;
- e) communicated with families while denying or concealing detention;
- f) provided personnel, equipment, transport, records, or other material support;
- g) supervised facility staff or transmitted instructions from higher authorities.

This category may be particularly relevant to enforced disappearance and imprisonment. Actors who controlled records, access, transfers, and

communication with families may have played a key role in removing detainees from the protection of the law, even if they did not personally inflict physical abuse.

7.4. Facility Leadership and On-Site Managers

The third priority should be individuals who exercised practical authority inside “Izoliatsiia.” This includes those who managed the site, supervised guards or detainee routines, controlled punishment practices, managed access to cells or interrogation areas, or acted as intermediaries between external security bodies and on-site personnel.

Future investigations should therefore examine whether such persons:

- a) controlled daily detention conditions;
- b) assigned guards or other personnel to detainee areas;
- c) organized or permitted punishment practices;
- d) facilitated interrogations or access by external personnel;
- e) maintained or transmitted information about detainees;
- f) had knowledge of repeated abuse and failed to prevent, stop, or report it;
- g) exercised practical authority over detainees, guards, or co-opted detainees.

Investigations at this level remain important because crimes against humanity often depend on proving the connection between high-level structures and the repeated commission of underlying crimes. Facility leadership may provide that bridge. Such actors may have had direct knowledge of patterns of abuse and may also help establish how orders, expectations, or tolerated practices moved between external security structures and the prison environment.

7.5. Recurring Direct Perpetrators and Specialist Personnel²⁷³

The fourth priority should be direct perpetrators whose alleged conduct was repeated, particularly serious, or connected to interrogation, punishment, sexual violence, enforced disappearance, or other core crimes analyzed in this report.

This category may include guards, interrogators, on-site personnel, members of security units, and others who allegedly had direct contact with detainees. It may also include individuals who were not formally part of the facility staff but entered the site for interrogations, intimidation, training exercises, or other coercive purposes.

Future investigations should prioritize direct perpetrators where evidence indicates:

- a) repeated involvement in violence or coercive interrogation;
- b) participation in particularly grave acts, including sexual violence, mock executions, electrocution, severe beatings, or threats against relatives;
- c) involvement in concealing detention or preventing contact with families or lawyers;
- d) a recognizable role across multiple survivor accounts;
- e) participation in training exercises or other activities that exposed detainees to violence or serious risk;
- f) coordination with facility leadership or external security personnel.

This approach should avoid treating every guard as equally important but, rather, focus instead on those whose conduct appears most serious, repeated, organized, or probative of the broader system.

²⁷³ The National Police of Ukraine has provided information that in Ukraine criminal justice agencies have launched investigations into at least 6 individuals identified during the preparation of this section, and have issued notices of suspicion. One individual has been convicted by the court.

7.6. Russian Security Structures and FSB-Linked Actors

Future investigations should also examine the role of Russian Federation security structures, including FSB-linked actors and other Russian officials or representatives, in supervising, supporting, or integrating “Izoliatsiia” into a broader system of control.

Available information cited earlier in this report indicates that Russian security structures had links to the leadership and operations of the MSS, that individuals identified as FSB officers were reportedly present at “Izoliatsiia,” and that the site later became more formally integrated into Russian-controlled structures. With further corroboration, they may connect the facility to the broader Russian security apparatus and to the policy or organizational elements relevant to crimes against humanity.

Future investigations should examine whether Russian Federation-linked actors:

- a) advised, supervised, or directed MSS or other *de facto* security structures;
- b) participated in interrogations or detention-related decisions;
- c) provided training, personnel, technical support, or operational guidance;
- d) instigated, had knowledge of, tolerated or otherwise implicitly endorsed the facility’s function and detainee treatment;
- e) helped integrate “Izoliatsiia” into Russian-controlled detention, filtering, or security systems;
- f) exercised authority over those who operated the facility.

This line of inquiry matters for attribution and command structures, and the broader contextual analysis of crimes committed in the occupied territory.

7.7. Conclusion

The available information indicates that “Izoliatsiia” operated as part of a wider system of unlawful detention, interrogation, coercion, and violence. For that reason, accountability efforts should focus not only on direct perpetrators, but also on the actors who may have designed, supervised, coordinated, enabled, or integrated the system.

Future investigations should prioritize those most responsible for the functioning of that system: actors exercising strategic or institutional control; operational coordinators linked to detention, transfer, interrogation, and concealment of imprisonment; facility-level managers with practical authority over detainees and staff; recurring direct perpetrators involved in grave or repeated abuses; and Russian Federation-linked actors who may have supervised, supported, or absorbed the facility into a broader security apparatus.

This approach reflects the legal theory of crimes against humanity. It also helps ensure that accountability efforts do not stop at the lowest level of abuse but examine the structures that allowed the abuse to continue for years.

Conclusions

For years, “Izoliatsiia” has operated as an organized site of unlawful detention, torture, enforced disappearance, and sexual violence directed against civilians in occupied Donetsk. Survivor testimony, corroborating material, and the reconstruction of the facility’s chain of control all point in the same direction: the violence at “Izoliatsiia” was repeated, deliberate, and embedded in a broader machinery of repression.

The documented conduct bears the hallmarks of crimes against humanity: imprisonment, enforced disappearance, torture, and sexual violence committed as part of a systematic attack against a civilian population. The duration of the abuses, the consistency of the methods used, and the structured system that enabled them all weigh against any claim that these were spontaneous acts by a few rogue perpetrators. They point instead to an organized pattern sustained over time.

The available information does not end with guards or on-site personnel. It points upward through the de facto administration of the facility, through the MSS and MIA, and toward Russian FSB involvement and oversight. Any credible accountability process must therefore follow the full chain of responsibility. Justice would be incomplete if it stopped with the men who carried out the beatings while ignoring those who designed, enabled, supervised, or protected the system that made those crimes possible.

More broadly, across territories of Ukraine that remain under occupation, the establishment of unlawful places of detention constitutes a recurring practice. Representatives of the occupying authorities have employed similar, and often

identical, methods of coercion against civilians unlawfully deprived of their liberty in areas beyond the control of the Government of Ukraine.

“Izoliatsiia” offers a stark example of how occupation authorities can seize a socially and culturally significant space, strip it of its original purpose, and turn it into an instrument of fear and domination. What was once a center of art and creativity became a detention site and, in time, a symbol of the wider destruction occupation inflicts on people, institutions, and public life. That transformation, from a place of cultural expression to a place defined by brutality and silence, also highlights the need to examine the cultural dimension of the violations committed there. The destruction, looting, and desecration of cultural objects at “Izoliatsiia” form part of the broader pattern of abuse and may give rise to an additional layer of responsibility under international law.

More than a decade after “Izoliatsiia” began operating as an illegal detention site, survivors still carry the physical and psychological consequences of what was done to them there. Many continue to live with pain, trauma, and the knowledge that those responsible have not yet been held to account. That reality gives these findings urgency especially in the wake of 2024 legislative changes creating a framework for the prosecution of crimes against humanity in Ukraine. Justice for the survivors of “Izoliatsiia” requires more than remembrance. It requires sustained legal action, public recognition of the truth, and accountability that reaches every level of the system that made these crimes possible.

Annex I.

Open-Source Indicators of Continued Operations at “Izoliatsiia”



Maxar satellite images from May 28, 2024, June 28, 2024, and July 5, 2025.

This annex presents materials derived from an open-source intelligence (OSINT) analysis conducted to assess whether the territory of the illegal detention facility “Izoliatsiia” remained in use during the period 2024-2025. Testimonies provided by individuals released from Russian captivity during recent prisoner exchanges offer differing accounts as to the current condition of the former factory complex and whether it continues to be utilized by the occupying authorities.

Materials collected by Truth Hounds, as well as by the colleagues from MIHR, indicate that following the onset of the Russian Federation’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the “Izoliatsiia” facility continued to function as an illegal place of detention, and that the site may have been partially destroyed in the first half of 2025. In light of these differing accounts, this annex seeks to examine the available open-source information, primarily satellite imagery, in order to clarify the status and use of the site during the relevant period.

The analysis of satellite images reveals indicators of activity on the territory of the former factory. Observed signs of economic and infrastructural activity include the dismantling of the building referred to as the “old workshop,” repairs to the roof of a structure previously identified as an ammunition storage facility, restoration or maintenance of communications infrastructure, and the presence and movement of construction materials across the site. Additionally, vehicles were observed within the perimeter of the complex, and thermal signatures consistent with heating were detected in the building reportedly used to hold detainees.

The photographs depict the same structure, identified by former detainees as the “old workshop.” In the first image, the roof of the building remains intact. In the second image, the central portion of the roof appears to have been partially dismantled. In the third image, the right-hand section of the building has been fully dismantled.

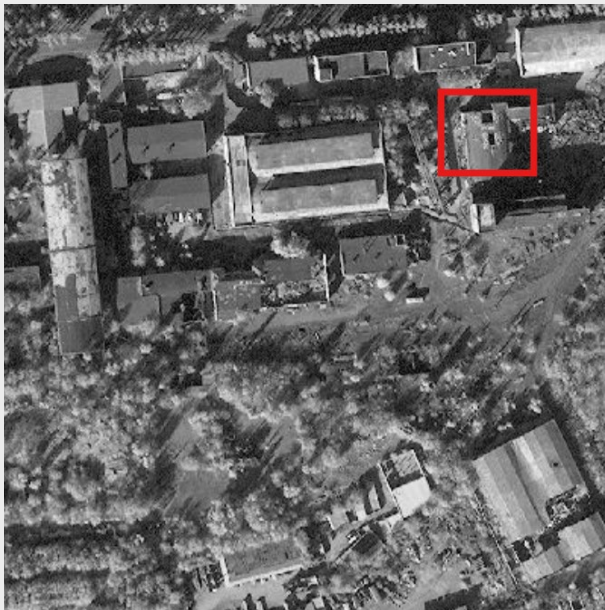


Maxar satellite image from June 28, 2024 (cars parked near garage boxes).

The photograph shows 6 elongated objects located adjacent to the building, in an area previously identified as housing garage boxes. These objects are not visible in satellite images taken on other dates. Their size, shape, and placement could indicate the presence of parked vehicles.



Maxar satellite image from August 29, 2024.



Maxar satellite image from October 29, 2024.

Regularly shaped square openings are visible on the roof of the “old workshop” building. These openings may indicate renovation or repair works. It is less likely that they result from dismantling activities, as no further progression or expansion of the openings is observable in subsequent images.



Maxar satellite image from October 26, 2024.

A stockpile of material consistent with construction-grade sand is visible on the site, which may indicate ongoing or recent construction, repair, or maintenance activities.



Maxar satellite image from February 8, 2025.

Additional mounds of a material consistent with construction-grade sand are visible on the site. A linear excavation, consistent with a trench for the installation or repair of underground utilities, can also be observed.



Maxar satellite image from February 8, 2025.

Most buildings in the area are covered with snow, with the exception of two structures that stand out. According to testimony from former detainees of "Izoliatsiia," one of these buildings (on the left) functions as a garage, while the other (on the right) corresponds to the location where detainees were previously held. The absence of snow on these buildings may indicate that they are heated and currently in use.

Dark marks have appeared on the roof of one building, likely indicating repair work addressing leaks or other maintenance needs.



Maxar satellite image from September 2, 2025.

A new sand embankment has been created on the square adjacent to the garage boxes, and the building is reportedly used for the training of "DPR" MSS personnel.



Maxar satellite image from July 28, 2025.

The image from July 28, 2025 shows multiple changes compared to the February 8, 2025 imagery. The trench previously dug for pipes has been filled with sand (red). The area near the garage boxes has been leveled with sand, and several containers are now present there (blue). A new trench, likely intended for pipe installation or repair, has appeared (brown). In addition, the roof of the building that previously housed the ammunition depot has been partially dismantled (green).



Maxar satellite images from February 8, 2025 (top) and July 28, 2025 (bottom).

The roof of the building has been removed, and construction materials are stored nearby. According to previous documentation, this building was used to store ammunition and weapons.



Maxar satellite image from July 28, 2025.



Maxar satellite images from July 28, 2025 (left) and September 2, 2025 (right).

The parking area near the checkpoint has been partially covered with building materials, as seen in the second image.



Maxar satellite images from July 28, 2025 (left) and September 2, 2025 (right).

The trench previously excavated for pipe installation or repair has been filled, and the adjacent road surface has been leveled.



Maxar satellite images from July 28, 2025 (left) and September 2, 2025 (right).

The image on the right confirms that the earlier trench (in the image on the left) for pipe installation or repair has been filled, with the road surface restored to level.

The analysis of available open-source materials, including satellite imagery and corroborating testimonies from former detainees, indicates that the "Izoliatsiia" complex continued to exhibit signs of activity in 2024-2025. Indicators observed include the movement and storage of construction materials, the repair or partial dismantling of roofs, the presence of vehicles on site, evidence of heating in buildings previously used to detain individuals, and maintenance of utility infrastructure. These observations suggest that at least some parts of the complex remained in use, either for logistical purposes or potentially in connection with the facility's prior functions.

The findings therefore point to ongoing human and material activity on the premises, but the precise nature and purpose of such activity cannot be fully ascertained from OSINT alone. In this context, the evidence allows us to assert with confidence that by the summer of 2025, the complex had not been completely destroyed and key structures were still standing. While the precise nature and full extent of activity on the site cannot be conclusively determined from open-source materials alone, the observable signs of infrastructure maintenance, building repairs, and other activity indicate that the facility was neither entirely abandoned nor inactive during the period under review.

Annex II.

Violations against Cultural Property at “Izoliatsiia”

While the primary focus of this report is the illegal detention and torture of civilians at the “Izoliatsiia” site, the appropriation of Izoliatsiia as a cultural institution and repository of cultural property, along with the destruction of artworks, may themselves constitute violations of international law.²⁷⁴ In the sections that follow, the cultural value of the destroyed artworks and the significance of the site are outlined, followed by an analysis of these acts as offenses against cultural property.

a. Izoliatsiia as a Site Dedicated to Art

The transformation of the factory into a cultural space extended far beyond the mere exhibition of artwork. The Izolyatsia team invited British architect Rick Rowbotham to develop a comprehensive plan to reconfigure the site to function effectively as a cultural center. As Mykhailo Hlubokyi, Izolyatsia’s Director for Development, recalled, “The team wanted to influence the development of the Donetsk region. Many factories had gone bankrupt, and there were no jobs. At the same time, we were observing trends of industrial revitalization across Europe.”²⁷⁵

In line with this vision, artists created a significant number of artworks exhibited at Izoliatsiia as site-specific installations. Artists conceived of these works to reimagine the industrial environment and engage critically with its history. One consequence of this approach was that the artworks could not be removed in time to protect them

from the “DPR” militants’ capture of the space: many installations were too large to dismantle, while others were permanently integrated into the site’s architectural fabric.

Over its 4 years of active operation in Donetsk, Izoliatsiia became a key hub for Ukraine’s artistic community. As Ukrainian art critic Kateryna Yakovenko notes, “The most important thing about Izoliatsiia was that it acted as a magnet for diverse groups – students and adults alike. It was a place of community.”²⁷⁶ Photographer Sasha Kurmaz similarly recalls that, “when a well-known artist came to Donetsk, everyone went to Izoliatsiia, even people traveling from Kyiv.”²⁷⁷ The space regularly hosted lectures, workshops, film screenings, and other public events. Taken together, these activities underscore that Izoliatsiia functioned as a dedicated cultural and artistic institution.

b. Cultural Value of the Artworks at Izoliatsiia

According to the Izolyatsia Platform for Cultural Initiatives, 35 pieces of art remained on the territory of the art center at the time of its seizure by the “DPR” militants in 2014.²⁷⁸

The collection at Izoliatsiia included numerous works by prominent Ukrainian and international artists. Among the most significant contributors was French conceptual artist Daniel Buren, one of the leading figures of the international contemporary art scene. His works are held in major public collections, including Tate Modern, the National Museum of Modern Art in Tokyo, and the Gug-

²⁷⁴ 1907 Hague Convention Respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land, and the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict.

²⁷⁸ Provided by Izolyatsia Foundation (see Figure 2 at the end of Annex II.)

genheim Museum Bilbao. Buren was awarded the Golden Lion at the 1986 Venice Biennale, one of the most prestigious international art events.²⁷⁹ For Izoliatsiia, he created several in situ works that directly engaged with and enhanced the industrial architecture of the former factory.

His project *21 Doors = 21 Colours* applied his signature striped visual language to the doors and gates of the site, while *Dans les filets, la couleur* and *Cabane-Lanterne* introduced interventions of colored plexiglass into existing structures in the yard of Izoliatsiia.²⁸⁰

Chinese artist Cai Guo-Qiang, internationally renowned for his use of gunpowder and explosion-based techniques, was another key participant. He was awarded the Golden Lion at the 1999 Venice Biennale.²⁸¹ His artistic practice was particularly well suited to the industrial and coal-mining context of the Donetsk region. His gunpowder portraits of miners captured the intensity of the moment immediately after they emerged from the mines, reflecting both the physical labor and the broader industrial history of the area.²⁸²

Internationally recognized Cameroonian artist Pascale Marthine Tayou has presented work at major global exhibitions, including Documenta 11 and the Venice Biennale.²⁸³

His site-specific work at Izoliatsiia, *Make Up... Peace!*, transformed the factory's smokestack into a monumental lipstick, turning it into a recognizable landmark within the local landscape. The work was dedicated to the women of Donetsk, whose labor played a crucial role in rebuilding the city after the Second World War.²⁸⁴

Among the most prominent Ukrainian artists exhibited at Izoliatsiia was Mariia Kulikovska, a Crimea-born multimedia artist. Her critically acclaimed sculptures,²⁸⁵ molded from her own body, have become a significant phenomenon in contemporary Ukrainian art and were later acquired by the Odesa National Art Museum and other institutional collections. For Izoliatsiia, Kulikovska created a series of outdoor sculptures made of soap, intentionally designed to undergo gradual decay, thereby engaging with themes of vulnerability, impermanence, and transformation.²⁸⁶

c. Destruction of the Artworks

As of June 2024, the former Izolyatsia art space remained off limits, and no one had been able to remove the artworks. Founder Lyubov Mykhailova said the captors first promised to allow the collection to leave the site, but later reversed that position during the evacuation process.

As she recalls, "One car was allowed to leave. Then an order came from above: art connoisseurs have appeared, they will come and see what we are loading, maybe someone will need something."²⁸⁷

Oleksandr Repetylo, one of the civilians illegally detained at "Izoliatsiia," later recalled seeing artworks on the premises, although he did not immediately understand their significance. "I saw all these paintings there, but I thought it was [the occupiers] who had made them," he stated.²⁸⁸

Between June 13 and 15, 2014, metal components of several artworks were reportedly cut down and removed from the site for scrap.²⁸⁹ This information most likely refers to metal-based works by Daniel Buren, Cai Guo-Qiang, Leandro Erlich, Élise Florenty and Marcel Turkowsky, Hamlet Zinkovsky, and Daniel Malone.

On June 22, 2015, the destruction of Pascale Marthine Tayou's *Make Up... Peace!* was confirmed. The installation was demolished together with the factory smokestack, an event that was recorded on video and subsequently circulated widely.²⁹⁰

The works by Mariia Kulikovska were reportedly used as shooting targets by "DPR" militants. Although this incident was widely reported in the media and confirmed by the artist herself, the act of shooting was not formally documented. Journalists from the Russian television channel *Dozhd*, who were able to film inside "Izoliatsiia" in 2014, reported statements by a former head of the detention center, who claimed that the sculptures had been shot. He had initially agreed to demonstrate this on camera, but according to the journalists, he refused to do so at the last moment.²⁹¹

d. Destruction as an Act of Ideology

Representatives of the so-called “DPR” authorities publicly acknowledged that the removal of art from the “Izoliatsiia” premises constituted not only a practical measure but also an ideological act. In an interview given in 2014, Leonid Baranov, head of the “Special Committee” operating at “Izoliatsiia” at the time, openly questioned the cultural value of the center and claimed that the artworks were used to “corrupt” young people.

During the interview, Baranov displayed books stored at “Izoliatsiia,” including a photobook by Boris Mikhailov, an internationally renowned photographer and a key representative of the Kharkiv School of Photography; Baranov characterized the work as “mentally ill” and “made for mentally ill people.” He further stated that such art would be punishable under the rules of the “DPR.” Baranov described the activities of the Izoliatsiia art center as “hostile to everything Slavic and Russian” and asserted that, instead of engaging with contemporary art, young people should “get married, have children, and exponentially increase the population of our republic.” According to his account, the artworks were discarded as garbage.²⁹²

Similarly, another “DPR” representative publicly characterized “Izoliatsiia” as an art center for “people integrated into the Maidan movement,”²⁹³ framing the institution as politically oppositional rather than cultural in nature.

e. Legal Analysis of the Alleged Violations

The seizure, appropriation, and destruction of the Izolyatsia cultural center and its artworks raise serious concerns under international law. The site, formerly an industrial factory, was transformed into a dedicated cultural institution, hosting site-specific works by internationally recognized artists. Over its operational period, Izolyatsia functioned as a public cultural hub, providing lectures, workshops, and exhibitions, thereby establishing its significance not merely as a physical location

but as a repository of cultural and artistic value. Under the 1907 Hague Convention Respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land, private property, including cultural property, is protected from seizure or destruction unless absolutely required by military necessity. The Convention also further prohibits pillage, reinforcing that the appropriation or looting of private and cultural property is unlawful.²⁹⁴ The documented dismantling of metal components of works by Buren, Cai Guo-Qiang, and others, the demolition of Tayou’s *Make Up... Peace!* installation, and the shooting at Kulikovska’s sculptures indicate actions incompatible with these protections, as they were not justified by military necessity and involved misappropriation of cultural assets.

Under the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict (Hague Convention 1954), the parties are required to respect cultural property, refrain from damaging or requisitioning it, and prevent pillage or misappropriation. The deliberate destruction, dismantling, and removal of artworks from Izoliatsiia constitutes a breach of these obligations. Article 5 Hague Convention 1954 further imposes on any occupying or controlling power a duty to take necessary precautions to safeguard and respect cultural property under its control, including measures to prevent its destruction or misappropriation.²⁹⁵ The failure to ensure the protection of the artworks, which were integrated into the architectural fabric of the site and of international cultural significance, underscores the violation of these protective duties.

The intentional destruction of cultural property not justified by military necessity may constitute a war crime. Article 8(2)(b)(ix) RS criminalizes directing attacks against buildings dedicated to art, science, or charitable purposes, provided such buildings are not military objectives.²⁹⁶

²⁹³ The Maidan movement was a wave of mass protests in Ukraine that began in late 2013 after the government suspended plans for closer integration with the European Union. It grew into a broader uprising against corruption and authoritarianism, ultimately leading to the removal of President Viktor Yanukovich in early 2014.

²⁹⁴ 1907 Hague Convention Respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land (Hague Regulations), October 18, 1907, Articles 27, 28.

²⁹⁵ 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, May 14, 1954, Articles 4, 5.

²⁹⁶ Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, Jul. 17, 1998.

The documented acts at “Izoliatsiia,” including dismantling, demolition, and ideological targeting of artworks, provide a *prima facie* basis for potential ICC jurisdiction over war crimes against cultural property.

To respond to these violations, Ukrainian authorities and international partners should prioritize a coordinated effort to identify, document, and trace the artworks that remained at “Izoliatsiia” after its seizure, including through inventories, witness testimony, photographic records, and open-source material. They should preserve this evidence for use in criminal proceedings, restitution efforts, and potential recovery of objects that may have been removed or otherwise dispersed. These steps would help ensure that the destruction, looting, and desecration of cultural property at “Izoliatsiia” receive the focused investigation and accountability they require.

In conclusion, the appropriation, destruction, and failure to protect the Izoliatsiia site and its artworks implicate violations of the 1907 and 1954 Hague Conventions, and may constitute war crimes under the RS.

Artworks that remained under the control of occupying authorities (Figure 2)



Paul Chaney
The Object of the Slight Acceleration
UNITED KINGDOM



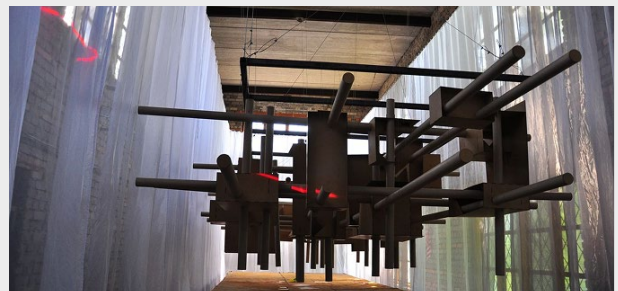
Paul Chaney
Space Patch
UNITED KINGDOM



Alexey Salmanov
Flag of Donetsk Region
RUSSIA / UKRAINE



Paul Chaney
The Acceleration of the Slightest Object
UNITED KINGDOM



Daniel Malone
Nineteen Ninety Now
NEW ZEALAND



Florenty, E. & Turkowsky, M.
Descenders of the Sun I
FRANCE / GERMANY



Maria Kulikovskaya
Homo bulla
UKRAINE



Pascale Marthine Tayou

Make up... Peace!

CAMEROON / BELGIUM



Daniel Buren

21 Doors = 21 Colours

FRANCE



Moataz Nasr

Tanoura

EGYPT



Daniel Buren

Dans les filets, la couleur

FRANCE



Leandro Erlich

Invisible Train

ARGENTINA



Daniel Buren

Cabane-Lanterne

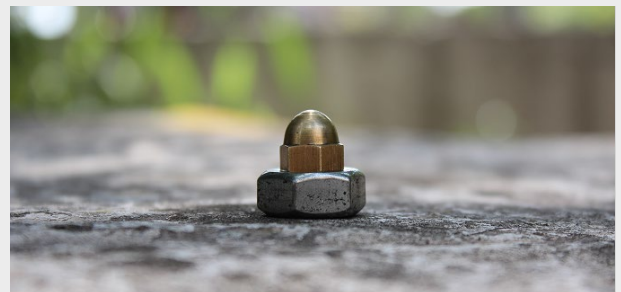
FRANCE



Leandro Erlich

Bank

ARGENTINA



Kader Attia

The More We Know the Smaller We Are

FRANCE



Kader Attia
Ce n'est rien...
FRANCE



Cai Guo-Qiang
1040m Underground: the Nursery Rhymes
CHINA



Natasha Pavlovskaya
Missing space 2
RUSSIA / HUNGARY



Natasha Pavlovskaya
Untitled
RUSSIA / HUNGARY



Anatoly Belov
Balance
UKRAINE



Hamlet Zinkovsky
Labyrinth
UKRAINE



APL315
Izoliatsiia graffiti
UKRAINE



Hamlet Zinkovsky
Hero of labour
UKRAINE



Lyubov Malikova

Babushka

UKRAINE



Richard Ansett

Partly Cloudy

UNITED KINGDOM



Maria Kulikovskaya

Army of clones

UKRAINE



Nuno Barroso

Partly Cloudy

PORTUGAL



Unknown

Izoliatsiia Deer

UKRAINE



Marina Black

Partly Cloudy

RUSSIA / CANADA



Hans Op de Beeck

Sea of tranquility

BELGIUM



Marco Citron

Partly Cloudy

ITALY



Sasha Kurmaz (Homer)

Partly Cloudy

UKRAINE



Flavia Junqueira

Partly Cloudy

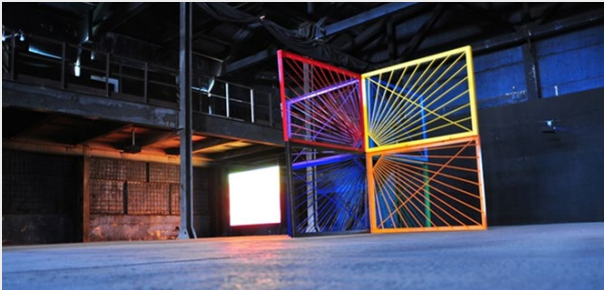
RUSSIA / HUNGARY



Oleksandr Strinadko

Partly Cloudy

UKRAINE



Florenty, E. & Turkowsky, M.

The Descendants of the Sun II

FRANCE / GERMANY

Annex III.

The Broader Context of the Long-Term Effects of Detentions in the Russian Federation and Occupied Territories of Ukraine

Violations of IHL and serious human rights abuses committed in territories under the control of the Russian Federation have repeatedly demonstrated a systematic character, employing violence as a sustained method of influence over the civilian population. The experiences documented in relation to the illegal detention facility known as “Izoliatsiia” must be understood within this broader context.²⁹⁷

Although this report focuses specifically on crimes committed against civilians unlawfully detained at that site, the harm inflicted on former detainees reflects patterns observed across a wider system of captivity-related abuse. This annex addresses the psychological consequences experienced by individuals held in Russian captivity, with particular attention to former detainees of “Izoliatsiia.”

Confidential, generalized data collected by Ukrainian criminal justice professionals provides a broader evidentiary backdrop against which the testimonies examined in this report can be situated. This material allows for the identification

of the recurring psychological effects of captivity and facilitates a comparison between the experiences of “Izoliatsiia” survivors and those of other former detainees.

The data indicates that captivity is frequently followed by profound and enduring psychological harm. Former detainees commonly experience persistent sleep disturbances, including chronic insomnia, night terrors, and involuntary reactions during sleep associated with memories of detention. Anxiety-related symptoms, such as recurrent panic attacks, heightened fear responses, and an inability to remain in crowded or unfamiliar environments, are widely reported. In many cases, these symptoms are accompanied by broader psychological and emotional disorders, including post-traumatic stress disorder, nervous system dysregulation, asthenic conditions, and suicidal ideation. These manifestations often persist long after release, underscoring the lasting nature of the trauma inflicted.²⁹⁸

The psychological consequences described in the generalized criminal justice data closely mirror the experiences recounted by former detainees of “Izoliatsiia.” Those survivors similarly experience chronic sleep disorders linked both to traumatic stress and to the conditions of detention, recurrent panic attacks triggered by reminders of captivity, and heightened fear responses rooted in the constant threat of violence. Survivor accounts of acute stress reactions to specific sen-

²⁹⁷ Truth Hounds, *International Partnership for Human Rights*, “Truth Beneath Silence: Russia’s Weaponisation of Sexual Violence Against Men in Ukraine,” forthcoming in June 2026. The report describes how Russian forces have committed widespread and systematic sexual violence against Ukrainian men in occupied territories as part of their broader campaign of control, intimidation, and suppression. It details documented cases, methods of abuse, and detention sites, framing these acts as crimes against humanity intended not only to harm individuals but also to humiliate communities and weaken Ukrainian society. The report also calls for accountability, better survivor support, and greater recognition of sexual violence against men in international law and policy.

²⁹⁸ Confidential information on file with the authors, provided by representatives of Ukrainian criminal justice agencies and not publicly accessible.

sory triggers, such as sounds associated with cell doors or guards' movements, align with broader patterns of trauma-related hypervigilance and anxiety identified among other former captives. The close similarity between survivors' personal accounts and the broader patterns identified by criminal justice agencies underscores that what former detainees of "Izoliatsiia" describe is not exceptional or isolated, but reflects a shared and recurring experience of psychological harm linked to captivity.²⁹⁹

According to the materials reviewed and conclusions drawn by legal professionals, this psychological harm is not incidental. The methods employed against detainees were designed to humiliate, intimidate, and break the individual, fostering a constant sense of fear, insecurity, and loss of personal autonomy. In the broader context of the armed conflict, these practices appear aimed at suppressing resistance, undermining individual agency, and exerting control over the civilian population. The psychological consequences documented here therefore form an integral part of the system of abuse associated with unlawful detention and ill-treatment, rather than a secondary or unintended outcome.³⁰⁰

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- 111 A missile struck Olenivka Prison in occupied Donetsk in July 2022, killing at least 50 Ukrainian prisoners of war detained there. Russia and Ukraine accused each other of being responsible for the attack, although subsequent investigations point to Russia as the most likely culprit: S. Blann and H. Arhirova, "2 years after Ukrainian POW deaths, survivors and leaked UN analysis point to Russia as the culprit," *Associated Press*, Jul. 25, 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/yuvxty97>, last accessed Feb. 4, 2026.
- 112 Statement of IZ-016, interviewed by Truth Hounds.
- 113 *IZOLYATSIYA, "Izolyatsia' in Exile,"* [n.d.], <https://izolyatsia.org/ua/project/exile/>, last accessed Jan. 30, 2026.
- 114 Statements of IZ-001, IZ-003, IZ-010, interviewed by Truth Hounds. Internal confidential analytical document IZ-D1.
- 115 Statements of IZ-003, IZ-006, interviewed by Truth Hounds.
- 116 Statements of IZ-002, IZ-016, IZ-017, IZ-018, IZ-020, interviewed by Truth Hounds.
- 117 Statements of IZ-002, IZ-011, interviewed by Truth Hounds.
- 118 Statements of IZ-005, IZ-020, interviewed by Truth Hounds.
- 119 Statement of IZ-002, interviewed by Truth Hounds.
- 120 Statement of IZ-003, interviewed by Truth Hounds.
- 121 Internal confidential analytical document IZ-D1.
- 122 Statements of IZ-001, IZ-002, interviewed by Truth Hounds.
- 123 Statements of IZ-005, IZ-007, interviewed by Truth Hounds.
- 124 Statement of IZ-005, interviewed by Truth Hounds.
- 125 Statement of IZ-006, interviewed by Truth Hounds.
- 126 Statement of IZ-010, interviewed by Truth Hounds.
- 127 Statements of IZ-001, IZ-003, IZ-018, interviewed by Truth Hounds.
- 128 Statement of IZ-003, interviewed by Truth Hounds.
- 129 Statements of IZ-005, IZ-006, IZ-008, IZ-013, IZ-015, interviewed by Truth Hounds. Internal confidential analytical document IZ-D1.
- 130 Statements of IZ-003, IZ-007, IZ-008, IZ-009, IZ-018, interviewed by Truth Hounds. Statements of IZ-CO-04, IZ-CO-06, interviewed by Media Initiative for Human Rights.
- 131 Statements of IZ-007, IZ-009, interviewed by Truth Hounds.
- 132 Statement of IZ-003, interviewed by Truth Hounds.
- 133 Statements of IZ-003, IZ-019, interviewed by Truth Hounds.
- 134 Statements of IZ-017, IZ-019, interviewed by Truth Hounds.
- 135 Statements of IZ-CO-01, IZ-CO-07, interviewed by Media Initiative for Human Rights.
- 136 Statement of IZ-020, interviewed by Truth Hounds.
- 137 Statement of IZ-020, interviewed by Truth Hounds.
- 138 Statements of IZ-010, IZ-011, IZ-015, interviewed by Truth Hounds.
- 139 Internal confidential analytical document IZ-D1. Statement of IZ-022, interviewed by Truth Hounds.
- 140 Statements of IZ-014, IZ-015, IZ-017, IZ-021, interviewed by Truth Hounds. Statement of IZ-CO-03, interviewed by Media Initiative for Human Rights.
- 141 Statements of IZ-005, IZ-010, IZ-012, IZ-019, interviewed by Truth Hounds.
- 142 Statements of IZ-005, IZ-010, IZ-011, interviewed by Truth Hounds. Statement of IZ-CO-03, interviewed by Media Initiative for Human Rights.
- 143 Statements of IZ-006, IZ-010, IZ-011, IZ-017, IZ-019, IZ-020, IZ-021, interviewed by Truth Hounds. Statement of IZ-CO-09, interviewed by Media Initiative for Human Rights. Internal confidential analytical document IZ-D1.
- 144 Statement of IZ-007, interviewed by Truth Hounds.
- 145 Statement of IZ-019, interviewed by Truth Hounds.
- 146 Statement of IZ-010, interviewed by Truth Hounds.
- 147 Internal confidential analytical document IZ-D1. Statement of IZ-022, interviewed by Truth Hounds.
- 148 Statements of IZ-011, IZ-013, IZ-019, IZ-020, IZ-021, interviewed by Truth Hounds.
- 149 Statements of IZ-018, IZ-019, IZ-021, interviewed by Truth Hounds.
- 150 Statement of IZ-011, interviewed by Truth Hounds.
- 151 Statement of IZ-017, interviewed by Truth Hounds.
- 152 Statements of IZ-003, IZ-011, IZ-017, IZ-019, interviewed by Truth Hounds.
- 153 Statement of IZ-003, interviewed by Truth Hounds.
- 154 Statements of IZ-005, IZ-013, IZ-018, IZ-019, interviewed by Truth Hounds. Internal confidential analytical document IZ-D1.
- 155 Statements of IZ-010, IZ-011, IZ-016, IZ-018, IZ-019, IZ-020, IZ-021, interviewed by Truth Hounds. Statement of IZ-CO-03, interviewed by Media Initiative for Human Rights.
- 156 Statement of IZ-011, interviewed by Truth Hounds.
- 157 Statements of IZ-019, IZ-020, interviewed by Truth Hounds.
- 158 Statement of IZ-011, interviewed by Truth Hounds.
- 159 Statements of IZ-010, IZ-018, interviewed by Truth Hounds.
- 160 Statement of IZ-006, interviewed by Truth Hounds.
- 161 Statement of IZ-CO-05, interviewed by Media Initiative for Human Rights.
- 162 Statement of IZ-005, interviewed by Truth Hounds.
- 163 Statement of IZ-006, interviewed by Truth Hounds. Internal confidential analytical document IZ-D1.
- 164 Statement of IZ-002, interviewed by Truth Hounds.
- 165 Statements of IZ-004, IZ-007, interviewed by Truth Hounds.
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- 167 Statements of IZ-001, IZ-002, IZ-003, IZ-005, IZ-014, IZ-015, interviewed by Truth Hounds.
- 168 Statement of IZ-003, interviewed by Truth Hounds.

- 169 Statement of IZ-007, interviewed by Truth Hounds.
- 170 Statement of IZ-002, interviewed by Truth Hounds.
- 171 Statement of IZ-001, interviewed by Truth Hounds; *Media Initiative for Human Rights*, "Female Face of Donbas Hostages," 2021, p. 23, <https://tinyurl.com/4hefjvwe>, last accessed Apr. 27, 2026.
- 172 Statement of IZ-001, interviewed by Truth Hounds.
- 173 Statement of IZ-006, interviewed by Truth Hounds.
- 174 Statements of IZ-010, IZ-017, interviewed by Truth Hounds. Prolonged solitary confinement is prohibited under international standards. The U.N. Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners ("the Nelson Mandela Rules") define it as solitary confinement for more than 15 consecutive days and prohibit its use. U.N. Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, Rules 43-45, G.A. Res. 70/175 (Dec. 17, 2015). The U.N. Special Rapporteur on torture stated that prolonged solitary confinement may amount to torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment. Report of the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, U.N. Doc. A/66/268, paras. 26, 79 (Aug. 5, 2011).
- 175 Statement of IZ-007, interviewed by Truth Hounds.
- 176 See, for example, 'Prison social hierarchy,' *Groklopedia*, Dec. 4, 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/bdducaen>, last accessed Feb. 4, 2026.
- 177 Statement of IZ-009, interviewed by Truth Hounds.
- 178 Statement of IZ-013, interviewed by Truth Hounds.
- 179 Statement of IZ-012, interviewed by Truth Hounds.
- 180 Statement of IZ-009, interviewed by Truth Hounds.
- 181 Statements of IZ-011, IZ-013, interviewed by Truth Hounds.
- 182 Statements of IZ-006, IZ-011, interviewed by Truth Hounds.
- 183 Statement of IZ-002, interviewed by Truth Hounds.
- 184 Statements of IZ-002, IZ-003, IZ-015, IZ-017, interviewed by Truth Hounds.
- 185 Statements of IZ-006, IZ-011, IZ-017, interviewed by Truth Hounds. Statement of IZ-CO-01, interviewed by Media Initiative for Human Rights.
- 186 Statements of IZ-005, IZ-015, IZ-021, interviewed by Truth Hounds. Statement of IZ-CO-01, interviewed by Media Initiative for Human Rights.
- 187 Statements of IZ-006, IZ-010, IZ-013, IZ-019, interviewed by Truth Hounds. Statements of IZ-CO-04, IZ-CO-07, interviewed by Media Initiative for Human Rights.
- 188 Statement of IZ-018, interviewed by Truth Hounds.
- 189 Statements of IZ-CO-04, IZ-CO-09, interviewed by Media Initiative for Human Rights.
- 190 Statement of IZ-CO-05, interviewed by Media Initiative for Human Rights.
- 191 Statements of IZ-003, IZ-007, interviewed by Truth Hounds.
- 192 Statements of IZ-001, IZ-003, IZ-005, IZ-007, IZ-009, IZ-010, IZ-012, IZ-015, IZ-017, interviewed by Truth Hounds.
- 193 Survivor testimonies from "Izolatsiia" align with research on the psychological impact of torture. As is outlined in the *Istanbul Protocol: Manual on the Effective Investigation and Documentation of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment*, "[t]he physical and psychological after-effects of torture can be devastating and last for years, affecting not only the victims but also members of their families," (UN, 1999/2004), para. 24.
- 194 Statement of IZ-011, interviewed by Truth Hounds. Internal confidential analytical document IZ-D1.
- 195 Statements of IZ-010, IZ-012, IZ-022, interviewed by Truth Hounds.
- 196 Statements of IZ-009, IZ-021, interviewed by Truth Hounds.
- 197 Statement of IZ-CO-05, interviewed by Media Initiative for Human Rights.
- 198 Statements of IZ-011, IZ-012, IZ-019, interviewed by Truth Hounds.
- 199 Survivors have reported knowing of instances in which the human remains of detainees who had died or been killed in detention were disposed of in a degrading manner by prison officials, including being fed to pigs kept on the premises. See IZ-020; *OHCHR UNHRMMU*, "Arbitrary Detention, Torture and Ill-Treatment in the Context of Armed Conflict in Eastern Ukraine 2014-2021," Jul. 2, 2021, p. 30, <https://tinyurl.com/459kv8v7>, last accessed Jan. 30, 2026; *European Conservatives and Reformists Group*, "Isolation: Voices from the Basement," 2021, p. 31.
- 200 Statement of IZ-019, interviewed by Truth Hounds. Internal document IZ-D2.
- 201 Statement of IZ-012, interviewed by Truth Hounds.
- 202 Statement of IZ-013, interviewed by Truth Hounds.
- 203 Statements of IZ-011, IZ-013, IZ-021, interviewed by Truth Hounds.
- 204 Statements of IZ-009, IZ-012, IZ-014, interviewed by Truth Hounds.
- 205 Statement of IZ-013, interviewed by Truth Hounds. Internal confidential analytical document IZ-D1.
- 206 Statement of IZ-017, interviewed by Truth Hounds.
- 207 Statement of IZ-019, interviewed by Truth Hounds. Statements of IZ-CO-01, IZ-CO-07, interviewed by Media Initiative for Human Rights.
- 208 Statement of IZ-019, interviewed by Truth Hounds.
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- 210 Statements of IZ-016, IZ-021, interviewed by Truth Hounds. Statements of IZ-CO-01, IZ-CO-05, interviewed by Media Initiative for Human Rights.
- 211 Statement of IZ-011, interviewed by Truth Hounds.
- 212 Statement of IZ-013, interviewed by Truth Hounds.
- 213 Statement of IZ-017, interviewed by Truth Hounds.
- 214 Statement of IZ-017, interviewed by Truth Hounds.
- 215 M. Andruszewska and W. Chekalo, "Isolation. Voices from the Basement," *Government of Poland*, May 21, 2021, <https://tinyurl.com/bdhejzhr>, last accessed Feb. 2, 2026.
- 216 *OHCHR UNHRMMU*, "Arbitrary Detention, Torture and Ill-Treatment in the Context of Armed Conflict in Eastern Ukraine 2014-2021," Jul. 2, 2021, <https://tinyurl.com/459kv8v7>, last accessed Jan. 30, 2026.
- 217 *Media Initiative for Human Rights*, "Female Face of Donbas Hostages," 2021, <https://tinyurl.com/4hefjvwe>, last accessed Apr. 27, 2026.
- 218 Law of Ukraine No. 3909-IX, "On Ratification of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court and the Amendments to It," adopted August 21, 2024; see also *Office of the President of Ukraine*, "On January 1, 2025, Ukraine Will Become the 125th Member State of the International Criminal Court," October 25, 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/4n5kn83c>, last accessed May 4, 2026.
- 219 Law of Ukraine No. 4012-IX of October 9, 2024, amending the Criminal Code of Ukraine and the Criminal Procedure Code of Ukraine in connection with ratification of the Rome Statute.
- 220 Criminal Code of Ukraine, art. 442-1, added by Law No. 4012-IX of October 9, 2024.
- 221 See Criminal Code of Ukraine, as amended by Law No. 4012-IX, including Article 31-1 on command responsibility, amendments concerning jurisdiction and limitation periods for international crimes, and related changes to the Criminal Procedure Code.
- 222 See Law No. 4012-IX of October 9, 2024, introducing Criminal Code article 442-1 on crimes against humanity; for the factual basis regarding "Izolatsiia," see Chapters 4-6 of this report.
- 223 RS, Art. 7(1)(e).
- 224 RS, Art. 7(1)(i).
- 225 RS, Art. 7(1)(f).
- 226 RS, Art. 7(1)(g).
- 227 ICC Elements of Crimes (EoC), Introduction to Article 7, para. 3.
- 228 ICC, *The Prosecutor v. Jean-Pierre Bemba Gombo* (ICC-01/05-01/08), Judgment, Trial Chamber III, Mar. 21, 2016, para. 149, referring to *The Prosecutor v. Laurent* (ICC-02/11-01/11), Decision on the Confirmation of Charges, Pre-Trial Chamber, Jun. 12, 2014, para. 209.
- 229 ICC, *The Prosecutor v. Jean-Pierre Bemba Gombo* (ICC-01/05-01/08), Decision Pursuant to Article 61(7)(a) and (b) of the Rome Statute on the Charges of the Prosecutor Against Jean-Pierre Bemba Gombo, Pre-Trial Chamber II, Jun. 15, 2009, para. 75.
- 230 See, for example, the Geneva Conventions, common Art. 3, and the Additional Protocols.
- 231 Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of August 12, 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (AP II).
- 232 ICTY, *Prosecutor v. Tadić* (IT-94-1-A), Trial Chamber, Judgment, May 7, 1997, para. 638.
- 233 ICTY, *Prosecutor v. Blaškić* (IT-95-14), Trial Chamber I, Judgment, Mar. 3, 2000, para. 208, fn. 401.
- 234 ICC, *The Prosecutor v. Jean-Pierre Bemba Gombo* (ICC-01/05-01/08), Decision Pursuant to Article 61(7)(a) and (b) of the Rome Statute on the Charges of the Prosecutor Against Jean-Pierre Bemba Gombo, Pre-Trial Chamber II, Jun. 15, 2009, para. 76; Situation in the Republic of Kenya, Decision Pursuant to Article 15 of the Rome Statute on the Authorization of an Investigation into the Situation in the Republic of Kenya, Mar. 31, 2010, para.

- 125.
- 235 ICTY, *Kunarac et al.*, (IT-96-23 & IT-96-23/1-A), Appeals Chamber, Judgment, Jun. 12, 2002, para. 93.
- 236 SCSL, *Prosecutor v. Taylor* (SCSL-03-01-T), Trial Chamber, Judgment, May 18, 2012, para. 553.
- 237 ICTY, *Prosecutor v. Kunarac, Kovac and Vukovic* (IT-96-23-T and IT-96-23/1-T), Trial Chamber, Judgment, Feb. 22, 2001, para. 429 (footnote omitted), ICTY; *Prosecutor v. Kunarac, Kovac and Vukovic* (IT-96-23-T and IT-96-23/1-A), Appeals Chamber, Appeals Judgment, Jun. 12, 2001, para. 94. See also ICTY, *Prosecutor v. Krnojelac* (IT-97-25-T, 15), Trial Chamber, Judgment, Mar. 15, 2002, para. 57.
- 238 ICTR, *The Prosecutor v. Jean-Paul Akayesu* (ICTR-96-4-T), Trial Chamber, Judgment, Sep. 2, 1998, para. 580.
- 239 ICC, *The Prosecutor v. Bosco Ntaganda* (ICC-01/04-02/06), Judgment, Trial Chamber VI, Jul. 8, 2019; ICC, *The Prosecutor v. Germain Katanga* (ICC-01/04-01/07), Judgment, Trial Chamber II, Mar. 7, 2014, para. 1123.
- 240 ICTY, *Prosecutor v. Kunarac, Kovac and Vukovic* (IT-96-23-T and IT-96-23/1-A), Appeals Chamber, Appeals Judgment, Jun. 12, 2001, para. 98.
- 241 W. A. Schabas, *The International Criminal Court: A Commentary on the Rome Statute* (2016, 2nd Edn.), p. 161.
- 242 ICC, *The Prosecutor v. Germain Katanga* (ICC-01/04-01/07), Judgment pursuant to Article 74 of the Rome Statute, Trial Chamber II, Mar. 7, 2014, para. 1110.
- 243 *Ibid.*, para. 1119.
- 244 ICC EoC, Art. 7(2).
- 245 ICTY, *Kordic and Čerkez* (IT-95-14/2-A), Appeals Chamber, Appeals Judgment, Dec. 17, 2004, para. 116.
- 246 R. Cryer et al., *An Introduction to International Criminal Law and Procedure* (2007), pp. 205-206.
- 247 ICRC, Customary International Humanitarian Law, Rule 99.
- 248 See, for example, UN Working Group on Enforced Disappearances, General Comment No. 9, para. 1.
- 249 ICC EoC, Art. 7(1)(i).
- 250 ICC EoC, Art. 7(1)(i)(4) and (5).
- 251 ICC EoC, Art. 7(1)(i)(6).
- 252 For more detail, see "Control and Oversight at 'Izoliatsiia'" and "Perpetrator Categories and Linkage Evidence."
- 253 RS, Art. 7(2)(f). The crime against humanity of torture in the RS does not require a specific purpose for the infliction of pain or suffering, like "obtaining information or a confession, punishing, or intimidating or coercing," which is an element of both war crimes (ICC EoC, Art. 8(2)(a)(iii)-1), The Convention Against Torture, and jurisprudence from the *ad hoc* tribunals. The requirement of the victim being in custody or control of the perpetrator is, however, novel to the RS.
- 254 ICC, *The Prosecutor v. Dominic Ongwen* (ICC-02/04-01/15-1762), Trial Chamber, Judgment, Feb. 4, 2021, para. 2701.
- 255 ICTY, *Prosecutor v. Kvočka et al.* (IT-98-30/1), Trial Chamber, Judgment, Nov. 2, 2001, paras. 142-3.
- 256 ICC EoC, Introduction, para. 4.
- 257 R. Cryer et al., *An Introduction to International Criminal Law and Procedure* (2007), pp. 206-208.
- 258 ICTY, *Prosecutor v. Anto Furundžija* (IT-95-17/1-T), Trial Chamber, Judgment, Dec. 10, 1998, para. 267.
- 259 ICTY, *Prosecutor v. Miroslav Kvočka et al.* (IT-98-30/1-T), Trial Chamber, Judgment, Nov. 2, 2001, para. 148.
- 260 RS, Art. 30(2)(a) and (b).
- 261 ICC, *The Prosecutor v. Al Hassan Ag Abdoul Aziz Ag Mohamed Ag Mahmoud* (ICC-01/12-01/18), Trial Chamber, Judgment, Jun. 26, 2024, para. 1325.
- 262 RS, Art. 7(1)(g).
- 263 ICC EoC, Art. 7(1)(g)-1.
- 264 ICC EoC, Art. 7(1)(g)-6.
- 265 R. Cryer, et al., *An Introduction to International Criminal Law and Procedure* (2007), pp. 208-211.
- 266 W. A. Schabas, *The International Criminal Court: A Commentary on the Rome Statute* (2016, 2nd Edn.), p. 186.
- 267 ICTY, *Kunarac et al.*, (IT-96-23 & IT-96-23/1-A), Appeals Chamber, Judgment, Jun. 12, 2002, para. 130.
- 268 *Kyiv Court of Appeal*, "15 years of imprisonment with confiscation of property – the court verdict against the former head of the 'Izoliatsiia' prison in occupied Donetsk has entered into force," Nov. 1, 2024, <https://www.kas.gov.ua/?p=36784&lang=en>. The Kyiv Court of Appeal reported that, on Oct. 28, 2024, it dismissed the defense appeal against the Jan. 3, 2024 verdict of the Shevchenkovskiy District Court of Kyiv, which had convicted Denys Kulykovskiy of participation in a terrorist organization, participation in a paramilitary formation not provided for by Ukrainian law, and cruel treatment of civilians combined with violations of the laws and customs of war. The court further reported that Kulykovskiy had served as head of the "Izoliatsiia" detention facility and had given orders concerning the escort, guarding, and forced labor of persons unlawfully deprived of liberty; that he was acquitted of the separate human trafficking charge; and that the final sentence, after partial joinder with a prior sentence imposed by the Chervonohvardiiskiy District Court of Makiivka, Donetsk Oblast, was 15 years' imprisonment with the confiscation of all property.
- 269 *Ibid.*
- 270 See Chapter 4.
- 271 On December 11, 2025, the National Police of Ukraine informed Truth Hounds that Ukrainian criminal justice agencies have issued notices of suspicion for at least 23 individuals of these ranks for alleged crimes committed in "Izoliatsiia."
- 272 See Chapter 5.
- 273 The National Police of Ukraine has provided information that in Ukraine criminal justice agencies have launched investigations into at least 6 individuals identified during the preparation of this section, and have issued notices of suspicion. One individual has been convicted by the court.
- 274 1907 Hague Convention Respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land, and the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict.
- 275 *Public Culture*, "ISOLATION: How the 'Russian World' destroyed art in Donetsk and created a secret torture chamber," Apr. 16, 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/yt4d3k5b>, last accessed Feb. 2, 2026.
- 276 *Ibid.*
- 277 *Ibid.*
- 278 Provided by Izolyatsia Foundation (see Figure 2 at the end of Annex II.)
- 279 *Galleria Continua*, "Daniel Buren," [n.d.], <https://www.galleriacontinua.com/artists/daniel-buren-11/biography>, last accessed Feb. 2, 2026.
- 280 *IZOLYATSIA*, "Buren, Daniel," 2012, <https://izolyatsia.org/en/collection/artist/Buren>, last accessed Feb. 2, 2026.
- 281 *Cai Guo-Qiang*, "Biography," [n.d.], <https://caiguoqiang.com/about-the-artist/>, last accessed Feb. 2, 2026.
- 282 *IZOLYATSIA*, "Guo-Qiang, Cai," 2011, <https://izolyatsia.org/en/collection/artist/Cai>, last accessed Feb. 2, 2026.
- 283 *Galleria Continua*, "Pascale Marthine Tayou," [n.d.], <https://www.galleriacontinua.com/artists/pascale-marthine-tayou-74/biography>, last accessed Feb. 2, 2026.
- 284 *IZOLYATSIA*, "Tayou, Pascale Marthine," 2012, <https://izolyatsia.org/en/collection/artist/Tayou>, last accessed Feb. 2, 2026.
- 285 *Art Ukraine*, "Homo Bulla — soap sculptures by Masha Kulikovskaya," Sep. 12, 2012, <https://tinyurl.com/3wv2sytp>, last accessed Feb. 2, 2026.
- 286 *IZOLYATSIA*, "Kulikovskaya, Maria," [n.d.], <https://izolyatsia.org/en/collection/artist/Kulikovskaya>, last accessed Feb. 2, 2026.
- 287 D. Volchek, "Looters on the island of 'Isolation'," *Radio Liberty*, Jun. 15, 2014, <https://tinyurl.com/2jnadm82>, last accessed Feb. 2, 2026.
- 288 *Public Culture*, "ISOLATION: How the 'Russian World' destroyed art in Donetsk and created a secret torture chamber," Apr. 16, 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/yt4d3k5b>, last accessed Feb. 2, 2026.
- 289 *IZOLYATSIA*, "Seizure of 'Izolyatsia' territory in Donetsk by armed forces of Russian Federation," [n.d.], <https://izolyatsia.org/en/foundation/exile/>, last accessed Feb. 2, 2026.
- 290 *IZOLYATSIA*, "Tayou, Pascale Marthine," [n.d.], https://izolyatsia.org/en/collection/art-work/Tayou_1/, last accessed Feb. 2, 2026.
- 291 T. Olevsky, "Territory of Isolation. How Donetsk separatists took over contemporary art," *Dozhd*, Jul. 5, 2014, <https://tinyurl.com/4dby7mub>, last accessed Feb. 2, 2026.
- 292 "Leonid Baranov at 'Izolyatsia,'" *Vimeo*, Jul. 29, 2014, <https://tinyurl.com/yt79pe5c>, last accessed Feb. 2, 2026.
- 293 The Maidan movement was a wave of mass protests in Ukraine that began in late 2013

after the government suspended plans for closer integration with the European Union. It grew into a broader uprising against corruption and authoritarianism, ultimately leading to the removal of President Viktor Yanukovich in early 2014. "Mongol," *Vimeo*, Jul. 29, 2014, <https://tinyurl.com/ygyu3pyj>, last accessed Feb. 2, 2026.

- 294 1907 Hague Convention Respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land (Hague Regulations), October 18, 1907, Articles 27, 28.
- 295 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, May 14, 1954, Articles 4, 5.
- 296 Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, Jul. 17, 1998.
- 297 *Truth Hounds, International Partnership for Human Rights*, "Truth Beneath Silence: Russia's Weaponisation of Sexual Violence Against Men in Ukraine," forthcoming in June 2026. The report describes how Russian forces have committed widespread and systematic sexual violence against Ukrainian men in occupied territories as part of their broader campaign of control, intimidation, and suppression. It details documented cases, methods of abuse, and detention sites, framing these acts as crimes against humanity intended not only to harm individuals but also to humiliate communities and weaken Ukrainian society. The report also calls for accountability, better survivor support, and greater recognition of sexual violence against men in international law and policy.
- 298 Confidential information on file with the authors, provided by representatives of Ukrainian criminal justice agencies and not publicly accessible.
- 299 *Truth Hounds, International Partnership for Human Rights*, "Truth Beneath Silence: Russia's Weaponisation of Sexual Violence Against Men in Ukraine," forthcoming in June 2026.
- 300 Confidential information on file with the authors, provided by representatives of Ukrainian criminal justice agencies and not publicly accessible.



The illustration references the "wall hold" torture: limbs spread, body standing against the wall for long periods. It also captures the constant bright lighting that guards kept on around the clock, the only light source in windowless or blacked-out cells.

Illustration: Maksym Filipenko / @maksymdraws

This report draws on survivor testimonies, institutional interviews, prior human rights reporting, and open-source investigation to establish patterns of violence – including imprisonment, enforced disappearance, torture, and sexual violence – and their long-lasting consequences for survivors, at "Izoliatsiia," an illegal detention facility created by Russian-backed forces in the occupied Donetsk in June 2014. It assesses whether these abuses meet the contextual and material elements of crimes against humanity under the Rome Statute, traces the chain of command and institutional structures through which the facility operated, examines the destruction of cultural property, and considers accountability pathways opened by Ukraine's 2024 legal reforms.