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Joint Submission to the Special Rapporteur on Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment, Alice Jill Edwards

Survivor Experiences and Perspectives on Torture and Conflict-Related Sexual Violence against Men and Boys in Ukraine

Submitted by:

Alumni Network of Ukrainian Men Who Survived Captivity and Torture (Alumni) – a survivor-led network of civilian male survivors of Russian detention and torture in the context of the war between Russia and Ukraine. Established after the liberation of Kherson, Alumni provides peer-support and advocates for survivor's access to services, medical assistance and justice.

December 29th – a survivor-led organisation, composed primarily of individuals who were imprisoned in the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) and Luhansk People's Republic (LPR) from 2014 onwards.

All Survivors Project (ASP) – an international non-governmental organisation that supports global efforts to eradicate conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) and strengthen national and international responses to it through research and action on CRSV against men and boys.

22 September 2025

Introduction

This submission draws on the experiences of Ukrainian men and boys who have survived torture and conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) at the hands of Russian military forces and their auxiliaries. It has been jointly prepared and submitted by

Alumni, December 29th and ASP in response to the Special Rapporteur on Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment call for input for her upcoming report on the experiences and perspectives of victims and survivors of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

Our organisations commend the Special Rapporteur’s efforts to place victims and survivors at the heart of policies and measures to prevent, prohibit, investigate and punish crimes of torture, and to provide rehabilitation and reparations for victims and survivors. These priorities align closely with our organisations’ work in supporting survivors, amplifying their perspectives, and advocating for services, medical assistance, justice, and accountability.

This submission focuses on the experience of Ukrainian men and boys who have survived CRSV and other forms of torture and ill-treatment at the hands of Russian military forces and their auxiliaries. It highlights the extent and impact of CRSV in Ukraine on men and boys from survivors’ perspectives, including the barriers survivors face in reporting and receiving support, the need for specialised service provision and reparations, and the need for safe, survivor-centred pathways for investigation and justice processes.

This submission was prepared with the direct input of two individual representatives from Alumni and December 29th. Their contributions draw on both their personal experiences as survivors and their wider knowledge of collective patterns, including the experiences of other individuals and groups encountered through their work as organisers and activists. ASP supported the collation and organisation of this information, and the final text has been reviewed and agreed by all three submitting groups.

Some survivors have chosen to provide their names and identifying details for inclusion in this report. Others remain anonymous for reasons of privacy and security. Identifying information may therefore be published in full, withheld, redacted, or anonymised at the discretion of the Special Rapporteur, in order to safeguard confidentiality and survivor safety.

Throughout this submission, the term “*survivor*” is used to emphasise agency, resilience, and the active pursuit of justice. In some sections, the pronouns “*we*” and “*our*” are used to reflect the voices and perspectives of survivors represented through Alumni and December 29th. While ASP supported the collation and organisation of this report, the first-person perspective belongs solely to the survivor organisations.

Background on CRSV against Men and Boys in Ukraine

As the Special Rapporteur will know, there is extensive evidence that Russian armed forces have perpetrated widespread sexual violence against Ukrainian women, men, girls and boys since the invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation in 2014. In July 2025, the European Court of Human Rights, in *Ukraine and the Netherlands v. Russia*, recognised that the Russian Federation was responsible for the “widespread and systemic use of rape and sexual

violence” and the “use of rape as a weapon of war, an act of extreme atrocity amounting to torture.”¹

While initial accounts of CRSV committed against Ukrainians since the 2022 full-scale invasion by Russia predominantly involved women,² UN and other reports have documented an increasing number of cases of men being subjected to CRSV, particularly in detention settings. In its last report to the Human Rights Council in March 2025, for example, the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine noted that “Russian authorities have systematically used sexual violence as a form of torture against male detainees.”³ Furthermore, the latest Annual Report of the United Nations Secretary-General on Conflict-Related Sexual Violence found that, of the 85 cases of CRSV in Ukraine documented during the reporting period, 52 of the victims were men and one was a boy.⁴ The UN Secretary General has also put the Russian Federation on notice to be listed in the Annex to the Annual Report in future, something we and other partners believe needs to happen as a matter of priority.⁵

Most documented cases of CRSV against men involve Ukrainian military personnel being held as prisoners of war (POWs) by Russian military forces at detention sites and centres in the occupied territories and the territory of the Russian Federation, with acts of sexual violence such as rape and other grave sexual abuses being used as a method of torture during their captivity. 119 out of the 174 Ukrainian POWs and detained medical personnel who were interviewed between March 2023 and August 2024 by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), for example, reported being subjected to rape, threats of and attempted rape and castration, beatings and electric shocks to their genitals, and sexualised humiliation. Survivor accounts indicate that sexualised torture occurred at various stages of the detention process, including during intake and interrogation.⁶

¹ European Court of Human Rights, Grand Chamber, [Case of Ukraine and the Netherlands v. Russia Judgement](#), 9 July 2025.

² See for example, [GBV Sub-Cluster Ukraine, Gender-Based Violence in Ukraine, Secondary Data Review, 27 April 2022](#).

³ Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine to the Human Rights Council, 11 March 2025, UN Doc. A/HRC/58/67.

⁴ UN Secretary-General. (2024) *Conflict-related sexual violence: report of the Secretary-General*, UN Doc S/2024/292), para 71.

⁵ Dr Albina Basysta, Alumni Network of Ukrainian Men who Survived Captivity and Torture, Andreiev Family Foundation, Mr Andrii Kostin, Dr. Denis Mukwege Foundation, Eastern-Ukrainian Center of Civil Initiatives, Global Survivors Fund, La Strada Ukraine, Legal Action Worldwide, Media Initiative for Human Rights, Numo Sisters!, SEMA Ukraine, Synergy for Justice, Truth Hounds, Ukrainian Women Lawyers Association “Jurfem”, Zmina Human Rights Center, 29th December: [Urgent Call for the Listing of the Russian Federation in the Annex to the Annual Report of the United Nations Secretary-General on Conflict-Related Sexual Violence](#), 2 July 2025

⁶ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), Treatment of Prisoners of War and Update on the Human Rights Situation in Ukraine 1 June – 31 August 2024, 1 October 2024, para. 30.

Ukrainian civilian men detained by Russian forces on various charges (often held in the same Russian penitentiaries or remand centres as military detainees) have also been subjected to forms of torture and ill-treatment, including sexual violence as a form of torture to deter expression of support for Ukraine.⁷ Alumni and December 29th are primarily composed of civilian survivors of such detention. Alumni currently has over 25 active members and 98 associate members. Survivors were held in detention sites, both formal (police stations, detention centres, penal colonies and correctional facilities) and informal (basements, garages, schools) mostly in areas that came under Russian occupation, including Kherson, Sumy, Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia, Kyiv, Chernihiv and the Crimean Peninsula. Members of our organisations come from these regions and were detained in locations across these regions.

Many of the members of Alumni and December 29th are unable to identify perpetrators by name or by their appearance, as detainees were often blindfolded and perpetrators deliberately concealed their identities by covering their faces and using false names. However, survivors have provided consistent information regarding the profile of those involved in detaining civilians and committing acts of torture. Reported perpetrators include mixture of Russian forces and Ukrainian collaborators. Among the Russian actors identified are the Federal Security Service (FSB) and the Federal Penitentiary Services (FSIN), alongside other military and police personnel.

Survivor Experiences of Torture and CRSV in Russian Detention

Members of Alumni and December 29th experienced many different forms of torture while in detention. From our meetings with other survivors, we know that similar methods are used at different detention sites across occupied territories of Ukraine and within Russia. These include:

- **Physical beatings:** We were beaten using fists, clubs, pipes, rifle butts, truncheons and other items that were available to our captors. This happened during interrogations or sometimes simply to cause us physical harm. We were also choked, kicked and violently restrained to inflict pain and suffering.
- **Electrocution:** For many of us, this treatment has had the deepest impact. Nearly every survivor who is part of Alumni was subject to electrocution, often using an old-military field telephone, though other electrical devices were also used. The perpetrators would attach the wires to different parts of our bodies, including legs, arms, head, nipples and genitals. The surges were often so strong that we felt we

⁷ World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT): ZMINA Human Rights Center and Media Initiative for Human Rights, “You’re loyal to Ukraine – Are you a Nazi?”: Torture and other violations as crimes against humanity by the Russian army in Ukraine, 18 July 2024, pp. 41-42.

might die. At other times, electrocution would be combined with other forms of torture, including placing sacks over our heads and pouring water over the sack. Electrocution caused serious physical injuries, including heart attacks, concussions and other long-term tissue damage.

- **Sexualised torture:** A very common type of physical sexual torture is the deliberate harm to genitals, which are beaten or subjected to electrocutions. Both men and women were at subjected to rape by Russians and their collaborators, often using objects such as truncheons. In certain cases, detainees were forced to rape other detainees. Other forms of sexualised abuse are also widespread, for example many of us were frequently stripped naked, subjected to intrusive cavity searches, or beaten while naked.
- **Psychological Torture:** Many methods are used to instil fear, humiliate or break the resolve of detainees. Sleep deprivation was routine. We were forced to sing pro-Russian or anti-Ukrainian slogans while standing or marching in a line or made to take polygraph tests to “prove” we were lying. Detainees are constantly threatened with executions, beatings, castration or rape, or that their family members would be subjected to the same.
- **Inhumane living conditions:** Conditions vary somewhat depending on the detention site, but many of us faced overcrowded cells, inadequate bedding, vermin-infested cells, denial of showers or other means of washing, unclean or insufficient drinking water, inadequate food, and the denial of medical care.
- **Forced Labour:** Many of us were forced into for heavy or dangerous work, including building fortifications or trenches. Some detainees were made to clean the blood, urine, and other excrement from their own torture sessions.

“It was not a question about whether you would be tortured but how far the torture would go. It depended on the regiment/group that detained you – in my case there were constant beatings, threats of sexual violence and murder, mock executions, and threats to my family.” Oleksiy Sivak, September 2025

Oleksiy Sivak is a civilian who was detained and tortured by Russian troops. In August 2022, he was arrested for raising a home-made Ukrainian flag to mark Ukraine’s Independence Day in his occupied hometown of Kherson. Over the course of 59 days in detention in Kherson, he was subjected to various forms of torture and ill-treatment, including interrogations that involved electric shocks being applied to his genitals, beatings, and mock executions. He was moved to a second place of detention, a police station, where he was held in a small cell of 1 x 3 metres with bare walls and no windows. There he was subjected to beatings during interrogations and at random in his cell, forced to sing the Russian anthem, and constantly

threatened with violence. He also heard others being subjected to torture in other cells. Food was scarce and there was no toilet, so detainees had to use bottles.

Another civilian, Andrii, was abducted by armed men from his home in October 2017. He was severely beaten and taken to a detention site in Donetsk, where he was interrogated and forced to sign a confession. He was taken to a second detention site where he spent two months locked in a basement with other detainees. They had no toilet, little drinking water (and therefore could not wash themselves), and were subjected to regular beatings and humiliation, including by being forced to march along the basement singing old soviet songs. Routine interrogations included threats of execution and following a sham trial, he was sent to a penitentiary colony where he was forced to do hard labour.

Impacts of Torture and CRSV on Survivors

Former Ukrainian POWs and civilian detainees have reported both extensive physical and psychological trauma because of the torture they experienced in Russian detention facilities. Of the 6,400 POWs that have returned, for example, many showed disfigurements and injuries including skull damage, internal bleeding, fractures, missing teeth, and limbs.⁸ Many also suffer heart conditions due to the extensive electric shocks.⁹ For those who suffered sexual violence, which could be up to 80% of POWs according to a military psychologist at Sanzhary Hospital treating returnees,¹⁰ the consequences are life-changing.¹¹ As documented in other contexts of CRSV, conditions such as depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, paranoia and sexual trauma are common amongst survivors.¹²

All members of Alumni and December 29th have expressed that the experience of abduction, detention, torture and CRSV has had a huge impact on them and frequently those around them.

Impacts to Physical Health

Our injuries from torture often persist beyond the period of detention. Survivors often reports of concussions, ruptured eardrums, broken bones and lacerations. Sexual violence can also result in chronic injuries, such as lasting urological and reproductive problems. Furthermore, there are unusually high rates of cancers and cardiac diseases among survivors. We believe

⁸ The Kyiv Independent, [Years of torture, abuse in Russian captivity take shocking toll on Ukrainian POWs](#), 2 September 2025.

⁹ The Kyiv Independent, [Years of torture, abuse in Russian captivity take shocking toll on Ukrainian POWs](#), 2 September 2025.

¹⁰ Human Rights Watch, [Opinion: Silent victims of sexual violence, Ukraine's male POWs deserve real support](#), 8 October 2024.

¹¹ NHK World Japan, [Sexual violence survivors in Ukraine plead for justice](#), 16 April 2025.

¹² Human Rights Watch, [Opinion: Silent victims of sexual violence, Ukraine's male POWs deserve real support](#), 8 October 2024.

these are connected to the abuse and conditions we endured in detention. These phenomena are under researched. Yet, even serious physical harms are not properly documented in medical examinations upon release. This is due to a combination of delayed access to medical care, inadequate forensic protocols and practices, and the systemic failure to recognise survivors' needs.

Impacts to Psychological Health

In addition to physical pain, we were also exposed to psychological trauma in detention. This including experiences of terror and humiliation from torture, but also and the fear and uncertainty from not knowing what was happening to us or to our families.

We experience a wide range of psychological symptoms, including flashbacks, insomnia, suicidal thoughts, and memory loss as well as other forms of cognitive decline. Some of us describe what feels like permanent damage to our brain function from head injuries, including a sense of the loss of mental connections and difficulties following everyday conversations and events. Ordinary encounters, sights, and sounds can trigger panic and fear, such as the sight of a police car. For Oleksiy Sivak, using underground trains has been impossible since his release from detention in a basement, as it triggers panic attacks.

Material and Economic Impacts

Detention harms us in material ways as well. While we were detained, our property was often stolen, occupied, or destroyed. Many people on their release have discovered that they have lost everything. Homes were ransacked or left behind due to displacement. Jobs and businesses were lost, and it is extremely difficult to find new work in a war-affected economy while also coping with trauma, displacement, the loss of personal and professional networks, and missing documents or skills.

Impacts on Identity and Relationships

Torture can shatter a survivor's sense of self and relationships with others. Many of us feel as though we no longer exist, as if we were destroyed in detention. For men, their trauma is often compounded by the fact that they often can no longer provide for themselves or their family, something which was the norm in many Ukrainian families before the war. This sense of humiliation and isolation makes it harder to seek assistance and reintegrate into society. Many of us also return to find that our families have fled Ukraine, or that loved ones have died while we were detained.

Impacts of CRSV as a Form of Torture

For those of us who have experienced CRSV, the consequences are distinctly damaging. In Ukrainian culture, men are often seen as defenders and fighters. Sexual violence can strip

away that sense of masculinity, especially when we were detained alongside wives or female relatives who were also tortured, leaving us feeling helpless to protect them. Electrocution or direct assaults on our genitals often cause lasting damage to reproductive health. Stigma surrounding sexual violence silences many men, preventing us from speaking about what happened. Women survivors we have spoken to describe equally devastating impacts. Some young women and girls say they do not want to have families or children after these experiences, feeling they could not protect them from future harm. These impacts, carried forward, weaken not only survivors but society as a whole.

The Impact on Families and Communities

“Families are victims while we are in captivity. They were losing us every day and experience the trauma of separation. Once we are released, it is treated like it’s a reward and families are forgotten.” Oleksiy Sivak, 15 September 2025

At the time of our arrest and abduction, we were subjected to enforced disappearance, leaving our families without information about our fate or whereabouts. Some witnessed us being taken; others heard nothing at all and were left without any information about our whereabouts. Families often searched desperately for answers, only to find themselves in a situation where they cannot obtain information about our whereabouts.

In Andrii’s case, when his mother went looking for him after he disappeared, she was warned by the local authorities in Donetsk not to ask for information and was followed in the street. It was only a month after his abduction that she received information about where he was detained. Even when families knew where their loved ones were detained, they lived with constant fear, informed by testimonies from others who had been released.

When we are reunited with our families, we see the toll our detention has had on them. This is particularly so in the case of our children, who have spent time in dread about their father’s life and safety. The resulting fear, including of the possibility that it may happen again, does not disappear when we come home. In some cases, the burden of the emotional strain has a medical impact, resulting in serious health problems that may not have occurred without the burden of our detention and torture.

Where more than one family member has been detained and tortured, the burden is even heavier. Families face the dual challenge of coping with their own trauma while trying to support each other. Moreover, families are not entitled to any support from the state and are not included in the documentation processes that could strengthen survivors’ cases against their perpetrators. In Andrii’s situation, for example, his mother died before she could give any testimony, four years after his release.

These harms extend far beyond individuals. We are not aware of a reliable estimate of how many people have endured Russian detention and torture, but we believe there are many thousands. When families are included, the scale of suffering is immense, with consequences that will have long-term effects on our society.

The Barriers that Survivors Face

Access to Health and Psychosocial Support

There is no coordinated or comprehensive system of support for former civilian detainees in Ukraine. On release, survivors undergo a form of medical examination and rehabilitation, but these are often superficial: diagnoses are incomplete or incorrect, and there is no meaningful follow-up support provided afterwards.

Survivors in Alumni and December 29th report that while some general services exist, such as mental healthcare open to the public or financial aid for war-affected families, these are rarely accessible or targeted at civilian male survivors of detention, trauma or sexual violence. Most of the available support is fragmented, short-term, or offered by NGOs and peer-led groups (like Alumni and December 29th), rather than by state institutions. Where more structured responses to CRSV have been attempted, such as the Survivor Relief Centres supported by intergovernmental and national bodies, they have been underfunded and focused largely on women survivors. Civilian male survivors frequently encounter societal and institutional stigma, a lack of tailored care, and bureaucratic exclusion.

Recognition and Reparations

Interim reparations for survivors of sexual violence have been made available through the Global Survivors Fund pilot project. However, the amounts provided were insufficient to provide long-term security or recovery. This project has now been paused and is no longer open to new applicants.

State services are primarily directed at former combatants, who receive support through the Ministry of Defence. For civilian survivors, recognition of our status currently lies with the Ministry of Development of Communities, Territories and Infrastructure. Status provides a one-time payment of 100,000 Hryvnias upon approval, as well as 100,000 Hryvnias for every year a survivor was in detention. In practice, this process is slow, opaque and discouraging. For example, in Oleksiy's case, it took him over a year to receive recognition of his status, during which time there no support available to help him navigate the process. In Andrii's case, he received recognition of his status almost immediately as he was released in an exchange. However, it took four years of correspondence and filing a lawsuit against the Ministry of Reintegration (responsible for this process at the time) to receive assistance for each year of captivity. During this time, inflation devalued this amount by 70% (in 2020, the

exchange rate was \$1-23 UAH, and in 2024, it was \$1-40 UAH).¹³ Alumni is supporting survivors to apply for this status, but in approximately 90% of cases, these have been rejected. The law governing this process dates back to 2019 and no longer reflects the realities survivors face today. Other forms of financial assistance take the form of short-term grants which survivors must actively seek out, leaving many feeling as though they are begging for help rather than exercising their rights.

Other compensation mechanisms also pose significant barriers for many survivors. The Register of Damages for Ukraine (R4DU), created by a resolution of the Council of Europe, is open for claims for houses damaged or destroyed by Russian aggression. Those who have experienced harms, including CRSV, prior to 24 February 2022, are currently excluded from the Register's mandate. This exclusion is a source of deep concern for Ukrainian civil society and survivor-led groups, particularly as the patterns of abuse being documented today often involve the same perpetrators, locations, and methods as those used prior to the full-scale invasion.

Shelter and Housing

Support for emergency shelter and accommodation is also lacking, particularly for male survivors of torture and CRSV. Some sheltering or housing assistance options exist for women former detainees, as many domestic violence NGOs have made provisions for them since the beginning of the war. A temporary housing programme for displaced people also exists, but it is overwhelmed, with long waiting times and no system to prioritise the most vulnerable. Survivors without updated identification or formal registration are often completely excluded from being able to access these programmes. For those of us who lost homes, documents, and personal property while in detention, these barriers are especially devastating and exclusionary.

Legal Services

There is a shortage of affordable legal services at the national level available for survivors of torture and CRSV. Some legal support is available for criminal proceedings, but not for civil proceedings, for example, seeking legal support to access social services or appeal decisions of state bodies. Free legal aid has been offered to survivors by the Government of Ukraine, but as some survivors have experienced, it does not cover all their needs or take into account the complex legal situation in Ukraine due to some territories being occupied by Russia.

¹³ Ukrainian Women's Fund, La Strada Ukraine, JurFem, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration, Office of the Government Commissioner for Gender Policy and the European Union, Ukraine is Not Silent: [Chronicles of Fighting Against War-Related Sexual Violence \(2022 – 2024\)](#), 2025.

Documentation and Interviews

In terms of investigation and documentation of survivors' experiences, the Special Rapporteur may know that there has been a significant effort by Ukrainian authorities, Ukrainian NGOs and international actors to create a record of Russian crimes. This includes the crimes of illegal detention and torture. However, the result has also been that many survivors have given statements to various organisations about their experiences, often more than once. One survivor has been interviewed up to 90 times on his case by different actors for example, whereas another has had 14 interviews. Many (but not all) members of Alumni or December 29th were interviewed by Ukrainian authorities (National Police of Ukraine (NPU) or the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU)) after their release. While this is standard for military detainees, it has been less consistent for civilians.

When interviews are done, they often fail to obtain full and meaningful informed consent from survivors regarding these statements. Many interviewers, though well-intentioned, lack experience with national or international justice mechanisms. They do not provide clear information on how these statements will be used and there is often no follow-up or coordination.

Documentation efforts also often fail to ask the right questions of us, particularly with respect to sexual violence. Many survivors have simply not been asked if they experienced sexual violence and therefore have not spoken about it. Speaking about such personal and humiliating experiences is difficult for most people even in the best conditions, so when a survivor is not asked about it, they will often not bring it up spontaneously. This means statements collected may appear complete, but in reality omit vital information. Furthermore, there is little forensic expertise available to support our cases or help initiate legal action against perpetrators.

Livelihoods and Economic Reintegration

Minimal assistance exists to help survivors rebuild their livelihoods. There is no support to find employment or to redevelop lost businesses. Furthermore, many programmes fail to account for the long-term consequences of torture and sexual violence that can affect a survivor's capacity to work. In many cases, men return from captivity without a source of income and are forced to navigate support systems that do not acknowledge their needs. We acknowledge that there have been some legislative changes to improve the situation of survivors of Russian crimes, including sexual violence.¹⁴ While these have successfully shown the significant numbers affected, it remains to be seen if the Ukrainian state and the

¹⁴ Human Rights Watch, [Ukraine Parliament Adopts Bill on Legal Status of CRSV Survivors](#), 12 December 2024.

international community will properly fund these schemes and ensure they are well implemented.

Trust in Institutions

Due to the struggles, we have faced in obtaining assistance from the state since our time in captivity, many of us are wary of engaging with state institutions. This is especially true in the case of police and prosecutors. Very often there is an attitude among those in these institutions that we have a duty to assist in their investigations. There is not an emphasis on voluntariness or on giving agency to survivors themselves. That can also be the case with journalists, lawyers and NGOs. The poor experiences that many of us have had with those who took our testimonies have also led us to be cautious with those who purport to want to help survivors, when in fact they may just be pursuing their own agenda.

Access to International Justice

On seeking justice at an international level, there is a lack of legal representation for survivors seeking accountability. This is partly due to the limited practical experience of Ukrainian lawyers in engaging with international mechanisms. There is also a lack of trust amongst survivors given the role of the Russian state within the international and UN system. We are willing to engage with mechanisms when we can see there is collaboration and follow-up with survivors, and that there is a tangible outcome, but this is often not the case in our experience.

Additionally, many survivors worry that their evidence might not be useful. They are not familiar with how international justice processes work. Former prisoners are often focussed on what they don't know or can't prove; they may have been blindfolded, tortured in the absence of others who could corroborate their accounts, or injured in ways that don't leave scars. This makes them fear there is no "proof" of what occurred, and that there may be no point speaking about it.

Strengthening Survivors Rights and Participation

"A healthy survivor makes a healthy society in the long run. For me a healthy survivor is someone who can provide for himself and his family, who has stability and can feel better mentally." Oleksiy Sivak, 15 September 2025

As survivors of Russian captivity, torture, and CRSV, we believe our immediate needs must be addressed first so that we can actively contribute to laws, policies, and processes. The barriers that we face, including access to basic services like accommodation, legal representation and comprehensive medical assistance, delay or deny us the possibility of healing ourselves and our families so that we can become active members of society once more. The bureaucratic barriers to recognising our survivor status must be removed.

In the meantime, state-funded legal assistance should be provided to help us navigate the processes of investigation and access to services. Survivors of torture and CRSV should be prioritised for accommodation if they have been displaced or lost their homes and property during detention, and there should be programmes to help us re-enter the workforce.

Safe, survivor-centred pathways for investigation are urgently needed. While some training has been provided to improve engagement with survivors, little has changed in practice. There must be well-coordinated documentation processes which centre full and informed consent from survivors. These must clearly set out how documentation will be used in legal processes to achieve justice for the survivor involved. Forensic expertise should also be accessible to survivors as part of their legal cases, so that perpetrators can be more easily identified and held accountable.

Although Alumni and December 29th take part in some inter-agency working groups and NGO meetings, we find that it is difficult for survivors to access these groups. When we do participate, survivors are often not seen as “experts” which results in our opinions on what is necessary to address torture and CRSV being overlooked. The perspectives of survivors must be part of programmatic design and should inform and improve service provision and justice processes. In addition, the time and capacity commitments expected from survivor representatives taking part in these and other spaces are high but very rarely compensated for which hinders sustainable and survivor-centred participation.

At the international level, survivors need the support of mechanisms such as the Special Procedures to publicly highlight the violations being committed by the Russian Federation. If we allow impunity to exist for such terrible and premeditated crimes, it is impossible to talk about democratic values and participation, or a world order based on law and human rights. Even if we don’t succeed in seeing the perpetrators arrested and tried for their crimes, attempting to bring them to justice at least shows that we stand up for ourselves. For many people around the world, it might not be known that Russia is disregarding humanitarian law on the battlefield, and it may be difficult to imagine that Russian officials have turned basements and prisons into torture chambers, something they have also done in other parts of the world. We want the world to know about these crimes, and in the face of that knowledge, maybe Russian leaders will be held accountable for what they have done.

Thank you.

End