



CONCEPT NOTE

United Nations Security Council Arria-Formula meeting

“Implementing international humanitarian law: prisoners of war, civilian detainees and foreign fighters, in the context of Russia’s war against Ukraine”

DATE: 10 August 2026, 10.00-13.00

VENUE: UN Headquarters, The Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) Chamber

The Permanent Missions of Latvia to the United Nations and the Permanent Mission of the United Kingdom to the United Nations, with the co-sponsorship of the Permanent Mission of Ukraine to the United Nations, are convening an Arria-Formula meeting of the UN Security Council to draw attention to humanitarian aspects of Russia’s ongoing war against Ukraine, specifically the treatment of Ukrainian prisoners of war and civilian detainees in Russian custody and allegations of widespread violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law; and the deceptive and coercive recruitment of foreign nationals into the Russian Armed Forces. It will include briefings by the UN officials, investigative journalists and first-hand testimonies from survivors, focusing on the current situation on the ground, building on the Arria-Formula meeting held on 13 January 2025, entitled “Violations of international humanitarian law against Ukrainian prisoners of war and civilian detainees”.

International humanitarian law (IHL) and international human rights law (IHRL) prohibit torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, enforced disappearance, arbitrary deprivation of life and arbitrary detention. These obligations continue to apply during armed conflict and occupation.

Prisoners of war (POWs) exchanges between Ukraine and Russia are taking place regularly, with support of various intermediaries. On 10 June 2026, the Ukrainian ombudsman reported that Ukraine had brought back 9,446 people from Russian captivity, including 457 civilians. Thousands however remain in Russia, and Ukraine’s official register of missing persons includes over 16,000 civilians from the temporarily occupied territories.

UN reporting has documented widespread violations of IHL and IHRL in relation to Ukrainian prisoners of war and civilian detainees held in Russian custody. OHCHR, through the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine (UNHRMMU), has continued to report torture and ill-treatment of POWs, arbitrary detention of civilians, restrictions on fundamental rights in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine, and rising civilian casualties. UNHRMMU has also reported violations by Russian authorities, including systematic torture and ill-treatment, conflict-related sexual violence and executions, with a recent spike in reported executions of captured Ukrainian soldiers in November and December 2025.

The UNHRMMU report from September 2025 on civilian detainees found that 92 percent of the 216 released detainees interviewed since June 2023 gave consistent accounts of torture or ill-treatment.

Access to POWs and detainees while in Russian custody remains severely limited. According to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) 2025 Annual report, in 2025, the ICRC made 75 visits to 22 places of internment/detention in Ukraine, holding 16,580 people, including POWs, security detainees and other people deprived of their liberty. They collected and distributed over 11,835 Red Cross messages (RCMs) between detainees and their families. There were no recorded ICRC visits to detention facilities in Russia, listed in the 2025 Annual report. One RCM was collected from a person deprived of their liberty.

UN reporting, human rights investigations and extensive open-source evidence indicate ongoing deceptive and coercive recruitment of foreign nationals into the Russian Armed Forces. According to the 2026 report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine, nationals from at least 17 countries were recruited into the Russian Armed Forces in various circumstances. Individuals were recruited through promises of civilian employment, transported to Russia by recruiters and then pressed to sign military contracts written in Russian that they did not understand. It was reported that many recruits had no prior military experience, received limited training and were assigned hazardous frontline duties.

Evidence gathered by civil society organisations and investigative journalists further indicates that Russia has developed recruitment networks involving intermediaries, agents and online platforms to target vulnerable individuals seeking work or economic opportunities abroad. Governments from a number of affected countries have publicly expressed concern, sought the repatriation of their nationals, and warned citizens about Russian recruitment schemes. These reports raise serious concerns over the exploitation of vulnerable individuals and the use of deceptive and coercive recruitment practices to facilitate the deployment of foreign nationals in Russia's war against Ukraine.

Guiding questions:

- How can the international community strengthen the implementation of existing international obligations for the protection of civilians and POWs held as a result of Russia's war against Ukraine, especially against ill-treatment and torture? How can the international community improve access to all detainees, and ensure credible investigations and accountability for all incidents?
- What practical measures can be taken to foster exchanges and returns of POWs and civilian detainees?
- What additional initiatives could be pursued specifically within the UN framework? How can the Security Council ensure implementation of international humanitarian law, including the Geneva Conventions?
- How can Member States take concrete action to preserve the principle that human lives are at the centre of peace processes?
- How can the international community develop a more coordinated response to the deceptive recruitment of foreign nationals?

Briefers:

- **Ms Claudia Fuentes Julio**, UN Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights, Head of Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.
- **Leniie Umerova**, a Crimean Tatar activist, human rights defender, and a member of the NGO “Numo, Sisters”. In December 2022 she was unlawfully detained on the Russia-Georgia border when travelling to temporarily occupied Crimea to care for her seriously ill father. Forcibly transferred to Moscow and held in Lefortovo pre-trial detention on politically motivated and fabricated espionage charges. Released in September 2024 after 21 months of unlawful detention.
- **Khuan Alberto Leyva Garsiya**, an active serviceman within Naval Forces of the Armed Forces of Ukraine since 2018, currently a Junior Sergeant of the 36th Separate Marine Brigade. He defended the city of Mariupol and the Azovstal steel plant in 2022. Mr Leyva Garsiya entered Russian captivity after international negotiations on 20 May 2022 and was freed on 14 August 2025 after three years and three months in captivity. Before the military service he studied Community and Regional Planning at Iowa State University. Ukrainian of Cuban descent.
- **Dr. Oleg Gushchyn** is a Ukrainian lawyer with military, peacekeeping and international relations background. He currently serves as a legal expert of the Coordination Headquarters for the Treatment of the Prisoners of War, a governmental institution which coordinates state bodies activities related to compliance with Third and Fourth Geneva conventions. His activities are focused on the legal aspects of international cooperation for the protection of civilians and prisoners of war.
- **Sheida Kiran**, a British-Turkish-Iranian documentary filmmaker based in London. She has directed short films for the likes of the BBC and BFI, and is currently producing investigative documentaries for BBC Eye. She recently produced the documentary ‘[Putin’s Foreign Fighters: Into the Void](#)’ (2026), exposing how Russia is recruiting young foreign men to fight in its war against Ukraine.

Format: UNSC Members; interested Member States. Participants are kindly requested to limit interventions to three (3) minutes.

To inscribe to the list of speakers, please email to mission.un-ny@mfa.gov.lv no later than noon on 07 August, 2026.

The meeting will be held in all official United Nations languages and will be [webcast on UN WebTV](#).