



"ASSOCIATION OF RELATIVES OF
POLITICAL PRISONERS OF THE
KREMLIN"

9-G Baseyna str., office 26
01004, Kyiv, Ukraine
+380999429089

info@relativespp.org
www.relativespp.org

PUBLIC JOINT-STOCK COMPANY
COMMERCIAL BANK PRIVAT
1D Hrushevskoho St., Kyiv, 01001, Ukraine

IBAN UA753133990000026001055746797
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**To the United Nations Committee on
Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
on the implementation by the Russian
Federation of the International Covenant
on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
(in relation to the occupied territories of
Ukraine)**

**Submission from the public organisation
'Assosiation of Relatives of Political
Prisoners of the Kremlin'**

Contact details: Kyiv, 9-G Baseina Street,
Office 26. Postal code 01024,
info@relativespp.org

Dear Members of the Committee,

The public organisation 'Assosiation of Relatives of Political Prisoners of the Kremlin' submits this submission to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights within the framework of the consideration of the seventh periodic report of the Russian Federation.

The public organisation 'Assosiation of Relatives of Political Prisoners of the Kremlin' (hereinafter referred to as the Assosiation) has been working since 2017 to protect people who have been illegally deprived of their personal freedom for political reasons. The large-scale armed aggression of the Russian Federation and the occupation of new significant territories of Ukraine have led to a new wave of enforced disappearances and arbitrary detentions. From 2022 to 2025, the Assosiation of Relatives of Political Prisoners of the Kremlin is systematically documenting international crimes committed by Russian military personnel in the temporarily occupied territories

of Ukraine, in particular by conducting in-depth interviews with victims and witnesses. The organisation is a full member of two of Ukraine's largest coalitions that bring together human rights initiatives in the field of documenting war crimes: the "Ukraine. 5 a.m. and the Tribunal for Putin initiative, and is also part of the international network BE4Ukraine, which promotes the issue of Russia's responsibility for aggression and crimes against humanity at the global level.

The submission covers the situation in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine — the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, the city of Sevastopol, and parts of the Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia, and Kherson regions, which have been under the effective control of the Russian Federation since 2022 as a result of armed aggression.

We would like to note that the submission is based on the results of the Association's work, in particular, in 2022, documenters identified and interviewed 526 witnesses of enforced disappearances, arbitrary detentions, and other international crimes against the civilian population, including shelling of civilian infrastructure, appropriation of private property by the occupiers, and unlawful deprivation of liberty. As of 31 June 2025, information about 372 civilians who were unlawfully deprived of their personal liberty as a result of the Russian Federation's aggression has been established and documented. Based on the work of the legal aid service, analytical work, and analysis of international law, we note systematic violations of economic, social, and cultural rights in the occupied territories. In particular, these include:

- lack of adequate social protection for persons in the occupied territories;
- restricted access to social and medical services;
- discriminatory practices against illegally detained persons and their families;
- other socio-economic consequences of politically motivated persecution, including restrictions on the rights to work, housing, education and movement.

This submission supplements the previous information provided by our organisation to the Committee on Enforced Disappearances and other UN mechanisms.

Violation of the right to social protection of families of victims of enforced disappearances (Article 9 of the Covenant)

According to Article 9 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, States Parties are obliged to recognise the right of everyone to social security, including social insurance. This right covers not only the insured persons themselves, but also their family members who find themselves in a vulnerable situation as a result of the loss of a breadwinner or other forms of social shock caused by state repression.

In the territories of Ukraine temporarily occupied by the Russian Federation — the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, the city of Sevastopol, as well as parts of the Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson regions — the occupying state does not provide any effective social protection mechanisms for relatives of persons who have been victims of enforced disappearance or illegal detention for political reasons. Such families are effectively excluded from any form of social security guaranteed by the legislation of the Russian Federation itself.

An analysis of evidence gathered by the NGO Association of Relatives of Political Prisoners of the Kremlin shows that in cases where the illegally detained person was the breadwinner, their disappearance or arrest leaves the family without a means of subsistence. At the same time, these families cannot count on any form of assistance from the occupying authorities or the participating state, as the Russian Federation does not recognise political persecution or enforced disappearances as grounds for granting social benefits or privileges.

Russian legislation also does not contain provisions that would allow families of victims of politically motivated criminal prosecution or disappearance to be recognised as eligible for social support. Moreover, the status of such persons is artificially complicated by their designation as ‘extremists’, ‘terrorists’, “spies” or ‘foreign agents’, which creates additional barriers to seeking any assistance, including through fear of repression.

The vast majority of members of such families are women, wives, mothers or sisters of victims. They are forced to bear the burden of paying for lawyers, transfers to places of detention, and trips to colonies, which are mainly located in remote regions of the Russian Federation. Often, these women are forced to give up permanent employment or face emotional, physical and social exhaustion, which only exacerbates their vulnerable situation.

Thus, the Russian Federation violates its positive obligations under Article 9 of the Covenant by creating a situation in which the families of victims not only receive no support but also suffer additional economic and social pressure. This also contradicts the provisions of General Comment No. 19 of the Committee, which obliges States to provide effective guarantees of social protection for households affected by State action or inaction.

Recommendations of the Committee to the Russian Federation:

1. **Guarantee the right to social security for the families of victims, regardless of how the case is classified by the authorities.** Ensure that any persons who have suffered economic hardship due to the disappearance or arrest of a family member are entitled to basic forms of social protection, including unemployment benefits, housing subsidies and targeted cash assistance.
2. **Abolish discriminatory restrictions related to a person's status as an ‘extremist’ or ‘terrorist’.** We consider it appropriate for the Committee to include a recommendation to the Russian Federation to remove provisions in legislation that restrict access to social protection for families of persons whom state authorities have deprived of their liberty under questionable legal status that is not based on the principles of fair trial.
3. **Ensure compensation for expenses related to visiting places of detention.** Establish a mechanism for reimbursing transportation and related expenses for families who are forced to visit their loved ones in remote regions of Russia where they are being held.
4. **Introduce a transparent mechanism for appealing against refusals to provide social protection.** The Russian Federation must ensure an effective and independent mechanism through which the families of victims can appeal against refusals to provide social benefits without risking further persecution.
5. **Immediately cease the practice of denying social protection to families of persons who have disappeared as a result of state actions and ensure their equal treatment.** In accordance with General Comment No. 19, the Russian Federation must fulfil its positive obligations to provide social protection to households affected by the actions or inaction of state structures.

Violation of the right to access social and health services in temporarily occupied territories (Articles 9 and 12 of the Covenant)

Article 12 of the Covenant guarantees everyone the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, and Article 9 guarantees the right to social security. These rights are interrelated and require the State party to ensure accessible, equal and non-discriminatory access to social and health services, in particular for persons in difficult life circumstances.

In practice, the Russian Federation, exercising effective control over parts of Ukraine's territory, systematically violates these norms with regard to persons who have been subjected to politically motivated persecution, as well as their relatives who remain in the occupied territories. Access to medical care, social insurance and basic services for such persons is restricted at both the administrative and practical levels.

Russian penitentiary institutions, including those operating in the temporarily occupied Crimea, systematically fail to provide adequate medical care to illegally detained civilians. In a number of documented cases, individuals with chronic illnesses, including diabetes, cardiovascular disease and cancer, did not receive basic medication, examinations or procedures, leading to a sharp deterioration in their health or disability. At the same time, prisoners were denied transfer to civilian hospitals or independent medical examinations.

In some cases, the denial of medical care was used as a means of pressure or punishment. In particular, the administrations of detention centres and colonies ignore complaints about deteriorating health, delay access to medical professionals or provide superficial care that does not meet the needs of prisoners. Such actions are systematic, particularly in institutions in Simferopol, Taganrog, Rostov-on-Don, Stavropol Krai, Mordovia, and in colonies in Chelyabinsk Oblast.

In addition, families of detainees who remain in the occupied territories also face obstacles in accessing medical and social services. Any attempt by relatives to obtain information about the whereabouts or health of a detainee may be used by the occupying authorities to intimidate, persecute or label them as 'unreliable'.

This situation demonstrates a systematic violation by the Russian Federation of both Article 12 and Article 9 of the Covenant. First, the state does not provide health care as a mandatory component of human dignity for persons under its jurisdiction (including those it illegally detains). Secondly, it violates its obligation to provide basic social guarantees, in particular for persons who have lost their ability to work or require special conditions of detention for medical reasons. Thirdly, it makes it impossible for persons who, as a result of political persecution or related circumstances, have lost their social ties, income and stability in life to access such services.

These violations are particularly acute in conditions of isolation, where the occupying administration prevents international monitoring of prisons and restricts access to independent legal and medical assistance.

Recommendations that may be made by the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in connection with the above-mentioned violations by the Russian Federation of Articles 9 and 12 of the Covenant in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine:

1. **Immediately ensure adequate access to medical care for all persons held in places of detention, including illegally detained civilians.** The Committee may call on the Russian Federation to guarantee the regular provision of basic medical services, medicines and examinations in accordance with international standards. Particular attention should be paid to detainees with chronic or serious illnesses.
2. **Stop using restrictions or denial of medical care as a form of pressure or punishment.** The Russian Federation should be urged to immediately investigate all cases of denial of treatment as a repressive tool and to ensure that all penal institutions comply with international standards of humane treatment.
3. **Ensure unhindered access for international monitoring missions to places of detention in the temporarily occupied territories.** The Russian Federation must fulfil its international obligations to allow independent human rights organisations and UN bodies access to closed institutions.

4. **Ensure the social and medical rights of family members of detainees living in the temporarily occupied territories.** In particular, guarantee access to medical services, medicines and psychological assistance without discrimination or risk of repression, regardless of the political position of relatives.
5. **Introduce a mechanism for the independent review of complaints about the denial of medical care in penitentiary institutions.** The Russian Federation must create an effective, impartial mechanism for recording and reviewing such complaints, with the possibility of bringing those responsible to justice.

Discriminatory practices against detainees and their families (Article 2(2) of the Covenant)

According to Article 2 (2) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, States Parties shall ensure that the rights set forth in the Covenant are exercised without discrimination on any ground such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.

The Russian Federation, exercising effective control over parts of Ukraine's territory, systematically discriminates against civilians detained for political reasons and their family members. In most cases, the targets of such discrimination are Crimean Tatars, Ukrainians, activists, journalists and individuals who have publicly expressed their disagreement with the policies of the occupying state. Their unlawful deprivation of liberty is accompanied by labelling them as 'terrorists', 'extremists', 'saboteurs', 'spies' or 'foreign agents', which not only criminalises opposition beliefs but also creates a social stigma for families who remain living in the occupied territories.

Relatives of such persons often face harassment by authorities controlled by the Russian Federation: they lose their jobs, are denied access to social or administrative services, are under constant surveillance, or are summoned to law enforcement agencies without cause.

A separate aspect is discrimination on the basis of religious beliefs. Muslims, in particular Crimean Tatars who practise Islam, are subject to increased surveillance, searches, arrests and criminal prosecution on trumped-up charges of terrorism or membership of banned religious organisations. The mere fact of regularly attending mosques, storing religious literature, participating in collective prayers or belonging to the Muslim community is already considered by law enforcement agencies as grounds for criminal prosecution.

In addition, in the occupied territory of Zaporizhzhia Oblast, a wave of searches, illegal detentions and forced cooperation of representatives of independent Christian religious communities was recorded in 2022–2023. Such measures were accompanied by intimidation, confiscation of religious literature, and the forced suspension of religious services, particularly in Protestant, Evangelical, and Baptist communities. The Russian Federation, through its security agencies, labels these communities as 'destructive,' bans their activities, and forces their leaders to sign statements of 'loyalty' or leave the territory.

Such actions constitute a violation of the State party's obligation to ensure the implementation of the rights of the Covenant without discrimination on political, national or religious grounds. The Committee has repeatedly emphasised in its practice that even in conditions of a state of emergency or armed conflict, discrimination on the basis of belief or religion is unacceptable.

Below is a list of recommendations that may be made by the Committee in connection with the violation of Article 2(2) of the Covenant by the Russian Federation through systematic discrimination in the occupied territories of Ukraine:

1. **Immediately cease the practice of criminalising individuals for their political beliefs, religious affiliation or civic activism.** Call on the Russian Federation to immediately stop labelling citizens as ‘extremists’, ‘terrorists’, ‘foreign agents’, etc. solely on the basis of their political views, participation in peaceful assemblies, religious ceremonies or ethnic affiliation.
2. **Ensure freedom of religion for all religious communities, including Muslim and Protestant communities in the temporarily occupied territories.** The Russian Federation must be urged to immediately cease the practice of arbitrary searches, closure of places of worship and pressure on believers, and to guarantee the unhindered conduct of religious gatherings.
3. **Ensure effective legal remedies for persons who have suffered discrimination in the occupied territories.** The Russian Federation should establish independent mechanisms to which persons who have suffered discrimination on political, ethnic or religious grounds can turn, with the possibility of having their complaints examined and those responsible brought to justice.
4. **Conduct a public legal assessment of current practices of persecution for political and religious beliefs, with a view to bringing legislation into line with international standards.** Call on the Russian Federation to repeal or substantially revise regulations used to persecute political opposition or religious activity, including laws on ‘extremism,’ ‘foreign agents,’ and restrictions on religious organisations.

Socio-economic consequences of politically motivated persecution (Articles 9, 10 and 11 of the Covenant)

The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights obliges States Parties to ensure the right of everyone to social security, including social insurance (Article 9), special protection for families (Article 10), and the right to an adequate standard of living, including adequate food, clothing and housing (Article 11). However, the Russian Federation, which controls part of Ukraine's territory, systematically violates these obligations with regard to persons who have been unlawfully deprived of their liberty for political reasons, as well as their families.

In most cases, after returning from illegal detention, victims find themselves without any state protection — both from the Russian Federation, which detained them, and from the occupation administrations, which refuse to restore their basic social rights. Such persons face obstacles in accessing medical care, including rehabilitation and psychotherapeutic services, which are critically important after prolonged detention in isolation, torture and psychological pressure.

Persons who have been illegally imprisoned on fabricated charges often have no confirmation of their status in any social security system. They are denied pensions or benefits, as well as compensation for loss of working capacity or health. The lack of a legal mechanism for recording politically motivated imprisonment creates a situation of legal uncertainty, leading to secondary victimisation.

Family members of victims also bear a significant social burden. In many cases, wives or mothers are forced to leave their jobs to care for those returning from captivity or to seek legal assistance. This leads to a loss of income, social status, and exclusion from health care and pension systems. If the family remains in the occupied territory, it loses access to some basic services due to the stigma of ‘unreliability.’

In addition, there are a significant number of cases where families of politically persecuted persons have been forced to leave the occupied territories and move to regions controlled by the Ukrainian government. At the same time, the lack of coordination between social protection systems

in the temporarily occupied and controlled territories, as well as the complicated mechanism for recognising the loss of documents confirming work experience or acquired status, leads to a complete loss of social guarantees.

Below is a list of recommendations that may be made by the Committee to the Russian Federation in connection with the violations of Articles 9, 10 and 11 of the Covenant:

1. **Ensure continuity of social rights in cases of internal displacement from temporarily occupied territories.** The Russian Federation must remove barriers for families who have been forced to leave the occupied territories and ensure that they retain their social status, access to medical services, restoration of documents and confirmation of work experience.
2. **Refrain from using administrative or informal forms of punishment against families of returnees who remain in the occupied territories.** The Russian Federation should stop stigmatising and depriving families associated with politically persecuted persons of their basic rights, including the right to work, medical care, and freedom of movement.

The information presented in this submission is based on directly documented testimonies of victims and their families who have suffered as a result of unlawful deprivation of liberty, persecution, torture, discriminatory treatment and systematic denial of economic, social and cultural rights in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine. ***For an in-depth analysis, confirmation of facts and summarisation of the systemic problems identified, we invite you to familiarise yourself with the following analytical materials from the Association:***

1. **Invisible in Russian captivity: Analysis of the illegal detention of civilians incommunicado: family testimonies and challenges in locating them.** (2025). <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1fwlQgjnZW0Cze0ZexbypXeJ7Sd8CS1IC/view?usp=sharing> This analytical report is extremely important for illustrating violations of Articles 9 (right to social security), 10 (protection of the family), 12 (right to health) and 15 (participation in cultural life) of the Covenant. The report describes the complete isolation of civilians in places of detention without contact with the outside world (holding them incommunicado), accompanied by psychological pressure, a ban on phone calls and correspondence, and no access to a lawyer or medical care. Such conditions not only violate their individual rights, but also deprive their families of the opportunity to provide care, support and the realisation of basic social rights.
2. **‘NO STATUS – NO RIGHTS: what prevents victims of unlawful deprivation of personal liberty from receiving social protection’ Analytical review of requests for legal assistance to the NGO ‘Assosiation of Relatives of Political Prisoners of the Kremlin’ during February 2024 – February 2025’** (2025). <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1lmRnghrOwsB3aCCtsB7TNxYXcUunIR1f/view?usp=sharing> The report illustrates how families of victims from temporarily occupied territories face systemic difficulties in accessing free legal aid, social security, document restoration, and medical services. This is a direct violation of the state's obligations under Articles 9 and 12 of the Covenant. The analysis of more than 200 appeals provides a qualitative empirical basis confirming the structural barriers created by the Russian occupation administration.
3. **‘Analytical Review: War Crimes in the Occupied Part of Zaporizhzhia Region. Documented Evidence, 2022 – Early 2025’** (2025). <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1KMRogQZU1prBtr1209mM9izn7tmINUer/view?usp=sharing> This document is important for confirming large-scale violations in the territory under the de facto control of the Russian Federation. It contains data on illegal searches, detentions, torture, coercion to cooperate, and oppression of representatives of religious communities (in particular Christians), confirming violations of Articles 12 (right to health), 15 (freedom

of thought and religion), and 2 (non-discrimination). This source directly supports the submission's arguments regarding the targeted discriminatory policy applied by the Russian Federation in the occupied territories, particularly in the context of access to medical care, social services and freedom of conscience.

Thus, the Russian Federation, as an occupying power, is failing to fulfil its obligations under the Covenant to guarantee the right to social security, protection of the family and an adequate standard of living for persons who have been unlawfully detained for political reasons and their families.

The information presented indicates systematic and multifaceted violations by the Russian Federation of the provisions of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in the territories of Ukraine under its effective control. Particular attention should be paid to cases where such violations are part of a broader policy of politically motivated persecution aimed at suppressing dissent, intimidating the local population and preventing the realisation of fundamental rights.

The consequences of such actions go far beyond the individual dimension and affect entire families, communities and social groups who lose access to health care, social protection, education, housing and security because of their real or perceived political, national or religious identity. The Russian Federation, acting as an occupying power, not only fails to fulfil its obligations under the Covenant, but also deliberately creates conditions that are incompatible with the principles of respect for human dignity, equality and social justice enshrined in the document.

We ask the Committee to take the above information into account and discuss the aforementioned violations of international law by Russia on the territory of Ukraine during its next session.

Thank you for your attention.

Best regards,
NGO "Assosiation of Relatives of Political
Prisoners of the Kremlin"
Igor Kotelyanets, head of the Assosiation

