

Submission to the Committee on Enforced Disappearances: UKRAINE

Media Initiative for Human Rights (MIHR)¹ and Physicians for Human Rights (PHR)² provide this information to the Committee on Enforced Disappearances to assist in its preparation for consideration of the report of Ukraine (provided pursuant to Article 29 (1) of the Convention), scheduled to take place during the Committee's 27th Session, scheduled to take place from 23 September to 4 October 2024.

General Context

1. In light of the upcoming review of Ukraine's implementation of its obligations under the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (the Convention), this submission takes the opportunity to highlight the general context, particularly the international armed conflict (the IAC) initiated by the Russian Federation on 20 February 2014, the consequences of which have posed challenges for the implementation of the Convention and have created new challenges for Ukraine.
2. The United Nations has extensively documented evidence of enforced disappearances within Ukraine perpetrated by the Russian Federation. In October 2023, Chair-Rapporteur Au Baldé of the Committee on Enforced Disappearances noted to the Third Committee that the "vast majority" of the 1,103 new cases reported were forcible disappearances of civilians and prisoners by the Russian Federation.³ The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights similarly published a report in March 2023 documenting 621 cases of enforced disappearances by Russian armed forces in Ukraine, of which 214 occurred in Ukrainian territory occupied by the Russian Federation.⁴ We commend the Committee and OHCHR's commitment to investigate these violations, and want to draw the Committee's attention to new cases of medical professionals and other civilians in this submission.
3. The main groups of missing persons highlighted by our organizations are:
 - a) Ukrainian military personnel;
 - b) Civilians (both adults and children) and other persons who are not considered combatants by their status (e.g., journalists in areas of armed conflict), and other

¹ The Media Initiative for Human Rights (MIHR) was founded in 2016. At first, the main activity of MIHR was journalistic investigations of human rights violations followed by legal support of cases. Currently, MIHR combines monitoring and recording human rights violations in connection with the armed aggression of the Russian Federation, coverage and investigation of separate episodes, analysis of collected data, and advocacy activities. The Main Lines of MIHR Actions: 1) Investigating war crimes committed in connection with Russian aggression in Ukraine. In particular, enforced disappearances, improper detention of prisoners of war, as well as tracking war trials and studying the quasi-legal system in the part of the territory of Ukraine occupied by Russia; 2) Analysis of the practices implemented by the military of the Russian Federation, based on which we prepare recommendations for the government of Ukraine, the international community, and the public to achieve justice; 3) Advocacy for changes in government policies and social practices regarding the provision and observance of human rights and freedoms.

² Physicians for Human Rights (PHR), which shared in the 1997 Nobel Peace Prize, works at the intersection of medicine, science, and law to end human suffering, save lives, and secure justice and universal human rights for all. Founded in 1986, PHR has more than 35 years of experience working in more than 60 countries to conduct research, launch fact-finding investigations, and galvanize thousands of health professionals and allies in the law enforcement and legal sectors to confront humanitarian emergencies and support justice for victims of human rights violations. Both directly and through the local networks of allied professionals that the organization builds and supports, PHR collects, analyzes, and preserves incontrovertible forensic evidence of abuses to support local, national, and international truth-telling and accountability processes. Our findings also offer policymakers, journalists, and activists information that can be used to reform policies and practices that undermine human rights.

³ "With Conflicts, Internal Strife, Leading to Escalating Enforced Disappearances Worldwide, Third Committee Highlights Importance of Coordinated Search," United Nations, October 16, 2023, <https://press.un.org/en/2023/gashc4384.doc.htm>.

⁴ "Report on the Human Rights Situation in Ukraine: 1 August 2022 to 31 January 2023," United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, March 24, 2023, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/countries/ukraine/2023/23-03-24-Ukraine-35th-periodic-report-ENG.pdf>

- categories of persons who left the battlefield as a result of injury or illness (hors de combat);
- c) Medical personnel:
- engaged to provide medical care to military personnel (combat medics);
 - providing medical care in military hospitals and civilian hospitals in the rear.
4. Thousands of Ukrainian citizens went missing as a result of the armed conflict. The exact number of missing persons in the context of the war was not known, but as of 2020, the ICRC had received 1,835 applications for searching for relatives in connection with the armed conflict in Ukraine.⁵ Since the beginning of the Russian Federation's full-scale invasion on 24 February 2022, the number of missing persons has been steadily increasing. As of 16 July 2024, the register of missing persons under special circumstances, which operates under the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine, already contains 51,000 records of people who went missing in the context of the war.⁶
5. Exact figures of those forcibly disappeared within categories of military personnel and civilians are difficult to estimate because the Russian Federation does not provide access to places of detention and refuses to confirm the numbers and identities of detainees in its territories and occupied territories of Ukraine.
6. Capture and enforced disappearances of medical personnel in particular have contributed to the humanitarian catastrophe as they could have alleviated the consequences of war in their humanitarian function. Customary international law provides protections against the arbitrary deprivation of liberty, enforced disappearances, torture and other cruel and inhuman punishment, and murder.⁷ Significantly, international humanitarian law protects health care workers acting within their humanitarian function and prohibits the punishment of a person for performing medical duties as demanded by medical ethics.⁸
7. Since the onset of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, there have been a staggering 1,519 attacks⁹ reported on the country's health care facilities, workers, and medical infrastructure.¹⁰ This amounts to approximately two attacks per day. Hospitals and clinics have been damaged or destroyed in 773 incidents.¹¹ These attacks include the shelling of ambulances, the looting of pharmacies, and acts of violence – killing, arrest,

⁵ International Day of the Disappeared, Ukrainian Red Cross Society website, August, 30 2020, <https://redcross.org.ua/news/2020/08/14211/>

⁶ "Head of the Department for Persons Missing in Special Circumstances of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine, said that the Register currently contains data on more than 51,000 people." MIHR, July 16, 2024, <https://mipl.org.ua/rodyiny-bezvisty-znyklyh-lyudej-chasto-ne-znavut-kudy-zvertatysya-po-dopomogu-ta-yaki-derzhavni-garantivi-mozhna-maty-pravozahysnyky/>

⁷ Customary International Humanitarian Law, ICRC, "Rule 99: Deprivation of Liberty," Vol. II, Ch. 32, Sec. L.; Customary International Humanitarian Law, ICRC, "Rule 90: Torture and Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment," Vol. II, Ch. 32, Sec. D.; Customary International Humanitarian Law, ICRC, "Rule 98: Enforced Disappearance," Vol. II, Ch. 32, Sec. K.; Customary International Humanitarian Law, ICRC, "Rule 89: Violence to Life," Vol. II, Ch. 32, Sec. C.

⁸ Geneva Convention I, Arts. 24-26; Geneva Convention IV, Art. 20; Additional Protocol I, Art. 15; Customary International Humanitarian Law, ICRC, "Rule 25: Medical Personnel, Vol. II, Ch. 7, Sec. A; Customary International Humanitarian Law, ICRC, "Rule 26: Medical Activities, Vol. II, Ch. 7, Sec. B.

⁹ The World Health Organization defines an attack on health as "any act of verbal or physical violence, obstruction, or threat of violence that interferes with the availability of, access to, and delivery of curative and/or preventive health services during emergencies." In this sense, attacks on health happen not only when hospitals and clinics are damaged and destroyed but also when access to health services is impeded or denied through an array of other methods, such as described below. "Attacks on Health Care Initiative," World Health Organization, July 22, 2020, <https://www.who.int/news-room/questions-and-answers/item/attacks-on-health-care-initiative>.

¹⁰ "Attacks on Health Care in Ukraine," eyeWitness to Atrocities, Insecurity Insight, Media Initiative for Human Rights, Physicians for Human Rights, and Ukrainian Healthcare Center, last modified July 16, 2024, <https://www.attacksonhealthukraine.org/>.

¹¹ Ibid.

detention, abduction, and torture – against health care personnel as well. Based on a joint dataset maintained by PHR, MIHR and partners, at least 232 Ukrainian health workers have been reportedly killed as of the end of June 2024.¹²

8. In February 2023, PHR, MIHR and other partners published its first report, *“Destruction and Devastation: One Year of Russia’s Assault on Ukraine’s Health Care System.”*¹³ The report established a reasonable basis to believe that attacks on Ukraine’s health care system constitute war crimes and potentially crimes against humanity. The report details, in particular, the testimony of a military medic who was captured in Mariupol and detained at two Russian-controlled correctional colonies, Olenivka Correctional Colony No. 120 and Kalinin Correctional Colony No. 27 in Donetsk oblast from April 12, 2022 (when he was captured) to November 3, 2022 (when he was released), where he provided care to the sick and wounded in cruel, inhuman conditions, having survived an attack on the Olenivka Correctional Colony No. 120 on the night between July 28 and 29, 2022.¹⁴ The medic recounted:

“Upon arriving at the colony, we underwent an ‘admission’ procedure. As soon as we got off the bus, the jailers identified and continued to beat us: while we were saying our names, then again along a corridor they formed, and finally after they forced us to squat down. There was constant physical violence. They could have let this bus in without this ‘ritual,’ everyone knew the bus was carrying wounded people and doctors. But the wounded were not spared. There was a guy with a crutch; they took the crutch from him and beat him with it, even as he fell to the ground. A wounded prisoner of war, who survived two airstrikes and had facial burns, was beaten to death.”

9. During Russia’s invasion, hundreds of health care workers have been detained, arrested, forcibly disappeared or otherwise persecuted by Russian forces. The report published by PHR, MIHR, and partners, *“Coercion and Control: Ukraine’s Health Care System Under Russian Occupation,”* demonstrates how Russia’s actions, including detaining health care workers, requiring forced changes of nationality as a precondition for gaining access to health care, and repurposing health facilities for nonmedical purposes, have compromised civilians’ right to health and imperiled access to essential health services.¹⁵ Although the Russian Federation refuses to provide access to detention centers and confirm the exact numbers of civilians in captivity as well as prisoners of war, estimates of medics currently thought to be held captive by the Russian Federation range from 60 to 500.¹⁶ Data gathered by PHR and partners has confirmed at least 68 health care workers were detained, arrested, captured or taken from their homes in 22 incidents since the start of the full-scale

¹² Ibid.

¹³ “Destruction and Devastation: One Year of Russia’s Assault on Ukraine’s Health Care System,” eyeWitness to Atrocities, Insecurity Insight, Media Initiative for Human Rights, Physicians for Human Rights, and Ukrainian Healthcare Center, February 2023, <https://phr.org/our-work/resources/russias-assault-on-ukraines-health-care-system>.

¹⁴ Interview with the witness, MIHR, November 24, 2022, from “Destruction and Devastation,” on file.

¹⁵ “Coercion and Control: Ukraine’s Health Care System under Russian Occupation,” eyeWitness to Atrocities, Insecurity Insight, Media Initiative for Human Rights, and Physicians for Human Rights, December 2023, <https://phr.org/our-work/resources/coercion-and-control-ukraines-health-care-system-under-russian-occupation/>

¹⁶ The lower estimates come from open source reports and testimonies of freed captives; the higher estimates come from families of those captured. “Families of captured medics demand tougher sanctions against Russian health care system,” Media Initiative for Human Rights, July 26, 2024, <https://mipl.org.ua/rodivny-polonenyh-medykiv-vymagayut-posyltyv-sankcziyi-proty-rosijskoyi-medyczyny/>; Ed Holt, “Ukrainian medic prisoners of war speak out,” The Lancet 402, no. 10405 (September 9, 2023), [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(23\)01885-8/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(23)01885-8/fulltext); “Military Medics of Ukraine,” Military Medics of Ukraine, accessed August 8, 2024, <https://military-medics-ua.org/en/home-en/>.

invasion.¹⁷ MIHR thus far identified 44 places of detention in the Russian Federation – pretrial detention centers and penal colonies, located both in the regions bordering Ukraine and farther in the country. Some prisoners are also held in the occupied territories of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts.¹⁸

10. Doctors are often sources of support; in conflict and occupation, it is common for them to assume leadership roles in their communities. Precisely for these reasons, however, health care workers are often singled out and targeted during conflict, particularly in situations of occupation.¹⁹ A doctor of the Hostomel Primary Care Center who was the only active doctor in Hostomel (Kyivska oblast) during Russian occupation in March 2022, described her role as follows: *“People, civilians, kept coming to me for medical help. We were already running out of medicines, basic medicines, for hypertension, diabetes, and it was clear that there was nowhere to buy them, people were getting contusions from explosions, they were dying, and there was nowhere to bury them. They started turning to me because they knew I was a doctor. I had to take on some kind of a leadership role.”* During the occupation of Hostomel, she was taken for interrogation by Russian soldiers where she had a plastic bag put over her head and was suffocated for up to 30 seconds. Her husband and son, both civilians, were taken prisoner by Russian forces. Her husband, who was shot when Russian soldiers entered their private house, has since been released in a prisoner exchange, but her son remains in captivity.²⁰

“On March 20, Russian soldiers came to our home in a private house. The Russian soldiers shot my husband in the knee and thigh with a gun, put him on the ground, and put the gun to his head. My son came out of the house [...] They put the three of us in an armored personnel carrier, blindfolded us and took us to their headquarters in Hostomel in the Yagoda residential complex. The interrogation was tough [...] Moreover, my husband was not provided with medical care, he was bleeding from the leg, he had two bullet wounds. During the interrogation, they asked me what I do, and I said that I am a doctor and that I have been working only in health care for more than 20 years. And after the interrogation, they put us in the corridor, put bags on our heads, tied our hands with tape, and started twisting and strangling us with tape around our necks. [...] As a doctor, I understand that asphyxiation is an easy death [...] I accepted it, that that’s the way it should be. Then, when they saw that we started to suffocate, they cut holes in our bags and took us all to Antonov airport for further interrogation. They left my husband and son there. And I was brought back to this Yagoda residential complex, where I was held captive for a day.”

¹⁷ “Attacks on Health Care in Ukraine,” eyeWitness to Atrocities, Insecurity Insight, Media Initiative for Human Rights, Physicians for Human Rights, and Ukrainian Healthcare Center, last modified March 21, 2024, <https://www.attacksonehealthukraine.org/>.

¹⁸ “In Russian captivity: what happens to Ukrainian soldiers behind the walls of Russian prisons,” Media Initiative for Human Rights, June 23, 2023, <https://mipl.org.ua/v-rosijskomu-poloni-shho-vidbuvavetsya-z-ukravinskymy-vijskovymy-za-stinamy-rosijskyh-tyurem/>.

¹⁹ “My Only Crime Was That I Was a Doctor’: How the Syrian Government Targets Health Workers for Arrest, Detention, and Torture,” Physicians for Human Rights, December 2019, <https://phr.org/our-work/resources/my-only-crime-was-that-i-was-a-doctor/>. Ukrainian human rights organizations have documented similar patterns of harassment of health care workers. “For refusing to cooperate, he was imprisoned: Kherson hospital chief doctor kidnapped by occupiers,” Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union, May 26, 2023, <https://www.helsinki.org.ua/articles/za-vidmovu-spivpratsiuvaty-potrapyv-do-kativni-holovnoho-likaria-khersonskoi-likarni-vykraly-okupanty/>.

²⁰ Interview with the witness, PHR, September 22, 2023.

11. Most of the health care workers detained by the Russian Federation were forcibly disappeared²¹ - they were never formally charged, and for many of them, their fate remains unknown. In the case of health care workers, whole communities are also affected as they are stripped of access to medical services these professionals provide.²²
12. Tens of thousands of families know nothing about the fate of their loved ones. They are neither among the living nor among the dead. In this complete uncertainty, the relatives of the missing risk remaining indefinitely in limbo.

Circumstances over which Ukraine has no effective influence

13. In this submission, we will mainly, but not exclusively, address those issues of the Convention's implementation related to the IAC. The new challenges faced by Ukraine have revealed a number of general problems that can be broadly classified as external and internal.
14. The former is largely related to the fact that the Russian Federation does not register or communicate the facts of capturing Ukrainian servicemen and women, as well as placing civilians in places of detention. The Russian armed forces do not always return the dead and do not provide humanitarian missions, including the ICRC, with access to military personnel and/or civilians deprived of their liberty. As a result, people who may be under the authority and control of the Russian Federation are considered and registered as missing in Ukraine. These circumstances increase the number of registered cases of undocumented and unreported missing persons.
15. Nevertheless, there are tasks that can be addressed at the national level to reduce both the number of missing persons and the suffering of their families.
16. The search for missing persons would be greatly assisted by receiving information from the Russian Federation on all persons held in places of deprivation of liberty. While the resolution of this issue falls outside the Committee's mandate, it would be impossible to achieve the purpose of the Convention without persistent and permanent attempts to encourage the Russian Federation to fulfill its obligations under international human rights law and humanitarian law.

Circumstances that can be influenced by Ukraine

On the New Version of the Law of Ukraine "On the Legal Status of Persons Missing under Special Circumstances"

²¹ As defined in Article 2 of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, "enforced disappearance" is considered to be the arrest, detention, abduction or any other form of deprivation of liberty by agents of the State or by persons or groups of persons acting with the authorization, support or acquiescence of the State, followed by a refusal to acknowledge the deprivation of liberty or by concealment of the fate or whereabouts of the disappeared person, which place such a person outside the protection of the law.

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-convention-protection-all-persons-enforced>

²² "The Survivors, the Dead, and the Disappeared: Detention of Health Care Workers in Syria, 2011-2012," Physicians for Human Rights, November 2021, <https://phr.org/our-work/resources/the-survivors-the-dead-and-the-disappeared/>

17. The concept, legal status and bodies involved in the identification, accounting and search for persons missing in the war context are regulated by the Law of Ukraine "On the Legal Status of Persons Missing in Special Circumstances"²³ (the "Law"), which until the changes in 2023 was called "On the Legal Status of Missing Persons".
18. The change of name also narrowed the list of regulated issues, as before the amendments were made, the law defined the legal status of missing persons. After the amendments, the law began to define the legal status of persons missing under special circumstances, such as armed conflict, military operations, temporary occupation of part of the territory of Ukraine, natural or man-made emergencies.
19. The need to search for missing persons under special circumstances (as a result of armed conflict) should not reduce the government's infrastructural capacity to search for missing persons not only under special circumstances, but also for missing persons due to all other circumstances.

Recommendation 1: Expand the definition of "special circumstances" to account for and search for missing persons due to circumstances not related to armed conflict, military operations, temporary occupation of a part of the territory of Ukraine, natural or man-made emergencies.

On eliminating discrepancies between the provisions of the Law of Ukraine "On the Legal Status of Persons Missing under Special Circumstances" and the by-laws of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine

20. The law provides for the position of the Ombudsperson for Persons Missing under Special Circumstances, who implements state policy in the field of compliance with international humanitarian law throughout Ukraine and is empowered to coordinate the search for persons missing under special circumstances and resolve other issues related to this, including the formation of search groups and the return of bodies.
21. In addition, the law provides for other bodies authorized to register and search for missing persons under special circumstances. These include ministries, state services, the National Guard and police, the Security Service of Ukraine, as well as prosecutors and local executive authorities. However, the powers of the Ombudsperson for Persons Missing under Special Circumstances as defined by the Law contradict the by-laws of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, which at the moment have greater applicability.

Recommendation 2 (*Convention Articles 3, 12 and 24*): To eliminate discrepancies between the provisions of the Law of Ukraine "On the Legal Status of Persons Missing under Special Circumstances" and the by-laws of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine regarding the powers and status of the Ombudsperson for Persons Missing under Special Circumstances.

Recommendation 3 (*Convention Articles 17 and 24*): Due to the fact that different bodies are involved in the registration and search for missing persons, there is a need to ensure a unified approach to the collection, registration and use of information on missing persons.

On the implementation of Articles 5 and 6 of the Convention

²³ Law of Ukraine No. 2505-VIII "On the Legal Status of Persons Missing in Special Circumstances" from July 12, 2018, <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2505-19>

22. Article 5 of the Convention stipulates that widespread or systematic practice of enforced disappearance constitutes a crime against humanity as defined in applicable international law and entails the penalties provided for in such applicable international law.
23. Article 6 of the Convention provides for a legal mechanism to hold accountable not only any person who commits, orders, instigates or induces an act of enforced disappearance, attempts to commit, aids or abets an act of enforced disappearance, but also a superior for failure to exercise proper control. The Ukrainian Criminal Code in Article 146-1²⁴ also provides for the responsibility of superiors; however, its provisions lack the legal certainty reflected in Article 6 of the Convention²⁵.
24. The Criminal Code of Ukraine currently does not provide for bringing criminal responsibility for crimes against humanity. The application of the above provisions directly on the basis of the Convention is not possible without amending the Criminal Code of Ukraine, since the latter provides that the basis for criminal liability is the commission by a person of a socially dangerous act that contains signs of a criminal offense under this Code (see part 1 of Article 2 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine).

Recommendation 4 (Convention Article 5): Take the necessary measures to enable criminal prosecution for crimes against humanity.

Recommendation 5 (Convention Article 6): Align the responsibility of supervisors as stipulated in Article 146-1 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine with the provisions on page 6 of the Convention.

Other general recommendations

25. Our work on documentation of enforced disappearances, as well as communication with survivors and their families, has identified a number of additional recommendations that we believe are relevant.

Recommendation 6 - Enhance Family Engagement and Support (Convention Articles 24 and 18): Ensure that families of the disappeared are regularly updated on the status of investigations and the search process. Provide them with clear guidelines and necessary support for filing applications and accessing available social benefits, as part of their right to information.

²⁴ Article 146-1. Hostage taking: 1. Arrest, detention, abduction or deprivation of liberty of a person in any other form, committed by a representative of a state, including a foreign one, with subsequent refusal to recognise the fact of such arrest, detention, abduction or deprivation of liberty of a person in any other form or concealment of data on the fate of such a person or his/her place of detention - shall be punishable by imprisonment for a term of three to five years; 2. Issuance of an order or directive to commit the acts specified in part 1 of this Article, or failure of head who became aware of the actions specified in part 1 of this Article, his/her subordinates to stop them and failure to notify the competent authorities of the crime- shall be punishable by imprisonment for a term of five to seven years.

²⁵ Until December 12, 2024, the provisions of Article 146-1 contained important clarifying notes explaining the status of the supervisor, but the new version of the law removed them, in particular, the following notes were removed: Note. 1. Under this Article, a representative of the state shall mean an official, as well as a person or group of persons acting with the permission, support or consent of the state. 2. Under this Article, representatives of a foreign state mean persons acting as civil servants of a foreign state or serving in the armed forces, police, state security, intelligence agencies, or persons holding positions in these or any other government authorities or local governments of a foreign state, established under its laws, or acting upon the orders of such persons, as well as representatives of irregular illegal armed groups, armed gangs and groups of mercenaries created by, subordinated to, managed and financed by the Russian Federation, as well as representatives of the occupation administration of the Russian Federation, which consists of its state bodies and structures functionally responsible for the administration of the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine, and representatives of the self-proclaimed bodies controlled by the Russian Federation, which usurped the performance of power functions in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine.

Recommendation 7 - *Protect and guarantee the rights of victims of enforced disappearances (Convention Articles 12 and 24)*: Reference samples should be collected, at least from those who do not have blood relatives.

Recommendation 8 - *Unified Documentation and Evidence Collection (Convention Articles 12 and 24)*: Mandate the use of standardized procedures for documenting testimonies and collecting evidence from returned individuals, in accordance with the Istanbul Protocol. This aligns with the State's obligation to investigate enforced disappearances thoroughly and ensure justice for victims.

Recommendation 9 (Convention Article 9): The jurisdiction of bodies searching for missing persons should cover land and sea. Currently, the active search groups for locating missing persons are only deployed on the land part of Ukraine. There is no designated body or organization responsible for forming search groups for water (sea, rivers) within the authorized agency, although relevant legislation does provide for the possibility of their establishment.

Recommendation 10 - *International Cooperation and Data Sharing (Convention Articles 14 and 15)*: Foster international cooperation by establishing agreements with foreign governments and international organizations, including completing the procedure of signing a cooperation agreement between Ukraine and the International Commission on Missing Persons with its subsequent ratification, to facilitate the exchange of information and support joint search and identification efforts, enhancing mutual legal assistance.

Recommendation 11 (Convention Articles 17 and 24): Ensure that information about a missing person can be entered into the Unified Register of Persons Missing under Special Circumstances on the basis of the opening of criminal proceedings, regardless of the pre-trial investigation body that opened them to improve the exchange of information between the investigator and the holders of Register.

Recommendation 12 - *Comprehensive Aftercare for Returned Individuals (Convention Article 24)*: Develop a robust aftercare program for individuals who return after enforced disappearances, including medical, psychological, and social support. Ensure these services are provided in a manner that respects the dignity and rights of the returned individuals.

Recommendation 13 - *Underline the Importance of the Return of Health Care Workers (Convention Article 24)*: Recognize health care workers as a protected group under international humanitarian law and prioritize their identification, location, and return. Establish a dedicated task force to work on cases involving the disappearance of health care workers. Recognize the protected status of this group in the Unified Register of Persons Missing under Special Circumstances.

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