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## Front Line Defenders calls on the Russian authorities to release Ukrainian woman human rights defender Iryna Horobtsova one year on from her enforced disappearance

On 13 May 2022, Ukrainian woman human rights defender **Iryna Horobtsova** was abducted from her family home in then Russian-occupied Kherson by the Russian military and appears to have been unlawfully detained ever since without charges, or access to legal or medical aid. On the first anniversary of her enforced disappearance, Front Line Defenders calls on the authorities of the Russian Federation to confirm where the woman human rights defender is being held and immediately release her.

[Iryna Horobtsova](#) is a woman human rights defender and grassroots activist from Kherson, Ukraine. During the Russian occupation of the city she volunteered as a driver providing transport to healthcare workers to the local hospital and delivering medical supplies, ensuring that hospitals could continue to provide healthcare services. On social media Iryna Horobtsova posted about peaceful rallies taking place against the occupation of Kherson and her experience living in the occupied city.

Woman human rights defender Iryna Horobtsova's relatives reported that on the morning of 13 May 2022, two cars with "Z" marks – the symbol of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine – arrived to the house where she lived with her parents. Several persons in Russian military uniforms raided the apartment and forced Iryna Horobtsova into a vehicle telling her parents that they were transporting her for interrogation. Iryna Horobtsova's parents have not had a chance to see their daughter since and, after the liberation of Kherson by Ukrainian armed forces, they received information that she had been transferred to Russian-occupied Crimea.

In June 2022, the Ministry of Interior of the Russian Federation refused the appeal of human rights defender and Iryna Horobtsova's lawyer, [Emil Kurbedinov](#), to open an investigation into the abduction of Iryna Horobtsova, but stated that the woman human rights defender was being held and had her fingerprints taken in pre-trial detention centre No. 1. in Simferopol. This is the only official confirmation of where she has been held. Meanwhile, the administration of the facility denied that the woman human rights defender was being held there and denied him access to his client.

At the same time, the local occupation authorities and Russian central law enforcement agencies responded negatively to Emil Kurbedinov's numerous inquiries as to whether a criminal case had been opened against the woman human rights defender. The Federal Security Service (FSB) and the Ministry of Interior responded to later requests from Kurbedinov in 2023 that Iryna Horobtsova was being held for allegedly obstructing a so-called "special military operation," but did not say where and denied that any criminal proceedings had been initiated against her. Meanwhile, the Federal Penitentiary Service departments in the Russian-occupied Crimea, the Rostov region of the Russian mainland, and the central office in Moscow all denied that she was being held in their facilities.

Last summer, Iryna Horobtsova's family received two letters from her from the Simferopol pre-trial detention centre No. 1, dated 8 August 2022 and 31 August 2022. After that, communication ceased. In one of the letters, she requested a number of items: food, clothes, medicines and hygiene products, which indicates that she lacked many basic necessities while in detention.

However, her relatives received no confirmation that the parcel of items they sent to the facility was delivered to her. They were particularly concerned that Iryna Horobtsova had not received the medication that she had been prescribed by a doctor, as this could indicate a lack of any medical care at all.

On 13 April 2023, the international human rights organisation *Human Rights Watch* [published](#) the testimony of another person who was reportedly held in the same cell as Iryna Horobtsova in Simferopol for three weeks in September 2022. This person said that before being transferred to her cell, Iryna Horobtsova was held in solitary confinement for several months, and also reported about ill-treatment, intimidation and psychological violence against Iryna Horobtsova while in detention.

Ukrainian human rights organisation *Media Initiative for Human Rights* (MIHR) issued a [report](#) which described the systemic practice of abduction and transfer of civilians by the Russian army in Russian-occupied territories, as happened to Iryna Horobtsova. As of early April 2023, the MIHR was able to identify at least 948 civilian hostages, including Ukrainian human rights defenders, being held in more than 40 detention facilities where prisoners of war are also held in Russia, Russian-occupied territories, and Belarus.

Front Line Defenders expresses its grave concern regarding the enforced disappearance of woman human rights defender Iryna Horobtsova. Front Line Defenders calls on the international community to organise independent monitoring of the facilities where she and other civilian hostages are held.

**Front Line Defenders urges the authorities of the Russian Federation to:**

- Immediately confirm the location of Iryna Horobtsova, ensure she has access to her lawyer and unconditionally release her from captivity;
- Take all necessary measures to ensure the physical and psychological security and integrity of Iryna Horobtsova while returning her to her family in Ukraine;
- Reveal the whereabouts of all other civilian captives held under the control of the Russian Federation;
- Provide independent agencies such as the ICRC and UN monitoring missions unimpeded access to detention facilities under the control of the Russian Federation so they can ensure that the Russian Federation is abiding by its international human rights obligations.