

**DUBLIN**

Front Line Defenders – Head Office
First Floor, Avoca Court
Temple Road, Blackrock
Co. Dublin, A94 R7W3, Ireland

info@frontlinedefenders.org
www.frontlinedefenders.org

phone +353 1 212 3750
fax +353 1 212 1001

BRUSSELS

Front Line Defenders – EU Office
Square Marie-Louise 72
1000 Brussels
Belgium

euoffice@frontlinedefenders.org
www.frontlinedefenders.org

phone +32 2 230 9383
fax +32 2 230 0028

22 August 2024

Ukraine: Woman human rights defender Iryna Horobtsova sentenced to 10.5 years in penal colony

On 15 August 2024, Ukrainian woman human rights defender **Iryna Horobtsova** was sentenced to 10.5 years in a Russian penal colony. This verdict came more than two years after her abduction by Russian military forces in Kherson and following a four-month closed-door trial. Iryna Horobtsova was found guilty of alleged espionage and charged under Article 276 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation.

[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 has posted about peaceful rallies taking place against the occupation of Kherson and her experience living in the occupied city.

On 15 August 2024, the so-called Kherson Regional Court, located in the Russian-occupied part of the Kherson region, sentenced Iryna Horobtsova to 10.5 years in a Russian penal colony. She was charged with alleged espionage under Article 276 of the Russian Criminal Code. The indictment claimed that she provided “*strategically important data on Russian Armed Forces units in the Kherson region to an employee of the Main Directorate of Intelligence of Ukraine*” from February 2022 to March 2023. However, this accusation is impossible, as she had been abducted by Russian military forces in May 2022 and has been detained since then. Moreover, Iryna Horobtsova’s lawyer, Emil Kurbedinov, highlighted inconsistencies in the legal documents, which falsely indicated that her arrest occurred in March 2024, not in May 2022, as previously stated.

A few months after Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Iryna Horobtsova was abducted on 13 May 2022 from her home by several persons in Russian military uniforms who arrived in two cars marked with the “Z” symbol—the symbol of Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Her parents reported that the Russian military personnel claimed they were taking her for interrogation. Since that day, for the past two years, her family has not been able to see or speak with her by phone. In August 2022, Iryna’s family received two letters from her, dated 8 August 2022 and 31 August 2022, in which she indicated a lack of basic necessities such as food, hygiene products, clothing, and medical care. Her family sent her a parcel but never received confirmation that it was delivered. They were particularly concerned that Iryna Horobtsova had not received the medication prescribed by a doctor, which raised concerns about a lack of medical care.

In the autumn of 2022, when Kherson city was liberated by the Ukrainian army, Iryna Horobtsova’s family received information that she had been transferred to a detention center in Russian-occupied Crimea. Despite appeals from her lawyer, Emil Kurbedinov, Russian authorities refused to investigate her abduction, only confirming that she was being held in Simferopol’s pre-trial detention center No. 1. Meanwhile, the Federal Penitentiary Service departments in Russian-occupied Crimea, the Rostov region, and the central office in Moscow denied that Iryna was being

held there and refused to allow her lawyer access to his client. Emil Kurbedinov was finally allowed to meet with her during a closed-door trial in 2024.

Iryna Horobtsova's case highlights the broader pattern of persecution faced by Ukrainian human rights defenders and civilians in Russian-occupied and controlled territories, many of whom have been abducted, tortured, or unlawfully imprisoned. The Ukrainian human rights organization Media Initiative for Human Rights (MIHR) issued a report describing the systemic practice of abduction and transfer of civilians by the Russian army in Russian-occupied territories. As of early April 2023, MIHR identified 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 condemns the sentencing of woman human rights defender Iryna Horobtsova to 10.5 years in prison and believes it to be in reprisal for her peaceful and legitimate human rights work. This unjust verdict exemplifies the ongoing repression and persecution of those who dare to stand up against occupation and speak out about human rights violations in Russian-occupied territories. The case of Iryna Horobtsova highlights serious violations of international law by Russian authorities, including the use of fabricated charges, denial of fair trial standards, and the inhumane treatment of detainees.

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

1. Immediately release Iryna Horobtsova, drop all charges against her, and discontinue the criminal case opened against her under Article 276 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation;
2. Take all necessary measures to ensure the physical and psychological security and integrity of Iryna Horobtsova and return her to her family in Ukraine;
3. Conduct an impartial investigation into the abduction and mistreatment of Iryna Horobtsova and hold those responsible accountable;
4. Cease the systematic persecution of Ukrainian human rights defenders and civilians in occupied regions and respect their rights under international law;
5. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Russia and in Russian-occupied territories are able to carry out their human rights activities without fear of reprisal and free from all restrictions, in line with the Russian Federation's international human rights obligations and commitments.

Front Line Defenders Board of Directors

Denis O'Brien, Jim Conway, Roja Fazaeli, Maria Mulcahy, Kieran Mulvey, Mary Jane Real (Philippines), David Sykes, Arnold Tsunga (Zimbabwe), Verónica Vidal (Uruguay)

Front Line Defenders International Advisory Council

James L. Cavallaro, Maryam Elahi, Michel Forst, Hina Jilani, Mary Lawlor

Front Line, The International Foundation for the Protection of Human Rights

Defenders trading as Front Line Defenders, is registered in Ireland as a company limited by guarantee and not having a share capital. Registered Office: First Floor, Avoca Court, Temple Road, Blackrock, Co. Dublin, A94 R7W3, Ireland.

Company No. 593190; Registered Charity No. 20204494; CHY 22404