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NEWS

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Statement on publication of press release on Ukrainian fighting tactics

Amnesty International deeply regrets the distress and anger that our press release on the Ukrainian military's fighting tactics has caused. Since Russian's invasion began in February 2022, Amnesty International has been rigorously documenting and reporting on war crimes and violations committed in Ukraine, speaking to hundreds of victims and survivors whose stories illuminate the brutal reality of Russia's war of aggression. We have challenged the world to demonstrate its solidarity with Ukrainians through concrete action, and we will continue to do so.

Amnesty International's priority in this and in any conflict is ensuring that civilians are protected; indeed, this was our sole objective when releasing this latest piece of research. While we fully stand by our findings, we regret the pain caused and wish to clarify a few crucial points.

In our press release, we documented how in all 19 of the towns and villages we visited, we found instances where Ukrainian forces had located themselves right next to where civilians were living, thereby potentially putting them at risk from incoming Russian fire. We made this assessment based on the rules of international humanitarian law (IHL),

which require all parties to a conflict to avoid locating, to the maximum extent feasible, military objectives within or near densely populated areas. The laws of war exist in part to protect civilians, and it is for this reason that Amnesty International urges governments to comply with them.

This does not mean that Amnesty International holds Ukrainian forces responsible for violations committed by Russian forces, nor that the Ukrainian military is not taking adequate precautions elsewhere in the country.

We must be very clear: Nothing we documented Ukrainian forces doing in any way justifies Russian violations. Russia alone is responsible for the violations it has committed against Ukrainian civilians. Amnesty's work over the last six months and our multiple briefings and reports on Russia's violations and war crimes reflect their scale and the gravity of their impact on civilians.

Amnesty International wrote to the Ukrainian government detailing our findings on 29 July. In our letter, we included GPS coordinates and other sensitive information about the locations, including schools and hospitals, where we had documented Ukrainian forces basing themselves among civilians. We did not make this information public in our press release due to the security risks it would pose to both Ukrainian forces and to the civilians we interviewed.

Amnesty International is not attempting to give the Ukrainian military detailed instructions regarding how they should operate – but we call on the relevant authorities to abide by their international humanitarian obligations in full.

Amnesty International's priority will always be ensuring that civilians' lives and human rights are protected during conflict.

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