



Lemkin Institute Statement on Genocide in Ukraine

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The Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention believes that *Russia's behavior since the 24 February 2022 invasion of Ukraine is indicative of genocidal intent.*

Most recently, the ramping up of shelling and bombing in civilian areas, including the port city of Mariupol, which has been under siege without water, electricity, medicine, and access to the outside world for over three weeks now, demonstrates intentional attacks on civilians and wanton disregard for their safety and security. Russian forces have shelled buildings in which civilians have taken refuge, such as the Donetsk Regional Theatre of Drama in Mariupol, as well as buildings that are legally off limits in times of war, including hospitals and schools. These facts, combined with the language of denial of the existence of Ukrainians as such, could imply an intention to destroy, in whole or in part, the national Ukrainian group.

Although there is not yet evidence of Russia's intentional destruction of cultural representations, people responsible for collectives have created bunkers in undisclosed locations to safeguard elements of cultural value. Moreover, artworks have been evacuated across borders to preserve them from Russia's invasion.

Even more alarming are reports of kidnappings and forced displacements of people from Mariupol as well as US intelligence reports that Russia may have lists of specific Ukrainians to be killed or sent to camps.

Finally, Russia's ultimatum today that Ukrainian security forces in Mariupol have until 5am Moscow time (2 am GMT) to surrender is a chilling threat in the context of this open flouting of international law and all norms of human morality.

Even before the February invasion, Russian President Vladimir Putin was using genocidal language to refer to Ukraine and Ukrainians. In his speech to the Russian nation on February 21, he repeatedly denied Ukraine's existence. We can see in just three examples from that speech that Putin denies the existence of the Ukrainian identity as a nation, denies the ability of the Ukrainian people to exercise sovereignty, and casts current Ukrainian authorities as cosmic enemies who rely on "the negation of everything that united us" to manipulate Russians into believing they are Ukrainian:

1. "Since time immemorial, the people living in the southwest of what has historically been Russian land have called themselves Russians and Orthodox Christians. So, I will start with the fact that modern Ukraine was entirely created by Russia or, to be more precise, by Bolshevik, Communist Russia. This process started practically right after the 1917 revolution, and Lenin and his associates did it in a way that was extremely harsh on Russia — by separating, severing what is historically Russian land."

2. "Ukraine never had a tradition of genuine statehood."

3. "The Ukrainian authorities — I would like to emphasize this — began by building their statehood on the negation of everything that united us, trying to distort the mentality and historical memory of millions of people, of entire generations living in Ukraine."

These statements, which Putin continues to repeat in addresses to the Russian public, leave Ukrainians no way to continue living peacefully *as Ukrainians*.

The Lemkin Institute shares with the world concerns regarding Putin's threat to use nuclear weapons should NATO or any other military become involved in its war on Ukraine. However, the Lemkin Institute is also acutely aware of how leaders committing mass atrocities, and particularly the specific crime of genocide, rarely have any internal limits, whether institutional or psychological, on their use of terror. The types of warfare and threats that we see from Russia in Ukraine tend only to radicalize, grow, and spread, causing destruction of such size and horror that regional and international forces eventually must respond.

The Putin regime's use of genocidal and genocidal violence against civilians dates back to the Second Chechen War (1999-2000). Putin also used similar tactics in Syria, where Russian bombers appeared intentionally to target hospitals. Given this history there is reason to fear that Putin will not stop with the destruction of Ukraine without significant pushback.

In the face of possible genocide, and clear war crimes as well as crimes against humanity, *the Lemkin Institute urges the international community to realize the seriousness of the atrocities being carried out by Russia and to make it absolutely clear to Russia that any further destruction of Ukrainian life may warrant an even more forceful and coordinated international response that may include military intervention.*