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Editorial

In the Third Year of War: Signs of Genocide of the Ukrainian People Through the Destruction of Medicine, Science, and Education

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The war in Ukraine has serious consequences for the entire Ukrainian society and the world in general. The Ukrainian people have once again suffered a tragic event at the hands of the Russian Federation in the 21st century, resulting in a bloody genocide and undermining the concept of freedom for all humanity. Ukraine survived the Holodomor genocides of the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s, the occupation wars of the Soviet Union in the early 1920s and late 1930s, and deportations of Ukrainians in the 20th and 21st centuries [1].

Every family remembers the significant losses of loved ones through generations and their suffering across the world. The concept of genocide as a crime emerged in international law after the Second World War. Lawyer Raphael Lemkin, a Polish and American legal practitioner of Jewish origin, first introduced the term genocide as a legal concept. In the early 1920s, R. Lemkin studied philology and then law at the Jan Kazimierz University of Lviv. He defended his doctoral thesis at Heidelberg University in Germany, served as an assistant prosecutor in Berezhany in Ternopil Region, and lectured in Warsaw. In the early 1930s, he represented Poland at international legal conferences, and as early as 1933, he suggested that those who deliberately harmed a large group of people out of hatred and destroyed their cultural treasures, engaged in “vandalism,” killed, and raped should be considered as manifestations of genocide. People who performed actions or gave orders to do them should be tried and punished [2]. On December 9, 1948, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. The definition of genocide is used in the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court [3]. The following acts committed with the intention of complete or partial destruction of the national, ethnic, racial or religious group are considered genocide: 1) murder; 2) causing severe physical or mental injuries; 3) deliberate creation of living conditions that are designed for complete or partial destruction; 4) actions intended to prevent the birth of children; 5) forcible transfer of children of this group to another group [4].

Thousands of Ukrainian civilians, wounded, soldiers, and prisoners of war have been victims of violent murders in this war. Russian prisoners of war have given testimony: “We had an order to immediately shoot anyone over 15 years of age without a word. 20 to 24 individuals were executed, including teenagers aged 10–15 and 17... we cleared the building. It unimportant who was there... In Soledar and Bakhmut, 150 Wagner Group mercenaries killed everyone – women, men, retired, and children, including young ones aged five... If disobeyed orders, they were killed” [5]. They not only murdered civilian Ukrainians but also ordered to finish off injured Ukrainian soldiers and shoot and behead prisoners[5].
In Geneva, Chair of the UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry, Erik Mose, stated that while no evidence had yet been found, the question «of the genocide in Ukraine presented by independent experts regarding the actions of the Russian aggressor (killings, inflicting severe bodily or mental injuries) needed further investigation». This is how the UN works, not for the people, but for the Russian Federation!!! [6]

The International Criminal Court in the Hague, which has the authority to prosecute individuals responsible for genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity, has only recognized the fifth item as a manifestation of genocide in Ukraine – the forcible transfer of children from one group to another. The International Criminal Court issued an arrest warrant for the President of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin, for deporting Ukrainian children to Russia, as well as for the RF Commissioner for Children’s Rights, Maria Lvova-Belova, who is suspected of committing a war crime. The courageous and consistent chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, Karim Khan, believes that no one should feel free to commit crimes [7].

We review the third and fourth items of the UN Convention in this article, which demonstrate signs of genocide in Ukraine and are associated with medicine, education, and science. Specifically, the intentional creation of living conditions intended for complete or partial destruction, actions intended to prevent the birth of children.

Since late February 2022 and up to the present day, the WHO has verified 1,773 attacks on the healthcare system in Ukraine, resulting in the deaths of at least 136 medical workers and injuries to 288 [8]. 1,564 medical facilities were damaged, and an additional 208 were completely destroyed. During this period, the Russian army also destroyed 260 ambulances, damaged 161, and captured another 125. The enemy attacks medical infrastructure, such as hospitals, outpatient healthcare facilities, maternity hospitals, polyclinics, etc., on a daily basis [9]. In 2024, the attacks intensified. The healthcare infrastructure has suffered significant damage, particularly in areas near the front line. Up to 14% of facilities were completely destroyed, and up to 48% experienced partial damage. During this period, 40% of all attacks on the healthcare system are targeted at the primary level of medical care, hindering Ukrainians’ access to essential medical services. Emergency medical care centers accounted for 15% of the attacks. The number of double strikes has increased, posing an even greater danger to emergency workers and civilians. Emergency service workers and medical transport personnel are three times more likely to be injured by such strikes compared to other medical professionals. The most significant damage was suffered by medical facilities in Kharkiv, Donetsk, Mykolaiv, Kyiv, Chernihiv, Dnipropetrovsk, Kherson, and Zaporizhzhia Oblasts.

The cost of medications has increased for the state during the war, particularly when inpatient treatment for patients is required. Patients purchase many medications themselves. Delivery of medicines to frontline regions is challenging. Providing access to medications is a significant issue in the healthcare sector, especially in areas that are subjected to constant shelling. As of April 2023, 75% of individuals had faced challenges because of the rising cost of medications, and 44% had difficulties obtaining them[10].

From February 24, 2022 to September 2023, complicated patients with oncological, autoimmune, and cardiovascular conditions who were receiving medication through clinical trials were affected. According to data from the State Expert Center of Ukraine, at the onset of the full-scale war, international sponsors of clinical trials suspended patient recruitment for 217 clinical trials. 234 clinical trials were prematurely terminated. Participants in the clinical trials were given four options: continuing treatment at the trial site (if possible), withdrawing from the trial early, transferring to other sites within Ukraine, or transferring to locations outside of Ukraine. Displaced patients scattered across over 25 countries around the world. The top therapeutic fields of transferred researched individuals were oncology, neurology, gastroenterology, rheumatology, and cardiology [10].

Damaging the energy infrastructure in Ukraine directly impacts the functioning of healthcare facilities. This applies to both the supply of electricity and water. Following the strikes on energy infrastructure last month, the winter season of 2024–2025 is likely to be extremely challenging. We also need to consider the availability of quality water and adequate sanitation, which are essential conditions for ensuring public health. 22% of households in the frontline regions delay seeking medical assistance. This is mainly due to financial constraints. Specifically, 24% of households are unable to afford medication, while 51% cannot cover the cost of medical services or vaccinations. Furthermore, there is an increasing lack of medical staff and a significant level of burnout. They feel a double burden. Medical professionals are part of affected communities in need of support and psychological assistance [11,12].

Therefore, the deliberate killing of patients and medical staff, the destruction of hospitals, polyclinics, outpatient medical facilities, and maternity hospitals, the destruction of the energy supply of medical facilities, the double bombing of ambulances, the inability to obtain necessary medications for patients, especially the seriously ill, the lack of possibility of getting medical assistance for Ukrainian citizens on their own territory are all consequences of the treacherous war waged by the Russian Federation against a neighboring country with the aim of seizing Ukrainian lands. Isn’t it a manifestation of genocide? Citizens of Ukraine have been deprived of the right to normal medical care.
for a third consecutive year! As medical professionals, we would like to ask the UN Investigative Committee if this could be considered a form of genocide.

Children and young people have faced terrible trials as a result of the brutal war, depriving them of a normal life and education. 1,790 children have been recognized as victims during the deceitful war in Ukraine. 535 children have died, and over 1,255 have sustained injuries of varying degrees of severity, according to official information from juvenile prosecutors [13]. Many children and students had their schools, colleges, institutes, and universities destroyed or captured. 410 educational institutions were completely destroyed, and over 3,500 were damaged [14].

Due to frequent air raid alerts and bombings in Ukraine, education takes place in shelters or remotely. Children and youth lack the chance to obtain a quality education, making it challenging for them to enroll in higher educational institutions. More than a million children are unable to communicate with their teachers and friends because they are pursuing distance learning. Children living in the frontline territories of Ukraine have been forced to spend about 5,000 hours in underground shelters and the subway over the past two years [14].

The future of Ukraine greatly depends on the higher education of its youth. More than ten universities and research institutes were destroyed, with up to 40 experiencing destruction. Many students and faculty had to relocate to safe areas in Western Ukraine or evacuate abroad [15].

Ukrainian science has been suffering losses due to Russian aggression since 2014, following the occupation of Crimea and parts of Donetsk and Luhansk Regions. This resulted in Ukrainian scientific and educational institutions losing their premises, equipment, and some employees. They were forced to restructure their work during the evacuation.

Since February 24, 2022, Ukraine has suffered unparalleled losses to its scientific community, with casualties including renowned professors, associate professors, senior researchers, assistants, graduate students, and undergraduates. By April 2024, over 140 Ukrainian scientists had perished in the full-scale Russian-Ukrainian war. We have lost highly talented individuals – the cream of the Ukrainian society [16].

Research and professional development opportunities for scientists in Ukraine are limited or completely absent due to the war. Continuous shelling, life-threatening situations, ruined labs, lecture halls, and research institutes, financial shortages, absence of basic amenities (power cuts, internet and mobile communication disruptions, etc.), displacement, forced emigration, and Russian occupation are just some of the challenges faced by students, teachers, and scientists.

According to the National Research Fund, only 57 out of 169 teams are prepared to resume their scientific research and development under martial law conditions. Only 62 teams can continue their work under specific circumstances, and 50 teams will be unable to continue their research at all [17].

Therefore, the deliberate destruction of educational and scientific institutions provides grounds to label the actions of the Russian Federation as “scientific genocide” against Ukrainian citizens. This is all part of the genocide of the Ukrainian people, aimed at eradicating Ukraine’s intellectual capacity. Ukrainians have been denied access to proper education and science due to the war initiated by the Russian Federation.

In conclusion, we call upon the civilized world that upholds democratic principles, the UN, and the International Criminal Court in The Hague! You are observing another genocide and its elements: urbicide, eliticide, linguicide, ecocide, and culturicide of the ancient Ukrainian people living in the heart of Europe. Ukraine has suffered all five legal indicators of genocide as adopted by the Rome Statute during this war. We do not want other European and world countries to experience this horror! We beg you: make strategically correct decisions for the future of humanity, because it may be too late for everyone!
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