

UN Human Rights Chief Describes 'Climate of Fear' in East Ukraine

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Employees of the Azovstal Iron and Steel Works hold a rally to protest against actions of armed separatists in Mariupol, eastern Ukraine. The banner reads "Peace! Orderliness! Disarmament!".

Armed separatists in eastern Ukraine have achieved nothing but the creation of a climate of insecurity, which is ruining their own region, UN human rights chief Navi Pillay said Wednesday.

One of her officials described a "reign of fear" in some areas where armed groups could abduct and assault people without restraint.

Armed groups in the regions of Donetsk and Luhansk should "stop taking themselves, and the people living in their regions, down this dead end, which is leading simply to misery, destruction, displacement and economic deprivation," Pillay said.

"All they have achieved is a climate of insecurity and fear, which is having a hugely detrimental impact on many thousands of people," she said. "The time has come to put down the guns and talk. Peace and reconciliation, and long-term solutions are certainly attainable."

Her office's third monthly report on human rights in Ukraine detailed a breakdown in law and order in parts of the east and the situation in the Crimean peninsula, which has been annexed by Russia.

Gianni Magazzeni, a UN official who oversees the work of the 34-strong UN human rights monitoring mission in Ukraine, said life remained normal for millions of people in the east of the country, but there were pockets where armed groups had taken over and did not respect any kind of law.

"We' are talking about a reign of fear, if not a reign of terror, in those pocket areas where armed groups can abduct, detain, conduct ill-treatment if not torture, sexual assault, intimidation," he said.

People were being threatened to the extent that they feared for their lives and did not dare to vote or leave the area, he said. The lack of law and order was undermining basic services such as education and water supplies in those areas.

"Food soon may be an issue," he added

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