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Russia's Matviyenko and Foreign Ministry Slam UN Report on Ukraine

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Federation Council Speaker Valentina Matviyenko on Thursday accused the United Nations of political bias over a report released a day earlier on the situation in eastern Ukraine, as the Foreign Ministry called on the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe to step in to help Ukrainian refugees.

The report by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, which stressed growing violence on the part of pro-Russian separatists, was "unfair and politicized," Matviyenko said.

The report's authors probably "didn't even need to travel to Ukraine" to write such a report and may have only met with pro-European Union authorities in Kiev, she said.

The report, published Wednesday and set to be discussed at the UN Security Council days later, also elicited indignation from the Foreign Ministry.

The ministry's spokesman, Alexander Lukashevich, excoriated the report as soon as it was

released, saying in a statement that the authors had "baselessly placed all blame for the bloodshed in eastern Ukraine on pro-Russian separatists in Donetsk and Luhansk."

The report contained "no objective assessment of the criminal actions of Kiev, which is conducting military operations ... against civilians," he said.

Worse yet, he said, a recommendation contained in the report for Kiev to conduct a counterterrorism operation against separatists could be seen as "excusing an escalation of the crisis."

"It is strange to hear such a thing from people calling themselves human rights defenders," he wrote.

On Thursday, he called on the OSCE to conduct a thorough analysis of the situation in Ukraine, especially that of refugees. RIA Novosti cited Lukashevich as saying that Moscow was hoping for objectivity in the analysis and that Ukrainian authorities had not yet put in place the humanitarian corridor they had promised.

The UN report said a steady rise in killings, torture and abductions by pro-Russia armed groups in eastern Ukraine has claimed hundreds of lives since last month.

"A climate of lawlessness prevails in the east with an increase in criminality, killings, abductions and detentions by the armed groups," UN Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights Ivan Simonovic said.

At least 356 people, including 257 civilians, have been killed since May 7, according to the 34 monitors with the UN human rights office. Among those casualties are 86 Ukrainian military personnel, including the 49 crew and troops who died when a Ukrainian military transport plane was shot down by separatists last week. The other 13 dead were not specified.

There have been more than 200 reports of torture, the new report said, and 81 people were being held on June 7 as the deadly conflict raged in eastern Ukraine between pro-Russia separatists and the government in Kiev.

"We are talking about a reign of fear, if not a reign of terror, in those pocket areas," Gianni Magazzeni, head of the rights office's European department, told reporters.

UN human rights chief Navi Pillay said in the report that a "climate of insecurity and fear" has displaced 34,000 people, nearly half in the regions of Donetsk and Luhansk, which have declared their independence from Kiev.

"The escalation in criminal activity resulting in human rights abuses is no longer limited to targeting journalists, elected representatives, local politicians, civil servants and civil society activists," the report says. "Abductions, detentions, acts of ill treatment and torture, and killings by armed groups are now affecting the broader population of the two eastern regions."

Simonovic said the government reported that armed groups in the east abducted 387 people in the east from April to June 7, including 39 journalists. He said UN monitors were able to confirm 222 abductions, including four people who have been killed, 137 who have been

released and 81 who remain in detention.

Magazzeni said monitors found that many people are "so fearful for their lives that they would not even want to dare to vote if they had a chance to do so."

At the same time, Simonovic said, there has been an increase in reports of enforced disappearances and excessive use of force during Ukrainian government security operations "that have led to casualties among civilians, which we continue to investigate."

Simonovic told a briefing on the report at the International Peace Institute in New York that representatives of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic have for the first time acknowledged that among their fighters are some volunteers from Russia, mostly from Chechnya, and includes Cossacks.

"This, of course, shows a clear danger of a possible spillover of the current crisis in eastern Ukraine," he said.

(AP, MT)

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