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Human Rights Groups Report Detention, Torture of Civilians in Ukraine

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Both Russian-backed separatists and Ukrainian authorities have illegally⊠ detained and tortured civilians in the country's war-torn east, human ⊠rights groups reported Thursday.⊠⊠

Charities Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International issued a joint ⊠report revealing that both sides had executed "enforced disappearances."⊠ Detainees were "seized off the streets," denied medical attention, beaten and abused and "cut off from family and lawyers."⊠

Ukrainian security services (SBU) allegedly operated an unofficial detention ⊠compound in Kharkiv, where as many as 16 people may remain detained ⊠without any official records. Local separatist in Donetsk and Luhansk ⊠operate "without any checks and balances," routinely "depriving" ⊠detainees "of their rights," and "leaving them helpless," the report ⊠said.⊠

The 56-page report details 18 different cases, in which almost all ⊠detainees discussed being offered in “prisoner exchanges.” The groups ⊠expressed “serious concern” that such civilians are being used as ⊠“currency” between the two sides.⊠

“In almost all the cases we investigated, captors told victims that ⊠they were being offered for prisoner exchanges. These stories gives us ⊠strong grounds to believe that both sides could be using civilians as ⊠“fodder” for potential exchanges. Such practices could constitute ⊠hostage taking, a war crime,” said Tanya Lokshina, a senior researcher ⊠for Europe and Central Asia at Human Rights Watch.⊠

"We are both calling on Ukraine’s authorities and pro-Russian ⊠separatists to end enforced disappearances and arbitrary and ⊠incommunicado detention, and to put into effect zero-tolerance policies ⊠for torture and ill-treatment of detainees," she said.

The report also cited “lack of access for independent monitors,” and ⊠recommended that both sides “end and investigate” these enforced ⊠disappearances.⊠⊠

The conflict in eastern Ukraine has killed more than 9,000 civilians and⊠ combatants since April 2014.⊠⊠⊠

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