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U.S., Britain to Seek Russia's Suspension From UN Rights Council

By AFP

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A vote on Russia's suspension could be held by Thursday, according to the U.S. **EPA/SALVATORE DI NOLFI / POOL / TASS**

The United States and Britain announced plans Monday to seek Russia's suspension from the UN Human Rights Council following allegations that Russian troops systematically executed civilians in Bucha, Ukraine.

"The images out of Bucha and devastation across Ukraine require us to now match our words with action," U.S. ambassador to the United Nations Linda Thomas-Greenfield said in a tweet Monday.

"We cannot let a member state that is subverting every principle we hold dear to continue to participate" in the council, she said. A vote on Russia's suspension could be held by Thursday, according to the U.S.

"Given strong evidence of war crimes, including reports of mass graves and heinous butchery in Bucha, Russia cannot remain a member of the UN Human Rights Council. Russia must be suspended," said British Foreign Secretary Liz Truss.

Russia reacted furiously. "This is unbelievable," said Vassily Nebenzia, the Russian ambassador to the UN. "What the West is trying to do with Russia, trying to exclude it from multilateral forums we are having in the world... this is unprecedented."

"This will not facilitate or encourage or be helpful to what is happening between Russian and Ukrainians in peace talks," he said.

Journalists over the weekend found corpses in civilian clothes, some with their hands bound, in the town of Bucha outside Ukraine's capital after Kyiv's forces retook it from Russia's army.

Bucha Mayor Anatoly Fedoruk said many "were shot, killed, in the back of the head."

The scale of the killings is still being pieced together, but Ukrainian prosecutor general Iryna Venediktova said 410 civilian bodies had been recovered so far.

The UN's human rights chief Michelle Bachelet said the images from Bucha point to "possible war crimes."

The Kremlin denied Russian forces killed civilians, and alleged that the images of dead bodies in Bucha are "fakes."

Suspending Russia from the council would require a vote in favor by two-thirds of the UN General Assembly.

Abstentions are not taken into account in the required two-thirds majority, which the United States and Britain believe they can secure.

Such an action has been taken in the past against Libya.

Asked at the daily UN press briefing about UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres' position on suspending Russia from the Human Rights Council, his deputy spokesman Farhan Haq appeared embarrassed.

"We will leave it to the member states to decide," he said.

"What the worry has been on this side is the precedent being set," he added, declining to explain further.

"Russia should not have a position of authority in that body, nor should we allow Russia to use its seat on the Council as a tool of propaganda to suggest they have a legitimate concern about human rights," said Thomas-Greenfield.

'"Our expectation is to do it as soon as possible – this week, and possibly as early as Thursday," the U.S. envoy said later in an interview with US radio NPR.

"It’s more than symbolic, and it does have force because it continues what we have started, and that is to isolate Russia and to call them out for what they’re doing," she added.

She said that Russia had pushed a narrative "that what they’re doing is normal. This is not normal. They will hear from the entire world that we will not continue to allow their misinformation, their propaganda to be used in – on a UN platform," she said.

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