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## Ukrainian human rights defender and journalist Dmytro Khyliuk forcibly disappeared by Russian authorities for over a year

On 12 June 2023, Ukrainian journalist and human rights defender **Dmytro Khyliuk** is spending a second birthday in Russian captivity as a civilian hostage, held incommunicado at an unknown location. Front Line Defenders is deeply concerned by the lack of information regarding his health condition, place of detention and legal status which it considers as a complete deprivation of his human rights.

[Dmytro Khyliuk](#) is a human rights defender and journalist for the independent Ukrainian news agency UNIAN who monitored court hearings and covered topics related to civil society movements and human rights in Ukraine. As a journalist and public figure, he drew attention to the importance of judicial reform and highlighted the anti-corruption efforts of Ukrainian civil society. After the Russian invasion of the Kyiv region, Dmytro Khyliuk worked from the cities and villages near the frontline, providing news about the civilian populations under attack.

On 1 March 2022, Dmytro Khyliuk wrote in a Facebook post that Russian troops were occupying the village of Kozarovychi, where he and his family lived. On 3 March 2022, Dmytro Khyliuk and his father were forcibly disappeared by the Russian military when they came to look at their house, which had been damaged by Russian shelling. The day before, their house had been raided by the Russian military who seized the phones of Dmytro Khyliuk's parents. The human rights defender's father Vasyl Khyliuk was released eight days after their abduction, but the whereabouts of Dmytro Khyliuk remain unknown.

According to the Ukrainian human rights organisation [Media Initiative for Human Rights](#) (MIHR), civilian hostages from Kozarovychi (including Dmytro and his father) were held in a warehouse in the village and then transported to a factory building in Dymer, another village in the Kyiv region. After the liberation of the Kyiv region from Russian occupation on 31 March 2022, it was revealed that the occupying forces had taken some of the hostages with them as they retreated to Russia.

For a long time, Dmytro Khyliuk's family had no information on his whereabouts. However, in late April 2022, they received a call from the Ukrainian Coordination Headquarters for the Treatment of Prisoners of War and were informed that the Russian authorities had confirmed that the journalist was being held by them.

In August 2022, thanks to the ICRC, Dmytro Khyliuk's parents received a letter from him, which had a Russian Post stamp on the envelope. The letter contained one sentence: "Dear mum and dad, I am alive, healthy and doing well." The letter was dated 14 April 2022. They wrote a letter in response, but its fate is unknown. To date, this has been their only contact with their son since his disappearance. They hired lawyers, but the Russian authorities denied them access to see or talk to their client and have still given no official confirmation of his whereabouts. There is no information available either on the possible charges being brought against him.

As MIHR discovered in May 2022 from interviews with POWs released as part of prisoner swaps, POWs were held together with abducted civilians and some of the interviewees heard Dmytro

Khilyuk's name while they were held in pre-trial detention center №2 in Novozybkov, Bryansk region in Russia.

This information was confirmed by an investigation conducted by the international organisation [Reporters Without Borders](#) and published on 2 May 2023. According to their sources, he was held in Novozybkov in 2022. However, they did not receive any confirmation of his whereabouts in 2023.

Media Initiative for Human Rights issued a [report](#) which described the systemic practice of abduction and transfer of civilians by the Russian army in Russian-occupied territories, as happened to Dmytro Khyliuk. As of early April 2023, the MIHR was able to identify at least 948 civilian hostages, including Ukrainian human rights defenders, being held in more than 40 detention facilities where prisoners of war are also held in Russia, Russian-occupied territories, and Belarus.

Hostage-taking is prohibited under international humanitarian law. The Fourth Geneva Convention permits the internment of civilians only for “imperative reasons of security” and ensures their right to contest the basis for detention (Article 43), access to counsel, and humane treatment at all times.

Front Line Defenders strongly condemns the practice of enforced disappearance of civilians in Russian-occupied territories, including human rights defender Dmytro Khyliuk, who is being deprived of legal aid, communication with his family and all other assistance.

**Front Line Defenders urges the authorities of the Russian Federation to:**

1. Immediately confirm the location of Dmytro Khyliuk, ensure he has access to his lawyer and unconditionally release him from captivity;
2. Take all necessary measures to ensure the physical and psychological security and integrity of Dmytro Khyliuk while returning him to his family in Ukraine;
3. Reveal the whereabouts of all other civilian captives held under the control of the Russian Federation;
4. Provide independent agencies such as the ICRC and UN monitoring missions unimpeded access to detention facilities under the control of the Russian Federation so they can ensure that the Russian Federation is abiding by its international human rights obligations.