



The Russo-Ukrainian War: Discrimination and Hatred Against Arabs and Africans

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The Forum for Development and Human Rights Dialogue.

A civil institution - registered with No. 6337 of 2005 - non-partisan.

Non-profit organization. Governed by Law No. 84 of 2002 on NGOs and Private Foundations.

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Introduction

"Ukrainian police stopped me in the frost, stole money from us and didn't let us pass through the western border crossings".

War is a destruction for humanity and devastation for human civilization. Even if countries are achieving victories over each other, they have lost part of the humanity with which we were created as human. The diseases and nature of what we have done against each other will be returned to us.

International humanitarian law applies in the event of armed conflict, and all civilians and civilian objects, including civilian disarmed people, are criminalized. The opposing parties in the armed war are trying to adhere to the highest standards of accuracy in their desired goals and not to prejudice any infrastructure..

Ukraine woke up at the dawn of the twenty-fourth of February to the Russian bombers striking military places in eastern Ukraine. All citizens and subjects panicked and fled from their homes to shelters and fled to the western borders to reach safety. The best option for everyone is to flee and migrate to neighboring countries. After three weeks of war, nearly four million people of different nationalities, including Arabs and Africans, were displaced.

When the world began to get rid of the Repercussions of Covid-19, Russia came in with a military war in Ukraine which had been opposed around the world to prove that humanity is coherent and an integral part of each other. Without this, waves of anger and discrimination emerged against Arab and African citizens who fled with them, which is known as "Xenophobia" which impedes human communication and sometimes encourages violence in times of crises and disasters, as a person prefers his countrymen over those who belong to a different race or nationality.

The report discuss the forms of discrimination that Arabs and Africans were subjected to during the displacement resulting from the Russian-Ukrainian war in



movement and movement, as well as media biases and political statements in the transfer of the war against the people of the Middle East. The report links to international agreements that show that the actions against Arabs and Africans during the exodus is discrimination against them in the clear sense.

Xenophobia is not an excuse in wartime

Although European countries are widely known as those that combat racism and discrimination against people of different colors or religions, they carry out racist "xenophobic" actions against Africans, especially people of color, or against those who are not European.

The concept of "racism" in the United States is used more widely than the concept of "xenophobia" where racism in the United States is directed against people of color mostly.

Whereas in Europe, especially Eastern Europe, the concept of "xenophobia" is used, which refers to the fear and hatred of strangers, foreigners, or anything strange or foreign. This means that xenophobia does not necessarily imply prejudice against people of color but against anyone who is not of the same nationality.

Xenophobia is widespread in Eastern Europe, however, since the outbreak of the refugee wave in 2015, there is some evidence of increased xenophobia and between 2016 and 2019 in many European countries there was a decline in the Gallup Immigration Acceptance Index based on whether people think immigrants who live in their country, become their neighbors and marry into their families are good or bad.

A 2018 Eurobarometer survey of the European Union found that 17% of respondents had a negative perception of the impact of migrants on society as migration became a prominent issue after the increase in refugee flows.



Eurobarometer's Autumn 2019 report showed that more than a third of European people (36%) considered migration the most important issue facing the EU, vastly outpacing the second most important issue, climate change (24%), but down from a peak (58%) in 2015. Until the summer of 2020, due to the pandemic economic situation, Europeans considered immigration to be by far the most important issue facing the European Union.

Since the outbreak of the Ukrainian-Russian war, xenophobic acts against people who are neither Ukrainians nor Europeans have been observed, particularly against people of African and Arab descent during displacement to neighboring European countries.

According to the witnesses of many Arab and African students who were stuck at the Ukrainian border, racism is practiced against them on many different levels. During the crisis between Russia and Ukraine in the period 2021-2022, and in the military escalation that occurred in February 2022, reports emerged of African and Indian students trying to escape as they were prevented from boarding trains and crossing the border of Poland. Officials in South Africa and Nigeria commented on these reports and condemned racist practices against African and Arab students.

In the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor report, Ukrainian and Polish border guards follow a discriminatory policy against non-Europeans, by impeding the crossing of Africans while allowing Ukrainians to cross and providing them with food and first aid. At the same time that European countries welcome Ukrainian refugees and provide them with official and safe transit routes, seven asylum seekers of non-European origin have died after their boat sank in the Mediterranean Sea off the coast of Greece, without their pleas being heeded.

Xenophobia is widely practiced in Ukraine against people of Arab, African and Indian descent. Eyewitnesses, including Arab and African students, said that they were forced to sit for long hours at the Polish border without any assistance, especially blacks, were prevented from crossing without reasons and kept stuck at



the border. At the same time, great facilities were provided to white Ukrainians, who were allowed to cross without visas and travel by train without tickets. As for the Arabs and Indians, they faced great difficulties when fleeing the country, as they were not allowed to board the trains and their crossing was delayed, while the Ukrainians were allowed to cross first.

The discrimination also extended to official political levels, with Kirill Petkov, the Bulgarian prime minister saying: "These people are smart, they are educated people...This is not the refugee wave we are used to, people we were not sure of who they were, people with an ambiguous past, who could even be terrorists." Major European countries have shown flexibility, welcomed Ukrainian refugees, and issued decisions to facilitate their reception and residence, in stark contrast to the policy of expulsion and retaliation that they followed when dealing with asylum seekers from the Middle East and North Africa and regions that are also witnessing violent conflicts more intense than the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in sometimes.

Although Arab officials called on the Ukrainian authorities to stop such racist practices, the situation of Arab or African refugees did not improve. On Monday, March 7, 2022, it was reported that Ukraine had halted the evacuation of Jordanian students from Sumy.

Biased Media Coverage

European journalists and media used racist speech, which focused on the fact that Ukrainian refugees are civilized, unlike refugees from the Middle East and North Africa who have been described as terrorists and uncivilized. For example, CBS foreign correspondent Charlie D'Agata said on television, *"This is not a place, with all due respect, like Iraq or Afghanistan, which has seen increasing conflict for decades. This is a relatively civilized place and relatively European"*.

I have to choose these words carefully, also the city, as you do not expect or hope for this to happen." Despite the reporter's apology after a wave of widespread



criticism on social media platforms, his statements reflect the views and impressions of a large segment of journalists who spoke about the crisis with similar expressions.

Similarly, Al Jazeera English presenter Peter Dubey made a seemingly discriminatory comparison between Ukrainian refugees and refugees from the Middle East and North Africa, saying: "What is convincing is just looking at them, the way they dress, these are thriving middle-class people, who Obviously, these are not refugees trying to escape from areas of the Middle East that are still in a state of great war, these are not people trying to escape from areas in North Africa, they look like any European family living next door".

"We're not talking here about Syrians fleeing the bombardment of the Putin-backed Syrian regime, we're talking about Europeans leaving in cars that look like ours. To save their lives," journalist Philip Korb on BFM, one of France's most watched channels, said on air. Meanwhile, a reporter in Poland on Britain's ITV said: *"This is not a developing country in the Third World. This is Europe"!*

Racist statements were also made by politician other than journalists, expressing intransigent racism against Arab and African peoples. The BBC hosted the former Ukrainian Deputy Prosecutor General, David Sakvarilidze, who said: *"It is very moving for me because I see Europeans with blue eyes and blond hair being killed, and children being killed every day by Russian President Putin's missiles and helicopters, and missiles"*.

The practice of racism did not stop at the Ukrainian people only, but we find many European journalists and politicians who, since the beginning of the war, made statements of racial discrimination, the last of whom was Prince William, Crown Prince of the British Kingdom, who said in his statement, *"It is natural to see war and bloodshed in Africa and Asia, But not in Europe"*.



All of these practices are forms of racial discrimination according to Article 1 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, which defines it as *“any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, color, descent, or ethnic origin that has the purpose or effect of nullify or impede the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life”*.

Humane treatment of refugees from EU countries and European countries should include refugees of different races, religions and nationalities, away from double standards in dealing with humanitarian issues that indicate a deep devaluation, dangerous discriminatory thinking, and ignorance of basic human rights principles.

Ukrainian Racism

Historically, it is a given in human rights that the peoples of Eastern Europe are racist and discriminate against minorities. According to Western human rights organizations, asylum seekers, refugees, students and migrant workers are among the victims of bias-motivated violence in Ukraine, which also included diplomats, expatriate employees of foreign companies, members of visible minorities in Ukraine and Ukrainians who helped victims of hate crimes. Foreign students, numbering about forty thousand, were among the main victims of hate crimes.

Small groups of citizens and migrants of African descent or color are clearly visible targets and are particularly vulnerable to racism and xenophobia. Although relatively few people of African descent reside in Ukraine, the rate of violence against this group has been extraordinary, and refugees, students, visitors, and a number of citizens and permanent residents of African descent live under constant threat of harassment and violence.

- 1- Tunisian Ahmed Al-Haboubi, from Tunisia: "One Arab person is dealt with at the crossing every two hours".**



Ahmed El Haboubi, a 22-year-old Franco-Tunisian medical student spoke of being discriminated against at the Ukrainian border, saying *that “all foreign nationals, including Africans, Israelis, Canadians and Americans, were asked to go to one gate at the Medica crossing from Ukraine to Poland.” Which would handle only four people every two hours, while Ukrainians were allowed to pass freely through another gate”*.

Speaking of the brutality of the Ukrainian soldiers, he added, *"The Ukrainian army beat me so badly that I couldn't walk properly.. When I finally managed to enter Poland, the Polish authorities took me straight to the hospital.. It was utter chaos. We were treated like animals, and there are still thousands of the people who are stranded there”*.

2- Wasiu, from Nigeria: “A queue for the Africans, a queue for the Ukrainians”

Many people of African descent spoke of their suffering and discrimination during the evictions. Wasiu Siddiq, a Nigerian student in Ukraine, spoke about discrimination that has been practiced against him as he tells his story and says there were thousands of people there already and after four hours of struggling to move through the crowds , a friend manages to get through the gate, but is separated from his friends in the process, eventually joining a waiting list that has not moved for nearly 24 hours. Wasiu said that the reason the waiting list did not move was because of the Ukrainians, and in the meantime, a Ukrainian woman told him and his companions that they were foreigners and were not entitled to cross with the Ukrainians and be treated equally with them. When the queue finally began to move, Siddiq said that officials asked the Africans to form a separate queue and other refugees began to grumble at them.

After there were two queues, the border guards dealt with about a hundred Ukrainians before selecting about five Africans, but finally, a friend's passport was stamped and processed for evacuation. By this time exhausted, hungry, and dehydrated, he noticed an aide serving food to the refugees, but he and other black



students were rejected. *"They were sharing bread, burgers, pasta and coffee," he says. "We went to meet these people, and I told them we were hungry, and they said the food was only for Ukrainians and not for blacks!"*

3- Elizabeth, from Nigeria: "Ukrainian officials deliberately misled us"

The Nigerian student Elizabeth said that she and her friend tried to reach the Polish border but had difficulty obtaining information from officials there. By contrast, they note, employees are telling Ukrainians the correct platform. When the train arrived at nine in the morning, Elizabeth and her friend were behind a large crowd that despite waiting for hours, failed to get on. At about 7 pm, another train arrived and they were in the right place. Women with children were allowed to pass first and then tried to advance but found themselves facing strong resistance. *"We were trying to get in and pushed down really hard and they kept hitting our chests over and over,"* Elizabeth says. *"One of my friends almost got thrown in the middle of the train track area, which is basically a very dangerous place and we just had to fight our way until we got seats."*

Realizing that they were just black people in the wagon, they tried so hard to appear harmless that they were attacked and forced off the train by the passengers who insisted they didn't know them. Soon it got worse as the passengers started forcing the blacks off the train. *"A black girl was unloaded and another Nigerian boy was kidnapped and they were pulled off the train, they were with us from the start,"* Elizabeth says. *"We know all about racism in Ukraine, but I think it's the worst kind we've ever faced because I think it's time where humanity is colorless,"* she says.

4- Mbago, from Nigeria: "Ukrainian border guards did not allow us, they beat us with sticks and took off our clothes"

Cheney Mbago, a 24-year-old Nigerian doctor who lives in the western Ukrainian town of Ivano-Frankivsk, said she spent more than two days stranded at the border



crossing between Poland and Ukraine in the town of Medica, while guards allowed foreign Ukrainians to cross but prevented her. *"Ukrainian border guards wouldn't let us cross...they were beating people with sticks, taking off their jackets, slapping them, hitting them and pushing them to the end of the queue, the scene was horrific,"* she added. Dr. Mbago was able to get to Warsaw, but said she *"crossed the border only by suffering and going on her way,"* adding: *"They were saying...only women and children can pass, but they let some Ukrainian men pass, and whenever a black woman tried to pass, they said ..Our women first". "There was no shelter from the cold. It snowed. There was no food, no water, no place to rest.. I was literally delirious from sleep deprivation."* She said her 21-year-old brother, a medical student, had been denied entry to the border since Friday, but had arrived in Poland after four days of trying.

5- Dennis, from Ghana: "Arabs, Africans and Indians were directed to closed gates in Romania"

Denis Nana, a Ghanaian student studying medicine in Ukraine, confirmed that he saw the same discrimination when crossing from Ukraine to the Romanian town of Siret, which is a window for Ukrainians and another for anyone else, noting that thousands of foreigners, including Zambians, Namibians, Moroccans, Indians and Pakistanis, were directed to one of the gates that were mostly closed, while another gate for Ukrainians was open and people streamed through.

He noted that over the course of about three hours, four or five foreigners were allowed to leave, while there was *"a massive influx of Ukrainians who crossed the border,"* adding: *"It's not fair, but we understood that they had to see their people first"*.

6- Taha Daraa, from Morocco: "Ukrainian soldiers shot us so we wouldn't cross".



Taha Daraa, a 25-year-old Moroccan student, in his fourth year of dentistry at the Dnipro Medical Institute, spoke of how he and other African-American students with him were shot by Ukrainian soldiers to prevent them from crossing. He started his journey around noon on Saturday 26 February and crossed the border into Romania in the early hours of Monday morning after days of sleepless nights. He explained, *"We were treated badly.. We took buses to the Romanian border.. It was very scary. Then we had to walk across the border while we heard gunshots.. All we did was pray. Our parents also prayed for our safety.. It's the only protection which we enjoyed.. I have seen a lot of racism"*

Pointing out that *"he was in a group with other Moroccans and many other Africans and asked one of the Ukrainian border guards to let them pass, the guard started shooting his rifle in the air to scare them and they returned their way."*

And Taha continued, *"I've never felt so afraid in my life.. He asked us to go back.. It was snowing on us, and as the crowd grew, they surrendered and let everyone pass"*.

According to local aid organizations on the ground, some foreigners who arrived in Poland from Ukraine over the past few days fell tired and froze and some were taken directly to hospitals with their injuries.

Statement of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism

In her statement regarding racist threats and xenophobic treatment against non-white people fleeing Ukraine, E. Tendayi Ashumi, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, expressed her grave concern regarding recent racist practices against “non-Ukrainians” during the Russo-Ukrainian War. It urged the international community to take swift action to protect the millions who were forced to flee this attack. Since then, black Africans, Indian



nationals, Pakistani citizens, people of Middle Eastern descent and others have sent urgent reports documenting life-threatening racist and xenophobic treatment as they try to flee the violence in Ukraine.

Some reported that they were denied access to shelters inside Ukraine, many reported that border guards prevented them from crossing the border or pushed them to the back of transport queues that would give them safe passage outside the country, and in some cases, reported being denied access to their respective consulates in neighboring countries.

Many, including children, had to wait longer in below-zero temperatures without shelter. In all of these cases, these individuals and groups were subjected to discriminatory treatment through racial, ethnic and national profiling prohibited under international law, even in the context of armed conflict.

The reality is that non-white immigrants and refugees face deadly discrimination around the world as they attempt to cross international borders. Photos and testimonies from non-white people trying to flee Ukraine attest to this fact and they must spur immediate action to ensure an end to racist and xenophobic treatment, whether official or unofficial.

Looking at the situation during World War II when thousands of Europeans fled their country due to the war and were welcomed at the Syrian border and allowed to cross the border safely. When the refugees in Aleppo camp make the many-mile journey into the city, for example, they might visit shops to buy basic supplies, watch a movie at the local cinema or simply get a distraction from the monotony of camp life. This is in contrast to the racist acts being practiced against Arabs and Africans in Ukraine.

International humanitarian law



International humanitarian law is a set of rules designed to limit the effects of armed conflicts for humanitarian reasons, protects people who are not or no longer participate in hostilities, and imposes restrictions on the means and methods used in warfare. International humanitarian law is also known as "the law of war" or "the law of armed conflict", and it forms part of general international law, that is, the set of rules that govern relations between states.

A distinction should be made between international humanitarian law, which governs the behavior of parties involved in armed conflicts (the law of war-) and that part of general international law enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations and which governs the right of a state to resort to the use of armed force against another state (the law of waging war).

The charter prohibits the use of force, but includes two exceptions: in the case of self-defense against armed attack, and when the United Nations Security Council authorizes the use of armed force.

The four Geneva Conventions of 1949 (the First, Second, Third and Fourth Geneva Conventions) are the core treaties of international humanitarian law. These conventions were supplemented by two Additional Protocols of 1977: Additional Protocol I relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts and Additional Protocol II relating to the Protection of Victims of Non-International Armed Conflicts; In addition to the third Additional Protocol of 2005 relating to the adoption of an additional distinctive emblem (red crystal)

There are other international treaties that prohibit the use of certain weapons and military plans and protect certain categories of persons and objects from the effects of hostilities. These treaties include:



- 1976 Convention for the Prohibition of the Use of Environmental Change Techniques for Military or Other Hostile Purposes.
- 1980 Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects and its Five Protocols
- 1993 Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction.

After defining what humanitarian law is, the question remains, "When is humanitarian law applied"?

International humanitarian law applies only in the case of armed conflict and does not apply to internal tensions or disturbances such as sporadic acts of violence amounting to armed conflict.

International humanitarian law further distinguishes between international and non-international armed conflicts. International armed conflicts are those conflicts in which one or more states resort to the use of armed force against another state. Wars of national liberation under certain conditions and situations of occupation are considered international armed conflicts. The four Geneva Conventions and the First Additional Protocol to them govern international armed conflicts.

Humanitarian law includes protection for those not or no longer taking part in hostilities. The Geneva Conventions regulate the protection afforded to the following four categories of persons and the treatment that each should receive during international armed conflicts:

- Wounded and sick members of armed forces in the field (Initial Geneva Convention)



- Wounded, sick and shipwrecked members of armed forces at sea (Second Geneva Convention)
- Prisoners of War (Third Geneva Convention)
- Civilians, including civilians in occupied territory (Fourth Geneva Convention).

Hostilities between the Russian armed forces and the Ukrainian armed forces constitute an international armed conflict governed by the law of international humanitarian treaties (the four Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their First Additional Protocol of 1977, the Hague Conventions of 1907 regulating means and methods of warfare, as well as the rules of customary international humanitarian law).

International humanitarian law, or the laws of war, protects civilians and other non-combatants from the dangers of armed conflict. It addresses the conduct of hostilities by all parties to the conflict, whereby civilians may never be the deliberate target of attacks. Parties to a conflict must take all feasible precautions to minimize harm to civilians and civilian objects and not launch attacks that do not discriminate between combatants and civilians, or that would cause disproportionate harm to the civilian population.

Speaking of civilians who must be protected under the Fourth Geneva Convention, they are those who fall into the hands of a party to the conflict or an occupying power of which they are not nationals. Displaced people, women and children refugees, stateless people and journalists are among the groups eligible for this protection.

Given the situation of Arabs and Africans in the conditions of the Russian-Ukrainian war, it is the duty of the Ukrainian state to provide full protection and equal



treatment between Ukrainian citizens and those of other nationalities during the war, but the reality of the war in Ukraine is not like that, as many Arabs and Africans witnessed many manifestations of racial discrimination against them, from not being allowed to get food and drink to not being allowed to board trains even after waiting in queues for hours.

As a party to a number of regional and international human rights treaties, including the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel and Inhuman Treatment, Ukraine is obligated to provide full and all protection Survival means for all civilians on its soil, whatever their nationality .

International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination

The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination provides for the different rights of every human being regardless of race, colour, religion or sex. color, or national or ethnic origin, in equality before the law, in particular in the enjoyment of the following rights :

- (a) the right to equal treatment before the courts and all other bodies administering justice.
- (b) The right to the security of his person and the protection of the State from any violence or bodily harm, whether by public officials or by any group or institution.
- (c) political rights, in particular the right to participate in elections - voting and nomination - on the basis of universal and equal suffrage, to participate in government and the management of public affairs at all levels, and to assume public office on an equal footing.
- (d) Other civil rights, in particular:



(i) the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of the State;

(ii) The right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country.

During the Ukrainian-Russian war, we find that Ukrainian soldiers have violated international conventions by attacking everyone of African and Arab origin and not allowing them to cross the border and flee the war in Ukraine. While European countries promote their respect for human rights, we find that even in times of war, these countries violate human rights and racism is practiced against all nationalities other than Ukrainian.

Conclusion

Xenophobia is widespread in Eastern Europe, not only against people of African or Arab origin but also against European people, but those who do not have the same nationality as the racist. Whether it is called “xenophobia” or “racism” is an act condemned by international law, international humanitarian law and all human rights conventions whereby all people must have the same rights and be treated equally.

Speaking of the Russo-Ukrainian war, we found that xenophobia is still very prevalent in Eastern European countries. Where everyone of Arab and African nationalities was subjected to racial discrimination, and they were not provided with the necessary protection or help to return to their country. Everyone of Arab or African descent was prevented from getting food and drink until Ukrainian citizens first got it, they were also prevented from boarding trains and leaving them to cross the road on foot and Ukrainian soldiers kept telling them "Ukrainians first." Even women and children of Arab or African origin were not allowed to board the trains.