

Dialogue Against Impunity: Russia's actions in Chechnya, Georgia, Syria, and Ukraine



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This webinar was organized by the Assemblée Européenne des Citoyens, France, and took place on September 21, 2022.

This online discussion—featuring Anna Neistat (Clooney foundation for Justice), Waad Al-Kateab (Syria), Lana Estemirova (Chechnya), Dmytro Koval (Ukraine), and Tamar Oniani (Georgia) — explored the crimes and grave human rights violations committed in Russia-initiated and -supported wars in Chechnya, Georgia, Syria and Ukraine.

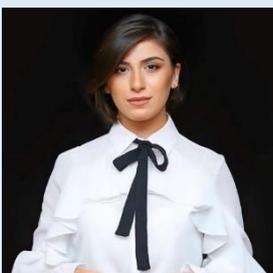
The panelists, each of whom documented and witnessed the conflicts concerned, discussed patterns of impunity common to all four conflicts and examined how to achieve accountability, justice, and a sustainable peace.

Key Takeaways



Lana Estemirova, Chechnya:

Grozny in 1999 was named the most bombed European city after the WWII, but now Mariupol is probably even worse. Chechnya's wars became a training ground for Russian aggression and often the same people who perpetuated crimes there, have also been engaged in later wars launched by Russia. What is also interesting of Russian propaganda, it is how it's being tailored-made for each cause, but essentially, it's always the same book with many covers. This propaganda is as damaging as weapons. If we talk about impunity, we have to consider how propaganda shapes this ideology.



Tamar Oniani, Georgia:

The 2008 August war is the untold war, but the story of Georgia resonates with other patterns of Russian crimes and the similarity between what happened in Ukraine and in Georgia was highlighted by the prosecutor of the ICC when requesting the recent arrest warrants. 14 years later, 20% of Georgia is still occupied and its consequences are still undergoing. The involvement of Russian officials has been documented by international institutions. Failure by the international Justice system to address what happened in Georgia - and the resulting sense of impunity - effectively has been a key factor in driving further actions by Russia, now culminating in Ukraine ways out than it did in the past.



Waad Al-Kateab, Syria

Yes, Russia became involved in Syria, but the violence was never new to us and the Russian intervention was unannounced in the beginning. But the Russian involvement had a different impact on us during these days since the violence was one of a kind. <...> Hospitals were attacked particularly by the Russian military assisting the Syrian army. Russia used UN vetoes to support and escalate the situation in Syria especially as far as direct crimes are concerned. Even if what the international community does for Ukraine is much better than what has been done for Syria, it's not enough: People are still being killed today, same crimes are being committed, every single day... The most important conversation we can have now, is this one, to have shared pain – I feel it in all of your eyes



Dmytro Koval, Ukraine:

This discussion is very important as it allows to see the patterns of Russian Federation behavior in different wars it participated in the last 30 years. <Like in the other conflicts mentioned>, Russia targets not only Ukraine's present but also Ukraine's past and Ukraine's future. Russia tried to portray itself as a defender of people all around the world. It goes with Russian desire to be liked in the world outside of what we traditionally call the "West". It's a true pattern.

Me and all the Ukrainians are very grateful for all the support from the international community. But we do think that this reaction would be very different if we didn't survive as a country those first days of the aggression. <Now>, there is no more neutrality, every country has to choose the side.

Speakers further compared the concrete pattern and numbers, addressed the efforts put in place nationally and internationally. The conclusion was drawn in

Waad's words:

There should be very active action, it has to be stopped what is happening, in Ukraine but also back to Syria, back to Georgia, back to Chechnya; I do think that it's important to do everything to bring those responsible to accountability but the main thing the international community has to do now, is to stop it all. It's not acceptable.

Biographies:

Lana Estemirova is an activist, journalist and writer. She is the daughter of the Chechen human rights activist Natalya Estemirova, who was abducted and murdered in Chechnya in 2009 while investigating human rights abuses. Lana was a child during the Chechen war and later endured a precarious existence in refugee tent camps in Ingushetia and exile. An International Relations graduate from the London School of Economics, she now produces a video podcast called [Trouble with the Truth - Justice for Journalists](#). She is also active with the Justice for Journalists Foundation. She writes widely on Chechnya and human rights issues in Russia and is working on her first book.

Tamar Oniani is the Head of the International Litigation Team at the Georgian Young Lawyers' Association, working on protecting human rights, defending democracy and rule of law in Georgia. On behalf of GYLA, she chairs the Georgian Coalition for the International Criminal Court (GCICC). Ms. Oniani litigates applications before the European Court of Human Rights on war-related and post-conflict violations committed by Russia. She also advocates for justice before the International Criminal Court for August 2008 war victims. She is PhD candidate from Tbilisi State University and invited lecturer at the several Georgian universities.

Waad Al-Kateab is a Syrian journalist, filmmaker, and activist. In 2011, when the Syrian Civil War began, she started her journey as a citizen journalist. Her acclaimed reports on the war were broadcast on Channel 4 in the

United Kingdom. For her coverage of the Siege of Aleppo, she won an International Emmy, the first Syrian to do so. Her documentary, *For Sama* (2019), directed with Edward Watts, was nominated for four BAFTAs at the 73rd British Academy Film Awards, winning for Best Documentary. In addition, *For Sama* won the Prix L'Œil d'or for best documentary at the 2019 Cannes Film Festival and was nominated for Best Documentary Feature at the 92nd Academy Awards. Al-Kateab was included in Time magazine's 100 Most Influential People in 2020.

Dmytro Koval is an associate professor at the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy. In 2014, he defended a Ph.D. thesis on "International Law Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict". Since 2013, he has researched international criminal courts' influence on post-conflict societies' collective memory. In 2015-2017, he served as a member of the Ministry of Justice Expert Committee on International Humanitarian Law Implementation in Kyiv. He has contributed to the monitoring reports on international humanitarian law compliance for the Truth Hounds NGO, Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union, International Partnership for Human Rights, Center for Civil Liberties and others. In addition, he has advised the Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Culture, Prosecutor General's Office, and Members of Parliament on different aspects of foreign policy and international law implementation in Ukraine. Since 2021, Dmytro has represented Ukraine in the UNESCO Committee on the implementation of Protocol II to the Convention of 1954.

The debate was moderated by Anna Neistat:

Anna Neistat is the Legal Director of The Docket, an initiative at the Clooney Foundation for Justice, focused on accountability for perpetrators and enablers of international crimes. Neistat has been involved in international human rights work for more than two decades. Before joining CFJ, she was as associate director for Program and Emergencies at Human Rights Watch and senior director for research at Amnesty International, in charge of the organization's global research agenda and crisis response. She led fact-finding missions in conflict areas and was responsible for developing investigative methodology and training. Neistat is the Chair of the Board at Crisis Action, an international organization working with global civil society to protect civilians from armed conflict. Neistat has conducted over 60 investigations in conflict areas around the world, including Syria, Georgia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, China, Zimbabwe, Nepal, Kenya, Yemen, Chechnya, Sri Lanka and Uzbekistan. Over the last six months, Anna Neistat has worked on the Ukraine issue and conducted a number of field missions there.