

URGENT ACTION

UKRAINIAN NURSERY TEACHER JAILED BY RUSSIA

Olha Baranevska, a retired, openly pro-Ukrainian nursery teacher from Melitopol, refused to return to work at the nursery under the Russian occupation. In May 2024, she was abducted by the occupying authorities from her home and allegedly tortured. A month later she was briefly released only to be arbitrarily arrested and given twice 14 days of “administrative detention” before being accused of hiding explosives in her garden and sentenced to six years in prison. Meanwhile her elderly mother died, and her own health is at risk.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

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Human Rights Commissioner

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Dear Human Rights Commissioner,

I am writing to express concern about the treatment of Ukrainian civilians in the Ukrainian territories occupied by Russia, and specifically the retired nursery teacher Olha Baranevska (Olga Baranevskaya). I believe she might have been targeted for her pro-Ukrainian sentiments. She disappeared from her home in Melitopol on 15 May 2024. A local resident reported seeing her briefly brought home, bruised, and escorted away by three ununiformed men on 19 May.

Olha's fate or whereabouts were unknown until 27 June 2024, when she unexpectedly came to her parents' house, quickly phoned her daughter (who is abroad) to say, in cryptic wording, that she had been held captive alone “in darkness,” that “everything that hurt [before] has healed”. Soon after the call, Olha was arbitrarily arrested by police, fined and given 14 days of administrative detention (twice) for purportedly violating the curfew. Meanwhile the authorities reported finding explosives in her garden. At the trial that followed in November, Melitopol Interdistrict Court convicted Olha Baranevska under Art. 222.1(1) of the Russian Criminal Code (unlawful possession of explosives) and sentenced her to six years in prison, based on questionable evidence, including Olha's “confession.” The judge accepted unquestioningly that explosives had been found in Olha's garden on 7 August 2024 (while she was serving “administrative detention”) and questioned neither her motive nor their origin. Olha is suffering from poor health, which is deteriorating, is insulin-dependent, and needs treatment for other conditions. Her human rights have been gravely violated.

According to Amnesty International, planting of explosives and forced self-incriminating statements are commonly used by Russian police to frame and falsely imprison civilians.

I urge you to take all steps within your authority to ensure that Olha Baranevska:

- ***is immediately and unconditionally released, unless credible evidence of a crime of which she can be plausibly suspected is presented, in which case her right to a fair trial must be fully respected;***
- ***pending her release, she is protected from ill-treatment and provided with the healthcare she requires;***
- ***the circumstance of her abduction, arbitrary detention and alleged torture and the alleged falsification of evidence are investigated, and all those suspected of these human rights violations are held accountable in fair trials.***

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Melitopol is a Ukrainian town in Zaporizhzhia Region, which came under Russian occupation in February 2022. While some residents left to avoid living under the occupation, including Olha Baranevska's daughter, Olha stayed behind to look after her elderly mother (who later died while Olha was in detention). Video greetings from Olha was published on Facebook, including updates about the life in Melitopol under the Russian occupation, in the Ukrainian language. Among Olha's Facebook posts was a story about a colleague who faced harassment by the occupation authorities, including house search, verbal abuse and destruction of personal items with national Ukrainian symbols.

The nursery where Olha had worked, reopened under Russian occupation. She was repeatedly asked to return to teach there but consistently refused. Amnesty International has documented [abusive practices targeting Ukrainian teachers by the occupying Russian authorities](#), including intimidation, physical violence and forced labour, to ensure that they resume teaching local children under Russian curriculum. The organization has also documented Russian policy aimed at changing the demography of the territories it occupies, including by [seeking to eradicate Ukrainian and other non-Russian identities and culture](#).

Olha Baranevska is 61 years old, has diabetes and is insulin-dependent, and has other health conditions that require examination and treatment. She had to accept Russian passport in 2023 to get access to healthcare. While in detention she has been provided with insulin, but denied adequate treatment of other health issues according to her daughter. While in detention, on her 85-year-old mother's birthday, Olha received news of the mother's passing away in November 2024, causing her further mental suffering.

Amnesty International has documented numerous violations of human rights of Ukrainian civilians and violations of international humanitarian law by Russian forces and occupying authorities in Ukraine. These included [war crimes and likely crimes against humanity](#), among them unlawful transfer or deportation of civilians from certain occupied parts of Ukraine. Abduction, enforced disappearance and unlawful imprisonment, and torture and other ill-treatment of civilians in Russian-occupied Ukraine have been widely reported, and Amnesty International has documented numerous instances of such practices in Crimea and eastern Ukraine, since 2014, and in other Russian-occupied territories since. Torture and other ill-treatment, including denial of adequate healthcare in custody, and denial of the right to a fair trial, are also commonplace in Russia.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Russian.

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 31 May 2025

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PRONOUN: Olha Baranevska (she/her)