

Russia/Ukraine: referenda have 'no legitimacy' and annexation moves would be illegal



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Hastily-arranged votes in Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia largely conducted in presence of armed men in uniform

Any Russian measures over changing status of occupied Ukrainian territory are violation of Geneva Convention

‘There is no legitimacy whatsoever in the results of these sham “referenda”’ - Denis Krivosheev

Responding to Russia’s announcement of the “results” of so-called “referenda” in the Ukrainian territories it occupies in the Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk and Zaporizhzhia regions, Denis Krivosheev, Amnesty International’s Eastern Europe and Central Asia Deputy Director, said:

“There is no legitimacy whatsoever in the results of these sham ‘referenda’ announced by the Russian authorities. “It is absurd that the Russian authorities would think these so-called votes - which took place at gunpoint in the presence of Russian soldiers and their proxies - are in any way credible. “The whole exercise, which is illegal under international law, is nothing more than another deplorable act in Russia’s strategy of aggression against Ukraine. “The ‘referenda results’ do not change the legal status under international law of the Ukrainian territories occupied by Russia, no matter what Russia chooses to declare next. “As with Crimea, any moves towards annexation will be illegal, and constitute yet another flagrant violation of international law by Russia. “Amnesty International reiterates its call on Russia to respect

its obligations as the occupying power under international humanitarian law. “We also call for the immediate cessation of all unlawful actions by Russia, including its war of aggression against Ukraine and accompanying human rights violations.”

Yesterday, the Russia-backed “administrations” of the occupied Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions of Ukraine and the de facto authorities of the so-called Donetsk and Luhansk “People’s Republics” announced the results of the unlawful “referenda” on joining Russia. The organisers claimed a very high turnout and majorities of between 87% to 99.2% in favour of joining Russia. This “voting” and any other measures by Russia or its proxies to change the status of occupied territory is a flagrant violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

The head of the Federation Council (the Russian Parliament’s upper house), Valentina Matvienko, said the chamber - which is required to approve annexation under Russian law - may consider the formal incorporation of territories on 4 October.

The “referenda” were hastily arranged, taking place over five days with voting organised at so-called polling stations only on the last day (27 September). Apart from on the final day, “ballots” were collected from residents at their home by organisers who went door to door. According to various reports, “voting” at home and at polling stations was often carried out in the presence of heavily-armed uniformed men.

Amnesty has received reports of brutal reprisals by the occupying authorities against local people who displayed or were suspected of disloyalty to Russia and its occupying forces. These reprisals include abductions, unlawful deprivation of liberty and torture, as well as unlawful killings.

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