

Beat: Travel

At least 331 deaths reported during fragile Ukraine ceasefire

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USPA News - At least 331 deaths have been reported in eastern Ukraine since a cease-fire between pro-Russian separatists and government troops was reached in early September, according to the United Nations (UN), saying that the protracted conflict continues to take a heavy toll on civilians. The UN Human Rights Office said Wednesday that it recorded at least 331 fatalities in eastern Ukraine between September 6 and Monday, raising the death toll since mid-April to at least 3,660 with 8,756 others wounded.

The figures show that localized fighting continues despite the absence of large-scale offensive actions. "While the ceasefire is a very welcome step towards ending the fighting in eastern Ukraine, I call on all parties to genuinely respect and uphold it, and to halt the attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure once and for all," said UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein. His office noted that some of the 331 fatalities reported since September 6 may have occurred prior to the ceasefire. And while there have been no large-scale offensive actions in eastern Ukraine since the ceasefire was announced on September 5, artillery, tank and small arms exchanges have continued on an almost daily basis in some areas, particularly at Donetsk airport as well as the Debaltseve area in Donetsk and the town of Shchastya in Luhansk. "For almost half a year, residents of the areas affected by the armed conflict have been deprived of their fundamental rights to education, to adequate health care, to housing and to opportunities to earn a living," Zeid said. "Further prolongation of this crisis will make the situation untenable for the millions of people whose daily lives have been seriously disrupted." Data released by Ukraine's State Emergency Service showed that at least 375,792 people were internally displaced in Ukraine as of October 2. Those who are attempting to return home face serious difficulties in addition to the volatile security situation, including the destruction of private property as well as water and gas shortages and limited access to medical care. Wednesday's report from the UN's Human Rights Office said there had been a "sharp increase" in detentions by armed groups between August 24 and the start of the ceasefire on September 5. It noted alarming reports of torture and ill-treatment of detainees by armed groups, including mock executions and sexual violence. There were also reports of ill-treatment by Ukrainian government forces, it said. "With the shift in control of territory during the reporting period between Government forces and the armed groups, the risk of reprisals against individuals for collaborating with 'the enemy' or for such perceived collaboration has increased," the report noted. Zeid further called for all violations and abuses of international human rights law and violations of international humanitarian law to be "scrupulously investigated and prosecuted," including violations such as the indiscriminate shelling of civilians, killings, allegations of sexual violence, the illegal seizure of property and the ill-treatment of detainees. "This is a call for justice, not retribution. All parties must ensure that there are no reprisals for perceived collaboration or affiliation with an opposing camp," the High Commissioner said. "It is crucial for the authorities to defuse such tensions."

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