

## Civilians targeted by Russian drones while fleeing Kostyantynivka, Ukraine



*NP team speaking to a 77-year-old Ukrainian woman who was evacuated from Lyman, Donetsk region. (Photo: Tetiana Gaviuk / Nonviolent Peaceforce, 31 March 2026)*

**Odesa, Ukraine – 08 April 2026:** Nonviolent Peaceforce (NP) sounds the alarm in Ukraine's Donetsk region, as civilians and partner organisations' teams are being systematically targeted by Russian attack drone operators while attempting to exit frontline cities such as Kostyantynivka and Lyman—the latest urban centres in the Donetsk region to be reduced to rubble by ongoing Russian strikes and shelling, where the humanitarian situation is dire.

The city of Kostyantynivka, located less than 10 km from the frontline, has been practically reduced to rubble by unabating Russian bombardment, leaving more than 2,000 residents who remain in the city without access to essential services or humanitarian assistance.

“Cities like Kostyantynivka have turned into a fight for survival, not only for its residents but also for anyone attempting to reach them,” says Bohdan Zuyakov, a frontline volunteer with the Kramatorsk Association of Volunteers, whose team has been evacuating civilians in the region.

The deteriorating security situation prevents first responders, repair crews, and evacuation teams from reaching the city, effectively trapping civilians in Kostyantynivka and forcing them to face an impossible choice: to flee and risk their lives, or to stay and face serious dangers.

“People are surviving in extremely difficult conditions: nearly every home is damaged or destroyed, and those remaining are sheltering in basements, relying on water from dirty wells and whatever food is left from earlier humanitarian aid distributions,” says Zuyakov.

Some residents risk walking over 10 km from Kostyantynivka to villages such as Oleksiievo-Druzhkivka, where evacuations teams can reach them. “Not all of them make it to safety,” says Zuyakov. “Every person attempting to leave Kostyantynivka is a target for Russian forces. At least six civilians have been killed by Russian FPV drones along that road, and their bodies remain there. Others are injured by drone attacks. We frequently provide first aid to evacuees when we pick them up in Oleksiievo-Druzhkivka”.

Druzhkivka, another city along the road to Kramatorsk, is now being systematically targeted by Russian air strikes, artillery shelling, and drones, forcing civilians to abandon their homes and seek safety while they still can. Zuyakov and his team evacuate an average of 10 to 15 people daily from Druzhkivka and surrounding villages. For civilians with limited mobility, they also arrange ambulances. “We are making three to four evacuation trips a day, moving people from Druzhkivka to Kramatorsk,” he says.

Kramatorsk, a regional administrative centre that has been hosting tens of thousands of internally displaced persons since 2014, was considered relatively safe until recently. As of early April 2026, Russian drones and artillery, including multiple launch rocket systems which previously only struck the outskirts, are now reaching deep into the city, attacking civilians, homes, and vehicles nearly every day. Meanwhile, aerial bombardment and shelling have also intensified.

“Civilians caught in active hostilities have a right to protection and safe passage. What we are seeing time, and time again, is that these obligations are not being upheld in Ukraine,” says Anastasiya Marchuk, NP’s Head of Mission in Ukraine. “The use of drones against civilians, civilian infrastructure, first responder teams, and evacuation teams is a clear breach of international humanitarian law and demonstrates a profound disregard to human life.”

According to regional authorities, in the frontline city of Lyman, north of Kostyantynivka, the situation is reported to be very similar, NP spoke to a 77-year-old woman who recently evacuated from the city to safety in the Mykolaiv region. Although she reached safety unharmed, the driver who evacuated her was killed while helping other civilians escape the bombing.

Zuyakov and his team, who have been evacuating civilians from the most dangerous frontline areas in Donetsk region since the beginning of the full-scale invasion, are exhausted, but seeing people reaching safety gives them the motivation to keep going.

As Russian aggression and systematic targeting of civilians and civilian infrastructure continue, Nonviolent Peaceforce urges the international community to step up diplomatic efforts by pushing urgently for a meaningful, tangible, diplomatic solution that ensures the protection of civilians and humanitarian responders, and grants immediate, much-needed access for aid and safe evacuation routes.

***ABOUT NONVIOLENT PEACEFORCE:***

Nonviolent Peaceforce (NP) is an international protection agency. Our mission is to protect civilians in violent conflicts through unarmed strategies, build peace side-by-side with local communities, and advocate for the wider adoption of these approaches to safeguard human lives and dignity. NP's duty of care programming aims to reduce the physical risks volunteers are exposed to as well as support the psychological resilience of volunteer networks and the communities they serve.

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