

## Ukraine: Civilian Casualties Mount as Russian Forces Intensify Aerial Strikes on Densely Populated Areas

**ODESA, UKRAINE—8 May 2026:** This week several powerful explosions struck central Kramatorsk, in Ukraine’s eastern Donetsk region. The strikes involved three 250-kg aerial bombs, reportedly modified by Russia forces with guidance and glide kits, allowing for longer-range and more precise targeting. The explosions killed six people and injured more than a dozen others who were going about their daily routines. Homes, vehicles, and critical civilian infrastructure, including a school, were destroyed or damaged in the blast and subsequent fires.

At the time of the attack, Nonviolent Peaceforce (NP) staff and local humanitarian partners were sheltering underground and remained unharmed. They also helped guide civilians to underground shelters. In the aftermath, emergency services and responders mobilised rapidly. NP staff and partners assisted at a casualty collection point, where the injured received initial first aid before being transferred for further medical treatment.

While responders in Kramatorsk were dealing with the aftermath, a similar scene unfolded in Zaporizhia in eastern Ukraine, where Russian forces struck an industrial area of the city. The attack killed 12 people and injured 46 others, according to local authorities. On that same day, strikes were also reported in other locations, with at least 28 civilians killed and 194 injured during ongoing bombardments.

“These attacks are occurring in broad daylight, when people are going about their daily lives. The scale and nature of these strikes indicate an intent to cause maximum civilian harm. This is not only about physical destruction, it is psychological warfare as well”, says Joachim Kleinmann, NP’s Head of Programmes in Ukraine.

The May 5 attacks were not unprecedented and reflect an ongoing pattern of intensified strikes on densely populated areas. UN data shows at least 70 civilians were killed and more than 500 injured across 14 regions of Ukraine in the first five days of May alone.

“Civilians are not targets, and these attacks must stop immediately,” adds Kleinmann. “The protection of civilians is a legal obligation that must apply at all times under International Humanitarian Law. We are seeing a rise in repeated, deliberate strikes on civilian infrastructure, residential areas, and on emergency and humanitarian workers by Russian forces. This cannot be excused as a military tactic. It is a consistent violation amounting to a war crime”.

The escalating attacks on civilian areas reduce humanitarian access and limit the ability of humanitarian workers to reach affected populations. As lack of safety forces many international organisations, including NP, to scale back their presence in the most high-risk areas, additional pressure falls on local responders who already carry most of the burden of the frontline response despite severely overstretched capacities.

While local organisations and volunteers remain at the forefront of the response amid mounting operational pressures and deteriorating security conditions, the reduced presence of international organisations is limiting both humanitarian reach and international visibility in areas facing repeated attacks on civilians. Maintaining sustained international presence remains critical not only to support service delivery and local responders but also to reinforcing civilian protection efforts, advocacy and global attention to ongoing harm affecting civilian populations.

“The continued silence and insufficient international response are enabling these attacks to persist with impunity,” says Kleinmann. “Each strike that goes without meaningful international accountability risks normalising violence against civilians. UN member states must elevate civilian protection in Ukraine to the highest political priority through sustained advocacy, accountability, and consistent political engagement so that such attacks on civilians are neither ignored nor accepted as inevitable.”

In Kramatorsk, local partners involved in frontline response are increasingly struggling to cope with the aftermath of such violent attacks and require ongoing mental health support.

“There is no respite between one strike and the next, and little time for frontline emergency workers to process what they are experiencing”, Kleinmann adds. “Despite their critical role in reaching affected communities, operating in such a high-threat environment is impossible to sustain without greater protection and support.

Nonviolent Peaceforce strongly condemns Russian strikes on civilians and civilian infrastructure and reiterates the urgent need to uphold International Humanitarian Law and ensure full protection of civilians.

**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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