Ukraine-Russia international armed conflict: ICRC asks for immediate and unimpeded access to all prisoners of war

International Committee of the Red Cross
Geneva, 14 October 2022

We share the frustration regarding our lack of access to all prisoners of war (POWs) held in the international armed conflict between Russia and Ukraine. We have been working since February to obtain access to check on the conditions and treatment of POWs and keep their families informed about their loved ones. We have been able to visit hundreds of POWs but there are thousands more who we have not been able to see.

The Third Geneva Convention obliges parties to an international armed conflict to grant the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) immediate access to all POWs, and the right to visit them wherever they are held.

We want to stress that our teams are ready on the ground—and have been ready for months—to visit the Olenivka penal facility and any other location where POWs are held. However, beyond being granted access by high levels of authority, this requires practical arrangements to materialize on the ground. We cannot access by force a place of detention or internment where we have not been admitted.

All States have committed to respect the Geneva Conventions. Giving the ICRC access to visit prisoners of war is a legal obligation. It also helps preserve humanity in an international armed conflict that has created immeasurable loss for countless families. Our mission can only be achieved through coordinated efforts with parties to the conflict. And we ask them and the international community to support the role we have been given.