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Armed group introduces ‘Criminal code’ permitting execution-style killings in eastern Ukraine

Amnesty International is concerned by reports that the armed group which calls itself Donetsk People’s Republic in eastern Ukraine has introduced a document which it refers to as its Criminal Code and which includes provisions for the penalty of execution for the ‘gravest crimes.’ The ‘Criminal Code’ was passed on 17 August in the first session of the armed group’s so-called Presidium of the Council of Ministers. The same session also saw approval given to the establishment of military ‘courts’ in the territories under *de facto* control of the armed group.

The crimes carrying the penalty of execution reportedly include treason, looting and espionage.

Strong evidence surfaced in July this year that execution-style killings had been carried out by armed groups in Donetsk region, including the killing of two armed group fighters and one civilian, which took place under the command of the then separatist leader, Igor Strelkov (Ghirkin).

Such execution-style killings only serve to escalate the spiralling lawlessness in eastern Ukraine which is taking an increasing toll on the lives of civilians caught up in the conflict.

Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions, which applies to all parties to the conflict in eastern Ukraine including the self-styled Donetsk People’s Republic, prohibits the passing of sentences and the carrying out of executions without previous judgment pronounced by a regularly constituted court, affording all judicial guarantees.

In another alarming development, today, 22 August, Ukraine’s National Security and Defence Council announced that armed fighters of the Donetsk People’s Republic had seized control of a penitentiary institution in Donetsk and had threatened to kill those facing life sentences while forcing others to join their ranks. Amnesty International has been unable to verify the claim.

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