



An official website of the United States government

[Here's how you know](#) ▾



THE UNITED STATES

Attorney General Merrick B. Garland Delivers Remarks in Lviv, Ukraine

Lviv Ukraine ~ Friday, March 3, 2023

Remarks as Prepared for Delivery

Attorney General Merrick B. Garland Delivers Remarks at the United for Justice Conference

President Zelenskyy, Prosecutor General Kostin, and esteemed colleagues: it is an honor to be here with you on behalf of the United States Department of Justice.

Just over twelve months ago, invading Russian forces began committing atrocities at the largest scale in any armed conflict since the second World War.

We are here today in Ukraine to speak clearly, and with one voice: the perpetrators of those crimes will not get away with them.

Thirty years ago, at the dedication of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, the late Nobel Peace Prize winner and Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel issued a charge:

“For the dead and the living,” he said, “we must bear witness.”

For the past year, our colleagues in the Ukrainian Prosecutor General's Office have risked their lives to bear witness.

Ukrainian prosecutors and investigators have worked tirelessly to uncover the truth of what is happening here in Ukraine, and to preserve and record it for future generations.

They have meticulously collected and catalogued evidence from the rubble of blast sites – including hospitals, apartment buildings, and schools.

They have worked urgently to seek justice on behalf of the thousands of Ukrainian men, women, and children who have been killed.

They have exhumed mass graves and carefully studied the bodies of victims – in order to tell the stories of those who no longer can.

They have documented the Russian regime's forced deportation of Ukrainian children and its use of sexual violence as a weapon of war.

They have worked relentlessly to pursue accountability for these crimes and make clear the costs of perpetrating them.

They have opened investigations, identified and tracked down suspects, and initiated prosecutions.

And they are only just getting started.

In bearing witness, Ukrainian prosecutors, like the Ukrainian people, have stood courageously in defense of democracy and in defense of the rule of law.

The United States Department of Justice is honored to stand beside you.

And we are honored to stand beside our international partners here today.

The courage of the Ukrainian people has inspired us all.

And it has galvanized cooperation in the international community to hold the Russian regime accountable for its crimes.

Just now, the United States signed an historic agreement with Ukraine, Lithuania, Poland, Estonia, Latvia, Slovakia, and Romania that will strengthen our efforts to hold Russian war criminals accountable.

This agreement will expand information sharing between our countries that will help us not only to identify and prosecute Russian war criminals, but to build winning cases against them.

In addition to strengthening our international partnerships, the United States is working more closely than ever with our Ukrainian partners in our investigations of Russian war crimes.

Together, American and Ukrainian prosecutors have zeroed in on specific crimes committed by Russian forces, including attacks on civilian targets.

We are working to identify not only the individuals who carried out these attacks, but those who ordered them.

As part of this effort, the Department's human rights prosecutors are providing advice and assistance to the Prosecutor General's office on specific cases.

Our environmental crimes prosecutors are training their Ukrainian counterparts on the investigation and prosecution of potential environmental war crimes.

And we are partnering together to apply the lessons the Justice Department has learned from its own complex criminal investigations to assist the Prosecutor General's Office in developing a secure electronic case management and analysis system.

This is not the first time the Justice Department has worked with the Ukrainian Prosecutor General's Office to hold accountable those who committed atrocities in Ukraine.

Thirty years ago, the U.S. Justice Department and the Ukrainian Prosecutor General's Office signed an agreement similar to the one that Prosecutor General Kostin and I signed in Washington last fall.

In 1993, the goal of that agreement was to deepen our countries' cooperation on cases involving Nazi war crimes.

As a result, the Justice Department and the Prosecutor General's Office successfully worked together to prove atrocity crimes in Nazi-occupied Ukraine.

This was integral to the Justice Department's own decades-long efforts to identify, denaturalize, and deport Nazi war criminals in the United States.

All told, the Department's Office of Special Investigations brought more than 130 cases against perpetrators of Nazi crimes.

The Justice Department – and the American people – have a long memory.

I am proud that I successfully persuaded the same prosecutor who led the Justice Department's work to investigate Nazi atrocity crimes to lead the Department's current efforts to investigate atrocity crimes in Ukraine.

I announced that effort – the War Crimes Accountability Team – when I visited Ukraine last June.

The U.S. Justice Department is also deploying our resources to hold accountable those whose criminal acts enable Russia's continued brutality.

In March of last year, I announced the launch of the Justice Department's Task Force KleptoCapture. That team of prosecutors, agents, analysts, translators, professional staff, and law enforcement partners has been busy seizing

assets, executing arrests, and bringing prosecutions against sanctioned enablers of the Kremlin and Russian military.

Last month, I authorized the United States' first-ever transfer of seized assets to the U.S. State Department to support the rebuilding of Ukraine. There will be more to come.

In addition to our work in partnership with Ukraine and the international community, the United States has also opened criminal investigations into war crimes in Ukraine that may violate U.S. law.

Although we are still building our cases, interviewing witnesses, and collecting evidence, we have already identified specific suspects.

Our prosecutors are working day and night to bring them to justice as quickly as possible.

What is happening here in Ukraine has significantly re-shaped the way the United States approaches war crimes accountability.

Until recently, our jurisdiction over war crimes was limited to cases in which a U.S. national was a victim or perpetrator.

But earlier this year – in the wake of Russia's campaign of brutality – Congress enacted a change in the law that will allow the U.S. Justice Department to prosecute alleged war criminals from anywhere in the world who are found in the United States.

And we intend to do so.

This means that in the years – and decades – ahead, Russian war criminals who set foot in our country should expect to find themselves in U.S. courts of law. War criminals will find no refuge in America.

In courageously defending itself against an authoritarian regime, Ukraine has demonstrated the stakes that we all have in the success of democracy and the Rule of Law.

The United States recognizes that what happens here in Ukraine will have a direct impact on the strength of our own democracy.

That is why, in addition to ensuring accountability for individual war crimes, the United States also supports efforts by the international community to ensure that individuals responsible for crimes of aggression are held accountable.

In doing so we can, and we should, look to the model established by the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg nearly eight decades ago.

In that effort, the United States and its allies demonstrated their faith in the Rule of Law to hold accountable those who perpetrated some of the worst crimes in history. That effort was led by one of my most illustrious predecessors as Attorney General – Robert Jackson.

Our presence here today is proof that our faith in the Rule of Law has not wavered.

My grandmother was one of five children born not far from here, in what is now Belarus.

Three, including my grandmother, made it to the United States long before the Nazis invaded. Two did not make it. Those two were killed in the Holocaust.

My family does not know exactly when, or exactly where, they were killed. We do not know if anyone involved in their deaths was ever held accountable.

The families and descendants of the victims of the current atrocities in Ukraine deserve to know what happened to their loved ones. They deserve justice.

Today, members of the international community have joined together here in Ukraine to bear witness to the atrocities being committed by Russian forces.

We have come here to remember and reaffirm the humanity of the individuals who have been victimized by Russia's brutal crimes.

And we have come here to seek justice and accountability under the law for all those who bear responsibility for those crimes.

Fulfilling those tasks will demand an enormous amount of work – not only from the Ukrainian people and their leaders, but also from the international community.

It will require painstaking attention to the details of individual crimes, sifting through enormous amounts of rapidly mounting evidence, and a relentless commitment to justice.

And it will require us to continue to adhere to, and put our trust in, the Rule of Law.

The United States Department of Justice will do that work for as long as it takes.

Thank you.

Attorney General Merrick B. Garland Delivers Remarks at the JIT MOU Signing Ceremony

Prosecutor General Kostin – Andriy – thank you for hosting the United for Justice Conference here in Lviv. It is good to see you again, and good to be back in Ukraine at this critical time.

Fellow prosecutors, thank you for making this historic moment possible.

A little over one year ago, the world watched in horror as Russia began its full-scale, unprovoked and unjustified invasion of Ukraine.

In the following twelve months, we have witnessed shocking attacks on innocent civilians, the destruction of civilian infrastructure, the forced deportation of Ukrainian children, and other blatant violations of international law. Even the city in which we gather today has been the site of deadly Russian attacks.

But the world has also watched with awe as the men and women of Ukraine have stood their ground to protect their country. And we have watched with awe as brave Ukrainian investigators have rushed to process war crime scenes in the midst of ongoing conflict.

The Ukrainian people have shown the world what true courage looks like.

As Prosecutor General Kostin says – the tools of justice must be as strong as the tools of war.

That is why we are here. Those Russian officials and members of Russia's armed forces who are responsible for the atrocities we have seen in Ukraine must be held to account.

Colleagues, you have been on the frontlines of that righteous task. You have been processing large amounts of evidence, including witness and victim testimonies from Ukrainian refugees. And you have been pursuing investigations within your respective jurisdictions.

To ensure that every possible measure was being taken to coordinate that gathering of war crimes evidence, Lithuania, Poland, and Ukraine established a Joint Investigative Team – a JIT – on March 25, 2022.

Just a month later, and for the first time in its history, the International Criminal Court signed an agreement to participate in the JIT. Not long after, Estonia, Latvia, and Slovakia became members. And later that year, Romania joined – forming the JIT as we know today.

Your collective action to ensure rapid and real-time law enforcement coordination and cooperation was far more than a practical, logistical step. It was a signal to the world that the perpetrators of this invasion would not undermine our shared commitment to free and democratic societies.

And it is one more reason – in the face of so much darkness – to be hopeful for the future of Ukraine and our ability as an international community to react quickly and decisively to unprovoked Russian aggression.

It is our honor to stand with you today.

Like you, the United States has been pursuing every avenue available to achieve justice for victims of atrocities in Ukraine.

In June of last year, I announced the launch of a War Crimes Accountability Team, to centralize and strengthen the Justice Department's accountability efforts in the wake of Russia's aggression. The Team has played an integral role in the Department's ongoing investigation of potential war crimes over which the U.S. has jurisdiction.

In addition to pursuing our own domestic cases, we have engaged with our allies and partners on a bilateral and multilateral basis.

In September of last year, the Justice Department entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with the Ukrainian Prosecutor General's Office. That MOU has already paid dividends as we work closely together.

But we recognize that investigating and prosecuting crimes of this magnitude poses a monumental challenge that can only be overcome with strong, multinational cooperation and coordination.

We are grateful for the JIT's pursuit of justice for victims in the face of Russia's continued aggression. We recognize the European Union's invaluable support for the JIT, and in particular the important work done by Eurojust to ensure that the JIT has the resources it needs to succeed.

And today, we are pleased to be the first country to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with all seven JIT national members.

The MOU will formalize and facilitate coordination between the United States and JIT member countries on our respective investigations and prosecutions.

We will back our contribution with the full force and weight of the United States government. You have our commitment that we will do everything in our power to achieve the accountability necessary for true justice.

Our mission is clear. Our resolve will not weaken. And our determination to see justice done will not waver.

Thank you.

Speaker:

Attorney General Merrick B. Garland

Component(s):

Office of the Attorney General

Updated March 3, 2023