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Hardships Grow in Ukraine, U.N. Says

By NICK CUMMING-BRUCEDDEC

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Fighting between Ukrainian government forces and pro-Russian armed groups is claiming an average of 13 lives a day, and after nine months of conflict, the approach of winter has created life-threatening conditions for many civilians in eastern Ukraine, the United Nations reported on Monday.

The fighting has killed 1,357 people since a Sept. 5 peace accord was reached by all parties to the conflict, the United Nations' human rights monitoring mission in Ukraine reported, bringing the total number of fatalities to at least 4,707 and the number of wounded to 10,322.

More than 100 episodes of indiscriminate shelling of built-up areas were reported in November alone, according to the United Nations. It cited as examples the shelling of a soccer field in the rebel stronghold of Donetsk, which killed two people, including a child, and the shelling of the nearby city of Horlivka, which killed five civilians, including two children.

As tensions mount, Western nations are contemplating tougher economic sanctions against Moscow. The United Nations human rights office here in Geneva spoke of the "very close link" between the inflow of fighters and sophisticated weaponry, "including from the Russian Federation," and a total breakdown of law and order in eastern Ukraine.



Andrey Yeliseyev and Daniil Kuznetsov were killed last month during the shelling of a soccer field in the rebel stronghold of Donetsk.

The situation around the self-proclaimed People’s Republics of Donetsk and Luhansk, under the control of pro-Russian armed groups, has been characterized by “killings, abductions, torture, ill treatment, sexual violence, rape, forced labor, ransom, extortion,” said Gianni Magazzeni, head of the division of the United Nations human rights office that deals with Europe and Central Asia.

The groups controlling these areas have taken some steps to create parallel structures of government, but they offer no protection to local residents, Mr. Magazzeni said. “Some of these people are kept almost as hostages,” he said. “They cannot leave. They are forced into doing things they may not want to do.”

Government forces, particularly “voluntary battalions” and intelligence agencies, have mistreated detainees and carried out arbitrary detentions and enforced disappearances, the United Nations said. But despite past reports of the existence of mass graves, the United Nations said it had found no clear evidence of mass summary executions by either side in the conflict.

More than a million people have fled the areas of conflict in eastern Ukraine, and more than half a million have been displaced internally. Many others have taken refuge in Russia and in other European countries.

Living conditions for about five million civilians in rebel-controlled areas are expected to deteriorate further with the government’s decision to suspend services like education and basic health care, as well as social payments, to prevent those payments from falling into the hands of armed groups.

The government has maintained gas and electricity supplies to areas under the control of armed groups for humanitarian reasons, the United Nations said, but some areas affected by fighting have reportedly had no electricity for six months, and as a result, water supply, sewage and communications systems have ceased to function. The United Nations, expressing concern for

the hardship that the decision to suspend services was likely to cause civilians, urged the government to “look seriously at the human rights implications.”