News

Ukrainian women wearing green coats stare emotionally out of windows on a bus or train

Ukrainian women who were prisoners of war in Russia become emotional as they arrive in Zaporizhzhia Oct. 17, 2022. After their release in a prisoner swap with Russia, Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk of Kyiv-Halych, head of the Ukrainian Catholic Church, said their stories "simply break the heart, make the blood run cold in your veins." (CNS photo/Reuters)



by Catholic News Service

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After Ukrainian women were released in a prisoner swap with Russia, the head of the Ukrainian Catholic Church said their stories "simply break the heart, make the blood run cold in your veins."

"This war will go down in history as one in which Russia uses sexual violence as a weapon against Ukraine," said Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk of Kyiv-Halych.

On Oct. 17, more than 100 Ukrainian women were released from Russian captivity.

Andriy Yermak, head of the Ukrainian Presidential Office, said it was the first female-only exchange, and he called it "especially emotional and truly special."

"Mothers and daughters, whose relatives were waiting for them, were held captive," Yermak said.

On Oct. 18, Shevchuk thanked God that the women were able to return to their families.

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"Let us wrap these women together today with our attention, love and prayer, and warm them up with our national warmth," he said.

Speaking of the latest military attacks on Ukraine, the archbishop also reflected on a separate Russian weapon: sexual violence against Ukrainian women and families.

He said in conditions of war, families found themselves in a sea of violence and malice that destroys a person.

"This war will go down in history as one in which Russia uses violence against the intimate sphere of a person as a weapon against Ukraine," he said, citing statistics about rapes and pregnancies resulting from rape.

"It is impossible to imagine how much this violence against the intimate sphere of a person hurts the Ukrainian family, the dignity of men and women, destroys what the Lord God created for love," the archbishop said.