Thousands Arrested At Russian Anti-War Protests In 'Increasingly Brutal Crackdown,' Says Watchdog

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<https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-anti-war-protests-crackdown-arrests/31745114.html>

Russian authorities have arbitrarily arrested thousands of peaceful protesters at anti-war rallies across Russia, in line with their increasingly brutal crackdown on those who disagree with Russia’s military offensive in Ukraine, Human Rights Watch (HRW) said on March 9.

The global rights watchdog accused Russian police of using “excessive force,” against protesters while detaining them, and, in several cases, inflicting “abuse amounting to torture or inhuman and degrading treatment, on those in custody.”

According to OVD-Info, a leading human rights NGO in Russia, 13,500 people have been arbitrarily arrested since Moscow launched its unprovoked invasion of Ukraine on February 24.

“Russian authorities continue to deny people the right to freedom of assembly and stifle the voices of those who disagree with Russia’s war in Ukraine,” said Hugh Williamson, Europe and Central Asia director at Human Rights Watch. “The escalating police violence illustrates the length to which Russian authorities will go to intimidate and silence dissent.”

During mass protests on March 6, police detained about 5,000 people in 69 cities, according to OVD-Info. On March 8, International Women’s Day, the police detained dozens of protesters at peaceful rallies across the country. That day women across Russia laid flowers next to monuments to protest the war.

Since February 24, Russian authorities have clamped down on public expressions of disapproval of the government’s official narrative, including by blocking independent media, criminalizing independent media reporting and calls to end the war, and by targeting peaceful protesters, HRW noted.

It said social media posts documenting incidents on March 6 show peaceful protesters being detained for holding placards, marching, and chanting “no to war!” for wearing ribbons or clothing in the blue and yellow of the Ukrainian flag, for filming arrests or simply, apparently, while passing by.

Police used violence against protesters on multiple occasions. OVD-Info reported at least 34 cases in which the police beat protesters on March 6.