9 INTERNATIONAL RESPONSES

The preceding chapter documents the failure of national governments to protect their citizens. The current one records the response of institutions with the mandate to address what national governments will not.

The African Union

As of July 2026, the African Union (AU) has passed no resolution, at the level of its principal political organs, issued no formal statement, and taken no comparable public action on the recruitment of African citizens into Russia's war in Ukraine. More than 3,000 African nationals from 40 countries have been identified in Russian military service. Over 500 are confirmed dead, dozens more are held as prisoners of war, yet the recruitment continues. Meanwhile, the continent's principal multilateral institution has yet to mount a formal political response.

The issue has nevertheless begun to reach the AU's human rights institutions. In May 2026, evidence of Russia's recruitment of Africans was presented at the 87th Ordinary Session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights in Banjul, The Gambia. The commission's chairman, Idrissa Sow, said the issue was new to the body and raised the possibility of an urgent intervention, a resolution, or a formal study. By the end of July, however, none had followed, and the commission's published decisions from its 87th and 88th sessions contained no formal action on the recruitment.[161]

Speaker Moses Wetang'ula further urged the Government to issue an immediate public advisory warning Kenyans that there are no legitimate job opportunities in Russia, and that such offers are a front for recruitment into a war zone. National Assembly Speaker, Hon. Moses Wetang'ula described the matter as grave, noting that more families from across the country had come forward with similar complaints. "I have personally spoken to our Ambassador in Moscow and to Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov. He insists the Russian government is not involved and that those dying at the frontlines are buried in mass graves," the Speaker told the House.

It cannot be said that the AU lacks the mandate to tackle a challenge like this one. In 2023, the African Commission adopted guiding principles guaranteeing migrants protection from forced labour and a right to "fair and ethical recruitment". The commission has invoked those principles elsewhere: in 2025, addressing abuses of sub-Saharan migrants in Libya, it called on states to prevent trafficking and forced labour and to address the conditions that leave migrants vulnerable to exploitation. No comparable formal intervention has followed over Africans recruited into Russia's war. The organisation was founded, in part, to protect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of African states and the rights of African peoples. Its predecessor, the Organisation of African Unity, adopted the 1977 Convention for the Elimination of Mercenarism in Africa in direct response to the use of mercenaries against African states during the decolonisation period.[162] The recruitment documented in this report – the organised movement of African men into a foreign war through deception, coercion, and the exploitation of economic vulnerability raises many of the same concerns that led to the convention, while also exposing the limits of a legal framework drafted nearly half a century ago.

161 Truth Hounds, 'Truth Hounds and FIDH Presented a Report on Russia's Predatory Recruitment at the Session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights in The Gambia,' 13 May 2026, https://truth-hounds.org/en/cases/truth-hounds-and-fidh-presented-a-report-in-the-gambia/; African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, Final Communique of the 87th Ordinary Session, 20 May 2026, https://achpr.au.int/en/news/final-communiques/2026-05-20/final-communique-87th-ordinary-session.

162 OAU Convention for the Elimination of Mercenarism in Africa, adopted 3 July 1977 in Libreville, entered into force 22 April 1985, https://au.int/en/treaties/convention-elimination-mercenarism-africa. The convention was adopted in response to the use of mercenaries against African states during the decolonisation period; it did not anticipate the recruitment of Africans as mercenaries for deployment in conflicts outside Africa.

The convention does not automatically cover all the cases documented here. Its definition of a mercenary may exclude foreigners formally incorporated into the armed forces of a party to the conflict, while people deceived or trafficked into military service may not meet the requirement that they were motivated to fight primarily by private gain. [163]

The 1977 convention has been the subject of a revision process within the Pan-African Parliament.[164] Its committees examined a zero draft of a revised convention in 2024, and the plenary subsequently adopted a recommendation on the proposed revision.[165] The review presents an opportunity to address a gap in the existing text: the convention was designed to prevent the deployment of mercenaries against African states, but it did not anticipate the recruitment of Africans as mercenaries – or as trafficking victims misclassified as mercenaries for deployment outside Africa. The revised convention should prohibit both. But while the convention is under review, the political will to confront the issue remains uncertain. That silence was particularly notable in July 2026, when African Union Commission Chairman Mahmoud Ali Youssouf met Lavrov in Addis Ababa for high-level consultations. According to the AU's public account, they discussed peace and security, international developments and the expanding Russia-Africa partnership. The account made no mention of the recruitment of Africans into Russia's military, and as of the date of this report, no comparable AU political response has emerged.

The European Union

On 12 March 2026, the European Parliament adopted Resolution 2026/2641(RSP), which condemned "the trafficking and coercive recruitment of foreign nationals into Russia's military service and war-related labour exploitation" and stated that these practices "are grave violations of human rights and international humanitarian law and may constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity."[166]

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The resolution is the most explicit political condemnation issued by a multilateral institution on the recruitment of African nationals. It names the conduct, identifies the legal categories, and locates the practices within the framework of international criminal law. Bibiana Wangari presented her testimony before the European Parliament in the same month the resolution was adopted.[167] She addressed European legislators about the death of her son in a Russian war because no African institution had provided her with a comparable forum. The Parliament went beyond condemnation. It called on affected governments to investigate recruitment networks, hold facilitators accountable, warn citizens about deceptive Russian employment and education offers, and facilitate the return of those recruited through fraud. It also called on online platforms to identify and remove deceptive recruitment material.

The United Nations

The United Nations has not issued a specific resolution or statement addressing the recruitment of African citizens into Russia's war. In early 2022, UNHCR condemned the discrimination African civilians faced while fleeing the invasion – barred from trains, turned away at borders.[168] But it did not anticipate the system that drew Africans into the war.

163 OAU Convention for the Elimination of Mercenarism in Africa, art. 1. The definition includes requirements concerning motivation by private gain and whether the person is a member of the armed forces of a party to the conflict; see https://au.int/en/treaties/convention-elimination-mercenarism-africa.

164 On the ongoing Pan-African Parliament review of the 1977 OAU Convention on Mercenarism, see https://pap.au.int/en/news/press-releases/2024-06-27/pan-african-parliament-committees-delve-revised-oau-convention.

165 African Union, 'Pan-African Parliament Committees delve into Revised OAU Convention for Eliminating Mercenaries in Africa,' 29 June 2024, https://au.int/en/pressreleases/20240629/pan-african-parliament-committees-delve-revised-oau-convention-eliminating; Pan-African Parliament, Recommendation on the Zero Draft of the Revised OAU Convention for the Elimination of Mercenarism in Africa, July 2024. 166

166 Op cit. European Parliament Resolution 2026/2641(RSP) of 12 March 2026 https://oeil.europarl.europa.eu/oeil/en/procedure-file?reference=2026/2641(RSP).

167 Op cit. Bibiana Waithaka European Parliament testimony, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/events/details/third-country-nationals-forced-to-fight-/20260313CHE13882.

168 On UNHCR's 2022 condemnation of the discrimination African civilians faced while fleeing the invasion, see UNHCR chief condemns 'discrimination, violence and racism' against some fleeing Ukraine, https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/03/1114282.

The United Nations has, however, begun to address the recruitment through its specialised human rights mechanisms. In March 2026, the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine reported that it had investigated foreign nationals from 17 countries recruited to fight with Russian forces, including citizens of Egypt, Ghana, Kenya, Somalia, and Uganda. The commission found that some had been deceived with promises of civilian employment, met on arrival in Russia by military personnel, pressured into signing Russian-language contracts they did not understand, and sent to dangerous frontline duties. It recommended that Russia cease recruiting foreign nationals through inducement, deception, or other means that undermine free and informed consent.[169]

The commission stopped short of determining that the recruitment itself constituted a war crime or crime against humanity, saying that its investigation into the applicable legal characterisation was continuing.

The issue had also reached the UN's special procedures.

The UN Working Group on the use of mercenaries has a term for the kind of conduct documented in this report: "predatory recruitment". It uses the phrase to describe recruitment that exploits economic hardship, relies on deception or coercion, and leaves people uncertain about the work they are being drawn into.[170] In July 2025, the Working Group and several UN Special Rapporteurs raised with Moscow the alleged trafficking and forced recruitment of three Sri Lankan men into the Russian army. The methods closely resembled those documented here: false job offers, economic vulnerability, Russian-language military contracts and deployment to the front. Russia did not respond publicly.[171] The Working Group has not issued a comparable assessment focused on African recruits.

By August 2026, the issue had also reached members of the UN Security Council. Latvia and Britain convened an informal Arria formula meeting on prisoners of war, civilian detainees, and foreign fighters, with the UN human rights office among the briefers. The meeting raised the issue of the deceptive and coercive recruitment of foreign nationals into Russia's armed forces and the need for a more coordinated international response. But an Arria meeting is an informal forum: it produced no Security Council resolution or other binding action.

The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, the Working Group on the use of mercenaries, and the UN Commission of Inquiry on the situation in Ukraine each hold mandates that encompass the practices documented in this report. Some have now exercised those mandates. What remains absent is a coordinated international response capable of stopping the recruitment, dismantling the networks behind it, or securing effective remedies for those already drawn into the war.

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The cumulative picture is less one of total institutional silence than of a fragmented and uneven response: national governments prioritised diplomacy over their citizens' safety, the AU has yet to mount a comparable political response, and the European Parliament condemned the practice but lacks the power to stop it.

The UN Commission of Inquiry has investigated the recruitment and called on Russia to stop it, while UN special procedures have intervened in comparable trafficking and forced recruitment cases. The issue has now reached an informal forum of the Security Council as well. Within the African human rights system, the issue has been raised before the African Commission, but has yet to produce a resolution, study, or other formal measure.

The European Parliament remains the forum that has issued the clearest political condemnation, while the UN Commission of Inquiry has undertaken the more substantial evidentiary examination. Neither has, however, an enforcement mechanism capable of ending the practice.

The institutional architecture designed to prevent exactly this kind of exploitation – the Palermo Protocol on trafficking, the Geneva Conventions on prisoners of war, the OAU Convention on mercenarism, and the mandates of the UN Human Rights Council and its special procedures – exists.

169 Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine, findings presented to the Human Rights Council, 12 March 2026. The Commission reported investigating recruits from 17 countries, including Egypt, Ghana, Kenya, Somalia and Uganda, and described deception, coercion into Russian-language contracts and frontline deployment. United Nations in Ukraine, 12 March 2026, https://ukraine.un.org/en/311741-un-commission-concludes-deportation-and-forcible-transfer-ukrainian-children-russian; UN Geneva press conference record, https://www.unognewsroom.org/story/en/3046/hrc-press-conference-independent-international-commission-of-inquiry-on-ukraine/9149.

170 United Nations Human Rights Council, Working Group on the use of mercenaries, Recruitment, including predatory recruitment, of mercenaries and mercenary-related actors, A/HRC/54/29, 12 July 2023, https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4017705.

171 UN Special Procedures, Joint Allegation Letter RUS 11/2025, 22 July 2025, concerning the alleged predatory recruitment of three Sri Lankan nationals through false employment promises and their trafficking and forced recruitment into the Russian army. The public communications database records no Russian reply, https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TmSearch/RelCom?code=RUS+11%2F2025.