

HOLODOMOR MEDIA MATERIALS

Q&A TO PREPARE FOR MEDIA INTERVIEWS

Q: What is the Holodomor?

A: The Holodomor, which means “murder by starvation” in Ukrainian, was a genocidal famine that took the lives of millions of Ukrainians in 1932-1933. The totalitarian communist regime deliberately used mass starvation to break the resistance of Ukrainian farmers to Soviet authority in general and to collectivization of farmland through the confiscation of their land, grain, and animals. Communist activists went door to door searching for grain and other food, leaving people with nothing to eat. At the height of the famine in June 1933, an estimated 28,000 Ukrainians were dying each day. Within 18 months, about one in six Ukrainians in rural areas had died.

Q: What was the historical background leading up to the Holodomor?

You need to go back to the Ukrainian Revolution, which began after Tsar Nicholas II abdicated the Russian throne in 1917. Ukrainian political, spiritual and intellectual leaders immediately began building Ukrainian institutions separate from Russia. While the Bolsheviks were fighting democratic Russian forces in the October Revolution, the Ukrainian People’s Republic declared independence in 1918. Unfortunately, the Ukrainian Army was unable to beat back the Bolshevik Red Army and Ukraine was forced into the Soviet Union in 1922, with its capital in Kharkiv.

During the 1920s, Ukraine experienced a cultural renaissance oriented toward Europe. It had renewed its own church (dating back to 988) separate from Russia and its own national education system. However, after Lenin died and Stalin became the totalitarian leader of the USSR, he implemented mass repressions, terror and deportation. The fear, murder and violence unleashed by the Soviet regime in the 1920s is very similar to what Ukrainians are living through today.

The Ukrainian nation, which was the second largest in the USSR, had its own centuries old cultural and historical heritage, its own glorious traditions of state building, and experience of national liberation struggle. Many Ukrainian intellectuals and farmers did not accept the policies of the communist leadership and mass protests against collectivization of agriculture took place. Therefore, the goal was set to destroy the Ukrainians as a political nation with ideas about autonomy or independence. To achieve this goal, a terrible tool was chosen - starvation.

Q: Why did Stalin and his regime in Moscow deliberately murder millions of Ukrainians?

A: The goal of the crime was the destruction of the Ukrainian people as a national group. The Holodomor was the culmination of Stalin’s efforts to destroy the Ukrainian peoples’ desire for

the freedom to be Ukrainian. Thousands of Communist true believers flooded the Ukrainian countryside to forcibly seize food, build cordons so villagers could not leave their town or district in search of food, and arrest anyone who disobeyed these cruel orders. A secret law made it a crime punishable by death for a child to take even five stalks of grain from the state-run farms.

Q: How many people were starved to death in the Holodomor?

A: It is hard to give a definitive answer because the Soviet authorities lied about the famine, destroyed official death registries and falsified Census data. Ukrainian archaeologists were still working to uncover mass graves in 2022, before Russia's invasion. We do know it was many millions – various scholars estimate numbers between 3.9 and 10 million or more, depending on the methods used for the estimates. The Ukrainian government is still studying the evidence and hopes to provide a more accurate estimate after the current war ends. Therefore, we do not focus on the number of deaths but on the gravity of the horrendous methods used to commit genocide – death by starvation – and the main goal for this action by the USSR.

However, the damage to the Ukrainian nation went beyond death. The future of the nation – its children – died at a much greater rate than adults. Also survivors could not recover from the psychological trauma of being deliberately starved; the Soviet authorities made it a crime to speak about the Holodomor, even within one's own family. It is only in recent years that Ukraine has begun to come to terms with the moral and psychological consequences of this manmade tragedy.

Q: Who were the people responsible for the Holodomor?

A: Soviet dictator Stalin was ultimately responsible. However, many willing participants were needed to carry out the famine. These included Stalin's appointees Stanislaw Kosior (First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Ukraine Communist Party), Pavel Postyshev (Second Secretary) and Lazar Kaganovich (First Secretary of the Communist Party in Ukraine). Of note, the infamous "leaders" of the Ukrainian SSR were not ethnic Ukrainians. Thousands of Communist activists were also brought in to carry out these evil policies against Ukrainians.

Q: Was the Holodomor a genocide?

A: Many sources believe the Holodomor meets the criteria of genocide.

- In 1953, American lawyer Raphael Lemkin, who introduced the term "genocide" into world legal terminology, described the Holodomor as "a classic example of genocide."
- In 1988, the U.S. Commission on the Ukraine Famine reported to Congress that "Joseph Stalin and those around him committed genocide against Ukrainians in 1932-1933."

- In 2006, the Law of Ukraine recognized the Holodomor as genocide of the Ukrainian people.
- As of August 2025 XX countries around the world have recognized the Holodomor as a genocide.

Q: What was the outcome of the Holodomor?

A: The genocidal murder of millions of Ukrainians paralyzed the nation for decades. Its leading writers, thinkers, spiritual leaders and political leaders were dead or in prison. The farmers' movement against collectivization was over. In August 1933, the USSR began to resettle collective farmers from Russia and Belarus to the empty famine-ravaged villages of Ukraine,. By the end of 1933, over 100,000 people had been resettled. At the same time, the Soviet regime carried out a policy of Russification to suppress the Ukrainian language and culture. Today, Russian President Vladimir Putin claims he is defending Russian speakers as a pretext for his invasion of Ukraine. However, we now know that the real reason he invaded Ukraine was to return Ukraine to Russian rule, replace the democratically elected government with a puppet regime beholden to Russia, and eliminate the Ukrainian language and culture. So Ukraine is still dealing with the fallout from the genocide of more than 90 years ago in the current Russia – Ukraine genocidal war.

Q: Why didn't anyone come to the aid of the starving Ukrainian people?

A: First of all, the Soviet Union conducted a highly effective global disinformation campaign. The USSR denied there was a famine and exported grain and other food to Europe during those years. Foreigners were either forbidden from traveling in the Ukrainian countryside or shown a false image of prosperity. However, a handful of Western journalists witnessed the mass starvation and wrote contemporaneous stories about it.

Ukrainian religious and political leaders outside the USSR tried to help. Andriy Sheptytsky, Metropolitan of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, made an appeal for "Ukraine in Death Throes", which led to 35 organizations in Lviv in Western Ukraine to join an effort to coordinate assistance to the victims and disseminate information about this crime. Stepan Skrypnyk, who would later become Patriarch Mstyslav of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in Ukraine, organized emergency aid as a lawmaker in the Polish Sejm. However, the Soviet Union turned away all offers of aid, including from the International Red Cross.

Ukrainian Americans were aware of the famine through reporting in émigré newspapers like Svoboda and the Ukrainian Weekly. Ukrainian communities organized letter writing campaigns and marches (which sometimes turned violent when American Communists attacked the

Ukrainians) to get the attention of lawmakers. Although most Western governments knew of the famine, their attention was diverted by Hitler's rise to power in Germany and the ongoing Depression.

Most notably, Pulitzer Prize winning New York Times "journalist" Walter Duranty who was Bureau Chief in Moscow and mixed in the upper circles of the Stalin government, denied that the famine in Ukraine existed. He supported the lies of Stalin and his government which have long since been proven to be just that – lies.

Q: Why is the Holodomor relevant today?

A: The study of genocides is important to understand how and why criminal regimes destroy innocent populations as a way to help prevent future genocides and crimes against humanity. The Russian Federation in 2025 is using many of the same disinformation tools as in 1932-33 in conducting its genocidal war of aggression against Ukraine using similar methods. President Vladimir Putin is using the same tools of disinformation, denial and obfuscation as Stalin, to confuse world leaders and populations about the true reasons for his war and about the war crimes and atrocities being conducted by his soldiers against Ukrainian civilians and POWs. Today, the Russians are once again using genocidal methods against Ukrainians to destroy Ukrainian identity, culture, and language. These include illegal actions such as terror, mass murder, deliberate attacks on civilians and shelters, evacuation routes and humanitarian corridors, sexual violence, military sieges and the abduction and trafficking of children. The Russia-Ukraine war is aimed not only at destroying the independence of the Ukrainian state, but also at exterminating Ukrainians as a distinct people, as a nation

Russia's war against Ukraine has caused the worst humanitarian crisis in Europe since World War II.

Q: How do Ukrainians feel about the starvation in Gaza?

A: Ukrainians who lived through the starvation of the Holodomor—or their descendants—often have a deep sensitivity to human suffering, especially involving civilians. However, views on Gaza vary widely among Ukrainians, shaped by individual experiences, historical context, political beliefs, and media narratives. While some may express empathy for civilians in Gaza due to shared memories of suffering, others may focus on different aspects of the conflict, such as security concerns or geopolitical alignments. The Ukrainian government recognizes both Israel and Palestine and has shipped grain to Gaza for humanitarian relief.

Holodomor Media Briefing Sheet – Key Messages

Core Definition

- The Holodomor (“*murder by starvation*”) was a **genocidal famine** in 1932–1933 that killed millions of Ukrainians.
 - Stalin’s regime **deliberately starved Ukrainians** by confiscating grain, food, and livestock.
-

Historical Context

- After declaring independence in 1918, Ukraine was forced into the USSR in 1922.
 - By the late 1920s, Ukraine had a vibrant cultural renaissance and strong national identity.
 - Stalin saw Ukraine’s independent nature and resistance to collectivization as a threat to Moscow’s control.
-

The Crime

- In the years leading up to the famine, Ukraine’s intellectual, spiritual and political leaders were systematically arrested, exiled or killed.
 - Once the famine began, villages were sealed off; leaving to find food was forbidden.
 - Even children could be executed for taking a handful of grain.
 - At the famine’s peak, **28,000 Ukrainians died daily**.
 - Survivors were forbidden to speak about it for decades.
-

Impact/Outcome

- The Soviet cover-up and destruction and falsification of records has made quantifying the number of victims very difficult. For this reason, we focus on the horror of the crime, not the numbers.
- The **majority of victims were children**.
- The independent spirit of Ukraine was broken for generations.
- Russian citizens were moved into famine-ravaged villages, and Russification was imposed.
- Beyond deaths, the Holodomor inflicted deep **psychological trauma** and cultural destruction.

Responsibility

- **Joseph Stalin** and top Soviet officials (Kosior, Postyshev, Kaganovich).
- Thousands of Communist activists enforced the policies.

Genocide Recognition

- 1953: Raphael Lemkin, who coined the term “genocide,” called the Holodomor a “classic example of genocide.”
- 1988: U.S. Commission on the Ukraine Famine found Stalin guilty of genocide.
- 2006: Ukraine recognized the Holodomor as genocide.
- **Dozens of countries worldwide** now recognize it as genocide.

International Response Then

- Soviet propaganda denied the famine and exported grain abroad.
- Ukrainian diaspora communities marched and lobbied in vain to raise awareness and government action.
- Some western journalists like **Gareth Jones and Malcolm Muggeridge** reported the truth. Others, like **Walter Duranty of The New York Times**, repeated Soviet lies.
- Western governments largely ignored the famine, distracted by the Depression and Hitler’s rise.

Relevance Today

- Russia’s war against Ukraine mirrors 1932–1933: disinformation, cultural destruction, deportations, and child abductions.
- The Holodomor is not just history—it explains **Russia’s ongoing attempt to erase Ukraine as a nation.**

Sound Bites / Quotes

- “The Holodomor was not a natural famine—it was **genocide by starvation.**”
- “At its height, **28,000 Ukrainians were dying each day.**”

- “Stalin tried to destroy Ukraine in 1933. Putin is trying again today.”
 - “The Holodomor teaches us: silence enables genocide.”
-