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## **The interview of the Chairman of the Investigative Committee of Russia Alexander Bastrykin to RIA Novosti on investigation of genocide of Soviet peoples during the Great Patriotic War**



Seventy-five years ago, the "Trial of History" ended - the International Military Tribunal in Nuremberg delivered a verdict in the case of the main Nazi war criminals. But the atrocities of the Nazis and their accomplices have no statute of limitations. The Investigative Committee of Russia is actively working to find and prosecute criminals of the Great Patriotic War. In the interview with RIA Novosti the Chairman of the Investigative Committee of Russia Alexander Bastrykin spoke about the educational activities of the Investigative Committee of Russia, a bill that provides for increased criminal responsibility for the rehabilitation of Nazism on the Web, perpetuating the memory of Soviet citizens killed by the Nazi invaders during the Great Patriotic War, the work of search teams and declassification of archives, as well as the inevitability of punishment for those



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who committed crimes against humanity.

**- Alexander Ivanovich, this June marks 80 years since the beginning of the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945 - one of the longest and bloodiest in the history of our country. How are the previously unknown facts of the atrocities of the fascists against the civilian population currently assessed from the position of the Committee?**

- Immediately after the end of the war, the Nuremberg Trials clearly recorded the criminal nature of aggression, as well as the responsibility of the state and the specific personal responsibility of officials for international crimes. The result of this process, in addition to the condemnation of the main Nazi war criminals, was the adoption in various countries of the world of legislative acts that criminalize the commission of war crimes and crimes against humanity. In Russia, they are included in the special 12th section of the Special Part of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation "Crimes against the Peace and Security of Mankind", the articles of which provide for responsibility for planning, preparing, unleashing or waging an aggressive war, genocide, mercenarism, rehabilitation of Nazism and a number of other offenses related to the jurisdiction of the Investigative Committee. The time that has passed since the war allows us to comprehend even deeper the essence of the Nuremberg Trials and the colossal role it played in studying the Second World War and creating an objective and truthful picture of the atrocities of the Nazis. It is no coincidence that the prominent Soviet writer Leonid Leonov, in one of his reports from Nuremberg, where Soviet prosecutors presented evidence of mass killings, torture, and abuse of the civilian population of the USSR, committed by the Nazis, rightly noted that the word of truth is needed "for those who read about this hundred years later in history textbooks". We are clearly convinced of the transcendent inhumanity and absolute immorality of the Nazi executioners in our time. Taking into account the results of excavations and declassification of archives, investigators of the department are initiating criminal cases on the grounds of crimes under Article 357 of the Criminal Code of Russia, on the facts of genocide of civilians and prisoners of war.

**- What is the geography of Nazi crimes?**

- Due to the excavation of the search teams and the declassification of archives, we have found out the details of the tragic events associated with the mass murder of civilians in the Novgorod, Pskov, Rostov, Oryol, Volgograd regions, on the Crimean Peninsula, in the Krasnodar and Stavropol regions. According to the Charter of the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg, the killing and extermination of civilians before or during war constitute crimes against humanity, and such crimes have no statute of limitations. And we have all the grounds to investigate the said facts. All those who are involved in the inhuman treatment of the population, genocide, murder of civilians and prisoners of war must be identified and condemned, and in the case of their death, their names and crimes must be made public.

**- Was the work on identifying specific persons responsible for committing atrocious crimes**



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## during the Great Patriotic War always carried out?

Already during the war, in 1943, Decree No. 39 of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR "On measures of punishment for German fascist villains guilty of murder and torture of the Soviet civilian population and prisoners of the Red Army, for spies, traitors to the motherland from among Soviet citizens and for their accomplices" was adopted. It became the legal basis for the trials of the Nazis. During the period 1943-1949, such trials took place in 21 Soviet cities that suffered at the hands of the Nazis. This determination of the country's leadership to conduct targeted trials of the Nazis was eventually implemented at the Nuremberg Tribunal, the very idea of which belonged precisely to the Soviet Union.

### - What is the subject of the investigation now?

- The results of examinations of the remains of the Great Patriotic War discovered in different regions of the country indicate that civilians and prisoners of war were subjected to systematic torture, people were starved and purposefully destroyed through punitive operations. Helpless children, women and old people were killed by the invaders. For the exploitation of civilians and prisoners of war, concentration camps were created, where, as a result of artificially created unbearably difficult conditions - hunger, lack of medical care, severe beatings, hundreds of Soviet prisoners died every day. Thus, according to archival data, only in 1942-1943, at least 2,600 people were killed by German punishers and their accomplices in the area of the village of Zhestyanaya Gorka, Novgorod Region. At present, excavations in the area of the village have been completed: the remains of 521 people have been recovered from a previously unknown mass grave of civilians, of which 188 are children. On October 27, 2020, these newly revealed crimes were recognized as war crimes against humanity, genocide of national and ethnic groups representing the population of the USSR, the peoples of the Soviet Union, part of the plan that Nazi Germany intended to get rid of the entire local population of the Soviet Union by exile and extermination in order to colonize the liberated territory by the Germans. In the course of the investigation, our investigators have already established the data of 33 punishers involved in committing a crime in the village of Zhestyanaya Gorka, of which 15 persons are dead, the verification and search for the rest continues as part of the operational-search activities. We are also investigating the circumstances of the destruction of 214 inmates of the Yeisk orphanage in October 1942, people held in concentration camps in the village of Moglino, Pskov region and in the area of the city of Simferopol; facts of mass killings of civilians on the territory of the Rostov region in 1942, where more than 30,000 people were shot near the village of Zmievsкая Balka, the town of Shakhty and in the Morozovsky district. And these are not the all facts we know about.

Taking into account the scale of punitive actions and the obtained evidence of their focus on the complete destruction of the civilian population of the Soviet republics, the Investigative Committee decided to initiate a criminal case on the genocide of the peoples of the Soviet Union by the Nazi invaders during the Great Patriotic War, with which all of the above mentioned criminal proceedings



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were combined into one proceeding.

## **- What opportunities does the Investigative Committee of Russia have today for investigating crimes committed more than 70 years ago?**

- To investigate the facts of genocide, we use various, primarily expert, opportunities. Thus, a number of forensic medical examinations are carried out, which make it possible to determine the sex, age of the found remains, the exact cause of death; medical forensic - to establish the mechanisms of damage formation; ballistic examinations and even cultural examinations of objects discovered on the spot that may have a certain value. DNA examinations help to answer many questions of interest to the investigation. We communicate with witnesses of those terrible events - former prisoners of concentration camps, who share with investigators memories that are of great evidentiary value for the contemporary investigation of a criminal case. Having access to a number of materials closed to the general public, we study a large array of archival sources about the events of those terrible days, and engage representatives of the historical community in this work as experts and specialists. Interaction is carried out within the framework of the procedures of international legal cooperation with colleagues from foreign states.

## **- What is the evidence that the Nazis committed these crimes?**

The main evidence of the commission of crimes by the Nazis today still remains the materials of the International Military Tribunal in Nuremberg and criminal cases considered by national courts, the results of the work of the Extraordinary State Commission. Thanks to these materials, we have the opportunity to continue working to identify and search for those responsible and implement the principle of the inevitability of punishment. We continue to identify and test for involvement in Nazi crimes of individuals who live or may reside in other states. In addition, the evidence of the crimes of the Nazi invaders are declassified archival materials of the Federal Security Service, the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs, Ministry of Defense, numerous testimonies of witnesses, including relatives of victims of Nazi atrocities, the remains of people with traces of violent death, their personal belongings and documents found in mass graves of the Great Patriotic War times during search operations, carried out in order to establish the names of the dead and missing in the defense of the Fatherland. Based on all of the above data, we now have the opportunity to continue working to identify and search for those responsible in order to implement the principle of inevitability of punishment. For this purpose, in May last year, the Headquarters for the coordination of the search and archival work of the Investigative Committee was created, which included representatives of the Russian Ministry of Defense, the All-Russian public movement to perpetuate the memory of those killed in the defense of the Fatherland "Search Movement of Russia", the Public Council of the Main Archive Directorate of the city of Moscow, as well as heads and employees of subdivisions of the Central Office of the Committee, the investigative bodies of the Investigative Committee of Russia, on whose territory it is planned to conduct archival, historical, reconnaissance and search work under the project "Without a statute of limitations", heads of educational organizations of the



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Investigative Committee of Russia and representatives of search organizations.

**- What is the essence of this initiative?**

- In continuation of this search, archival and patriotic work, which is being carried out by our department, in February a search movement was created in the Investigative Committee, which included officers of the Investigative Committee of Russia and students of educational institutions of the Committee. In a number of constituent entities of Russia, on the basis of the investigation departments of the Investigative Committee of Russia, such detachments have already been created, the purpose of which is to perpetuate the memory of Soviet citizens who died at the hands of the Nazi invaders during the Great Patriotic War.

**- Can you give an example?**

- On the initiative of the head of the Smolensk Regional Investigative Department of the Investigative Committee of Russia, a search group "Sledopyt" was created. It includes the acting officers of the Investigative Committee of Russia. However, earlier search work in different regions was of a scattered nature, which is why we decided to centralize this work.

**- But all these activities will require additional time?**

- Employees of the department will be engaged in this activity in their free time, including during holidays. They have a normal attitude to such a regime, because the goal of the movement and the employees of the Investigative Committee of Russia is to find as many people as possible who died during the Second World War, to perpetuate their memory, to reburial the remains with honor, to convey information to descendants and to pay tribute to the heroic deed of heroes. In the Investigative Committee of Russia, we adhere to the position of the great Russian commander Alexander Vasilyevich Suvorov - "the war is not over until the last soldier is buried."

**- Recently, the Investigative Committee opened an exhibition of archival documents dedicated to the facts of the genocide of civilians during the Great Patriotic War. How do you assess the importance of this initiative for carrying out educational and patriotic work in the system of the Committee?**

- The "Without a Statute of Limitations" exhibition is a continuation of a large complex of patriotic and educational events of the Year of Memory and Glory, dedicated to the 75th anniversary of Victory in the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945, the 75th anniversary of the Nuremberg Trials. It presents the most interesting archival materials identified from seven thousand documents from federal, regional, municipal and departmental archives. Each document is proof of genocide purposefully carried out on the territory of the USSR by the Nazis and their accomplices. The exhibition consists of several sections and reflects various aspects of the implementation by the



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Nazis and their accomplices of the policy of genocide of the Soviet people: punitive operations and mass destruction of civilians, destruction by hunger and the creation of living conditions incompatible with life, crimes against childhood, forced labor and the deportation of civilians to Germany, destruction of citizens in hospitals and other medical institutions. The documents on the most important events in the investigation of the crimes of the Nazis against the civilian population have been also presented. Within the framework of the project, for the first time in Russia, a 23-volume series of collections of documents on the war crimes of the Nazis and their accomplices against the civilian population was published, covering all the regions occupied during the Great Patriotic War. Let me emphasize that this format of information presentation makes it possible to form a unified assessment of the crimes of the Nazis. Of course, such events once again remind us of the tragedy of our people, of how important it is to keep the peace, to prevent such tragedies. For our young employees and students of educational institutions, participation in such events has already become a part of life, from school we are trying to instill the right values in young people, because it is the young generation that is our future.

**- The opening day of the exhibition of archival documents is timed to coincide with an important historical event - the beginning of the speech of the chief prosecutor at the Nuremberg trials from the USSR, Roman Rudenko. Why is this speech so important today for understanding the essence of the Court of Nations?**

- Indeed, the opening date of the exhibition, February 8, was timed to coincide with the 75th anniversary of the speech of the chief prosecutor from the USSR, Roman Andreevich Rudenko, at the International Military Tribunal in Nuremberg. On this day, in 1946, in his opening speech, as the chief prosecutor from the USSR, for the first time, he voiced the full scale of the atrocities of Nazi criminals in the occupied territory of the Soviet Union. He cited figures and concrete facts of mass executions and theft for forced labor of civilians, torture and murder of prisoners of war, plundering and destruction of cities and villages. In the language of Hitler and his accomplices, robbery, executions, driving civilians into German slavery and all kinds of violence against them were called "regulation." The facts cited by R.A. Rudenko became one of the main materials that formed the basis of the guilty verdict of the Nuremberg Tribunal, which recognized at the international level not only the crimes of the Nazis and their accomplices against civilians, but also that they were part of the deliberate destruction of the Soviet people. Rudenko's opening speech is of great importance today as never before, taking into account the belittling of the role of the Soviet Union in the victory over Nazi Germany in the West.

**- At the beginning of the year, congratulating your department on the tenth anniversary of its founding and highly commending the activities of the Investigative Committee on combating crime, the President of the Russian Federation emphasized such an area of your work as suppressing any attempts to rehabilitate Nazism. Tell us about this work.**

- First of all, it should be said that the Investigative Committee was one of the initiators of the



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introduction of criminal liability for the rehabilitation of Nazism, in connection with which the Federal Law of May 5, 2014 No. 128-FZ of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation was supplemented by Article 354.1 of the Criminal Code "Rehabilitation of Nazism". The provisions of this article are already applied to those who publicly deny the facts established by the Nuremberg Tribunal, approve the Nazi crimes and disseminate knowingly false information about the activities of the USSR during the Second World War. Those persons who posted photographs of Nazi criminals and traitors to the Motherland on the websites of the "Immortal Regiment - Online" action have already been punished. I will also note that in September 2020, a special unit was created in the Investigative Committee to investigate crimes related to the rehabilitation of Nazism and the falsification of the history of the Fatherland. In addition to directly investigating crimes, the new unit acts as a focal point, providing methodological and analytical assistance to regional investigative bodies in investigation of such criminal cases. At the same time, at present, unfortunately, we are witnessing attempts to present the history of the Great Patriotic War in a completely different form. This happens when, for example, officials of foreign states, deliberately ignoring the key role of the USSR in defeating the enemy, try to revise the decisions of the Nuremberg Tribunal. We also see attempts, especially in the Baltic countries and in Ukraine, to present as heroes those who committed atrocious crimes against the civilian population without regard for the truth. And the Investigative Committee also does not ignore such attempts to rehabilitate Nazism. Thus, a criminal case is being investigated into the rehabilitation of Nazism in relation to the already former chairman of the Ukrainian Institute of National Memory (this institution is the central executive body that implements state policy in the field of restoring and preserving the national memory of the Ukrainian people!).

We will do everything in our power to ensure that the terrible tragedies of the past war will never be repeated, so that future generations will remember the horror of the Holocaust, the heroism and courage of the inhabitants of besieged Leningrad. The Investigative Committee also pays great attention to educational work: we constantly tell the public about our work on the investigation of criminal cases of crimes against the peaceful Soviet population and prisoners of war, we provide consulting assistance in the filming of documentaries, in particular, in the preparation of films within the framework of the project "Without a statute of limitations".

By the way, on February 10, 2021, the State Duma adopted in the first reading a bill that provides for increased criminal liability for the rehabilitation of Nazism on the Internet.

As you know, the current legislation establishes increased liability under Article 354.1 of the Criminal Code of Russia "Rehabilitation of Nazism" if the perpetrator uses the media. The new edition proposes to indicate the use of "information and telecommunication networks", including the Internet, as a qualifying sign of the commission of a crime. I believe that this will be one of the most effective forms of protecting the historical memory of the crimes of Nazism.

In conclusion, I shall note that time is inexorably moving us away from the tragic events of the Great



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Patriotic War, however, the crimes committed by the Nazis on our land have no statute of limitations, and the investigators of the Investigative Committee scrupulously, bit by bit, expose the crimes of the Nazi regime and those who committed these atrocities so that future generations will remember the sorrows of war.

22 March 2021

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