



United States Mission to the OSCE

The Russian Federation's Ongoing Aggression Against Ukraine

As delivered by Ambassador Michael Carpenter
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
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As we approach the one-year mark of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the Kremlin continues its brutal campaign of seeking to wipe out a sovereign Ukraine from the map of Europe. Last Friday, Russia fired over 100 drones, rockets, and missiles across the country, again targeting Ukraine's civilian infrastructure. And last night, Russia fired an additional 36 missiles into Ukraine. We've also seen reports Russia is deliberately draining the Kakhovka Reservoir which could have a profound impact on Ukraine's people and environment, posing risks to the safe operation of the Zaporizhzhya Nuclear Power Plant. We have and will continue to condemn Russia's actions like these. We also remain committed to sharing the experiences of Ukrainian civilians who have needlessly suffered, and continue to suffer, as a result of Russia's unconscionable war of choice.

These include the traumas of Ukraine's children, who are among the most vulnerable to Russia's brutality. The Ukrainian government has collected information on close to 15,000 Ukrainian children forcibly deported to Russia. The real number is likely much, much higher. Yale University's Humanitarian Research Lab has also documented how Russia is holding at least 6,000 children across Russia and Russian-occupied Ukraine in a far-flung system of political re-education camps. The large-scale network of at least 43 camps runs from Russian-occupied Crimea all the way to Magadan in Siberia and to Russia's Far East. Again, the real number of these camps is likely much larger than what has been documented thus far. These re-education camps hold children as young as four months old to teenagers. Teenagers at these facilities are reportedly given military training and indoctrinated into Russia's imperialistic view of the world. When children enter the camps, Russia's officials actively work to block communication with family members in Ukraine, prevent children from returning home, and attempt to brainwash them into being pro-Russian.

Medvezhonok is one of the largest camps that has been identified, at one point holding at least 300 children from Ukraine. Officials there originally told the children's parents they would come home at the end of summer, but later refused to specify a date of return. In the case of one boy from Ukraine, camp administrators said he would go home only if Russia's forces retook the town of Izium. Another boy was told he could not go home due to his "pro-Ukrainian views."

The evidence collected so far makes this appear to be yet another clear cut case of Russia choosing to violate its wartime responsibilities to protect civilians. This systematic effort of "re-homing" Ukrainian children reflects decisions made and actions taken at all levels of the Russian government. Again, Yale University's Humanitarian Research Center describes the operation as "centrally coordinated by Russia's federal government" and involving federal,

regional, and local figures, many of whom were personally appointed by Russia's President Vladimir Putin, whose support for these efforts is a matter of the public record.

Mr. Chair, the unlawful transfer and deportation of children is a grave breach of the Fourth Geneva Convention on the protection of civilians, and as such, constitutes a war crime. Furthermore, the transfer of children for purposes of changing, altering or eliminating national identity can constitute a component act of the crime of genocide.

The harrowing experiences of Ukraine's children are not limited to those in Russia's re-education camp system. Take 16-year-old Vladyslav, who was forced into Russia's filtration system after soldiers found pro-Ukraine content on his phone while he was trying to escape to Zaporizhizya. He was held for 90 days in a police cell. After Russia's forces reportedly tortured other prisoners, Vladyslav – remember 16 years old – was forced to clean the blood and filth off the cell floors.

Let's also consider the case of 12-year-old Sasha. Sasha was injured by a missile attack during Russia's siege of Mariupol. Russia's forces captured Sasha and his mother when she tried to find medical treatment for him. Separating the mother from her crying son, the soldiers sent Sasha to Russia-occupied Donetsk where he was told he would be adopted by Russians because "he had no parents." Sasha was forced to speak Russian, was told that Ukraine was bad, and that Ukrainians were evil. Sasha knew he had to get back to his family, so he found a way to call his grandmother, Lyudmila. Lyudmila traveled from Ukraine to Poland, then to Lithuania, then to Latvia, and finally to Russia, and eventually made her way all the way back to Russia-occupied Donetsk to find her grandson. Lyudmila was lucky. She was able to bring Sasha home. Other families have not been so lucky.

I fully anticipate later today you'll hear Russia's representatives yet again attempt to mislead, distract, and justify what Russia is doing to the children of Ukraine. Let's see what sort of lies they come up with today. But please remember what Václav Havel said about authoritarian systems: "if the main pillar of the system is living a lie, then it is not surprising that the fundamental threat to it is living the truth." That's why it's vital we hear the truth about those who lived through, as well as those who died, in the course of Russia's neocolonial war against Ukraine. Their individual stories give us all a better understanding of the depths of Russia's deception, of the true nature of what it is trying to perpetrate in Ukraine. We must have no illusion: the only way Russia's abuses in occupied areas of Ukraine will end is when those areas are liberated and completely freed of every single Russian soldier.

Mr. Chair, Russia needs to provide the international community with the lists of children it has taken from Ukraine and allow these children to be reunited with their families in Ukraine. Unfortunately, we all know the likelihood of that happening, at least for the time being, is low. Because of this, we need to energize our activities here to protect Ukraine's children. We need to think creatively about ways we can help Ukraine record and track where Russia has taken Ukraine's children. History will not be kind to us if we choose to do nothing in the face of such systematic depravity.

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