



United States Mission to the OSCE

The Russian Federation's Ongoing Aggression Against Ukraine

As delivered by Ambassador Michael R. Carpenter
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
December 14, 2023

On this 659th day of Russia's war against Ukraine, Moscow has launched yet another massive missile attack on Kyiv injuring 53 people, including six children.

Four days ago on December 10th, we marked Human Rights Day, commemorating the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Nowhere do we see more egregious, horrifying, and disturbing violations of human rights in the OSCE region than those perpetrated by Russia's forces and Russia's authorities against the people of Ukraine, especially Ukrainian children.

The United Nations has recorded 1,741 casualties among Ukraine's children from February of 2022 to September of 2023 – a staggering figure some experts fear to be even higher. Ukraine has also confirmed that more than 19,000 of its children have been deported or forcibly transferred since February of 2022. Fewer than two percent of those have returned home.

As a December 11 Amnesty International report details, Ukraine's educational system in the parts of the country under Russian occupation is in tatters. Russia's attacks have damaged 3,151 educational institutions for children, completely destroying 440 of them. Russia's forces' attacks on power grids have rendered online schooling impossible in many areas. And where schools still exist, Russian occupation authorities have replaced school curricula with propaganda aimed at turning Ukrainian children into obedient robots parroting Kremlin talking points.

Take the experience of 15-year-old Kyrylo, who lived through Russia's occupation of Kherson. According to Amnesty International, when Kyrylo was forced back to a school, he found it festooned in Russian state symbols with armed personnel stationed at the door as well as inside. At a different school in Berdiansk, Amnesty International saw propaganda given to students and teachers, saying "look around you. You can see that Ukraine has destroyed Kharkov, Mariupol, and other cities. If you do not want Ukraine to kill you, tell us everything you see and know about it." Note the Orwellian doublespeak: if you don't want to be killed, repeat our lies and everything will be fine.

Russian soldiers have forced parents and teachers in the occupied parts of Ukraine to make impossible choices. Take the experience of Oksana. A mother of two in Kherson, Oksana hid her children for several months in her home rather than expose them to Russian propaganda in the local school. Separately, Russian forces threatened another mother,

Kseniya, that if her teenage son did not come back to school, “a bus will come the following week and take [him] to an orphanage in Russia.”

In the face of all this abuse and coercion, we’ve also seen reports of Ukraine’s teachers going to heroic lengths to protect the cultural identities of their pupils. According to Amnesty International again, Uliyana, a school librarian in Shevchenkivska, had to arrange clandestine meetings to distribute Ukrainian textbooks to the village’s remaining children so they could continue studying despite having no electricity, Internet, or mobile phone connections for an entire ten months. Uliyana reportedly had to evade roving Russian military patrols who conducted arbitrary searches for so-called “dangerous items.”

Additionally, Russian occupation authorities threatened to deport to reeducation camps in Russia those found distributing Ukrainian educational materials. This is clearly a deliberate attempt to undermine Ukraine’s future by depriving it of a well-educated citizenry needed to rebuild the country after the war.

While Russia carries out these unconscionable actions, the international community is undeterred in its support for Ukraine. More than 60 countries and international organizations have pledged to join the International Coalition of Countries for the Return of Ukrainian Children, the first meeting of which took place on December 8. We fully support this coalition, established at the most recent international meeting in Malta to implement President Zelenskyy’s Peace Formula. We will do our utmost to facilitate the return of children and hold responsible all those Russian authorities at all levels.

Mr. Chair, as we begin what should be a holiday season filled with joy and surrounded by family and friends, let us remember the Ukrainian children who are suffering through yet another holiday season marked by war, brutality, and occupation. Instead of spending time with their families, some of them will face loneliness in the Russian Federation, in various camps, or housed with strangers trying to force them into a new life as Russians.

As these children suffer, Vladimir Putin continues drinking champagne in the gilded halls of the Kremlin, basking in the enthusiastic reaction of his sycophants to his announcement of yet another reelection campaign during which no authentic viable candidates will be permitted to challenge him. Russian authorities have already announced their intention to organize voting in the occupied parts of Ukraine, despite the fact that such a sham move would be entirely unlawful and illegitimate.

In conclusion, as 2023 draws to a close, let me assure everyone of our unwavering support for Ukraine. As President Biden said earlier this week, this winter Putin plans once again to bombard Ukraine’s electricity grid, plunging families into darkness in the coldest part of the year. We can’t and we won’t let him succeed in that effort. We must give Ukraine the tools to prevail.

###