



Delegation of Canada
to the OSCE

Délégation du Canada
auprès de l'OSCE

**STATEMENT BY AMBASSADOR JOCELYN KINNEAR
ON THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION'S ONGOING AGGRESSION AGAINST UKRAINE
1465th MEETING OF THE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

14 March 2024

Madam Chair,

The Moscow Mechanism report last year laid out in detail the protections that children are entitled to in times of conflict.

The nucleus of the family is essential for the protection of children during armed conflict. International humanitarian law therefore protects family unity. If an occupying power undertakes evacuation of an area for certain reasons specified therein, it shall see to it that members of the same family are not separated. In case of separation, children must be provided with special treatment, and their reunification or repatriation with their families must be highly prioritized by the parties.

Yet, the actions of the Russian Federation so far seem to indicate that the Russian Federation has no intention of reuniting children with their families. The Russian Federation claims their actions are meant to protect children. If this were true, let us ask this:

Why is there an international arrest warrant for the President of the Russian Federation, and his Children's Rights Commissioner?

Why are the whereabouts and status of these children so murky, despite efforts by Ukraine and the international community to trace them?

Why is the Moscow Mechanism report so damning?

The answer to these questions is simple: because the Russian Federation is not telling the truth. Russia is not protecting children.

Earlier this week, more information came to light about Russia's indefensible and illegal actions vis-à-vis Ukrainian children it deported or illegally transferred from Ukraine to Russia, and Russian-occupied territories of Ukraine.

Citing a source in the Russian Ministry of Education, the Latvia-based independent Russian media outlet Meduza revealed documents attesting that there is a program in Russia for the adoption of Ukrainian children, contrary to Russian insistence that the mechanism for providing care to Ukrainian children is guardianship or foster care. The re-education and integration efforts for Ukrainian children in Russia suggest that there is no intention of returning these children to Ukraine.

A manual by the Ministry of Education claims there is a widespread “destructive ideology” [...] among Ukrainian teenagers, and that Russian teachers and social workers must “re-educate” the “rising generation” based on the “spiritual-moral values” and “historical and national-cultural traditions of the Russian Federation.” The ultimate aim is for the deported minors to “develop a Russian identity.”

We call on Russia to cease these harmful practices and intensify their efforts to reunite these children with their families and caregivers in Ukraine.

Canada and over 30 other countries are working together under the Coalition for the Return of Ukrainian Children to bring these children home. We will use every tool at our disposal to do so.

Madam Chair,

I would like to briefly note the voting for presidential elections that has started in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine. The conduct of elections in the temporarily occupied territory is illegal under international law.

We do not recognize any Russian authority over Crimea, Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson. They are all Ukraine.

Thank you.