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**Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner
for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the
High Commissioner and the Secretary-General**

Written statement* submitted by Coordination des Associations et des Particuliers pour la Liberté de Conscience, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[10 August 2023]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.

Ukrainian children in search of a way home from Russia How does the child protection system work in Ukraine and in the world?

CAP Liberté de conscience and Human Rights Without Frontiers are deeply concerned about the Ukrainian children who were taken away against their will from the Ukrainian occupied territories to Russia in the framework of the war and whose parents are desperately in search of them. Both NGOs strongly support the recommendations of the UN Secretary-General, who urges

- Russia to ensure that no changes are made to the personal status of Ukrainian children, including their citizenship;
- all parties to continue to ensure that the best interests of all children are respected, including by facilitating family tracing and reunification of unaccompanied and/or separated children who find themselves outside borders or control lines without their families or guardians;
- parties to the conflict to grant child protection authorities access to these children to facilitate family reunification;
- his Special Representative on “Children and Armed Conflicts”, together with United Nations agencies and partners, to consider ways to facilitate such processes.

Ukraine is trying to identify children illegally taken away by Russia

Currently, there is no exact figure on how many Ukrainian children were deported to Russia or moved to the territories controlled by it (for example, to the occupied Crimea).

Moscow says Russia has (1) taken in 5.3 million people from Ukraine since its full-scale invasion, including 738,000 children. Russian authorities do not provide more detailed statistics and it is impossible to verify this information. No lists or any personal data at all is available. Russia does not submit reports to any international organizations and does not report to Ukraine either.

Verkhovna Rada Commissioner for Human Rights Dmytro Lubinets (2) claims that the figure of 700,000 ‘moved away’ children is exaggerated. The Ombudsman suggests (3) that Russia has illegally removed about 150,000 children from Ukraine.

Adviser-Commissioner of the President of Ukraine for Children's Rights and Children's Rehabilitation Daria Gerasymchuk (4) calls the figure "several hundred thousand children, that is, somewhere around 200-300,000." She notes (5) that the aggressor country, Russia, might have illegally ‘imported’ from Ukraine up to 300,000 children during the war. Currently, Ukrainian authorities have confirmed information about less than 20,000 deported Ukrainian children. "According to our estimates, we can talk about 200-300,000 children they could have kidnapped," Gerasymchuk said.

Gerasymchuk explained that it is impossible to evaluate the exact figure today, since the Russian Federation also deports children from the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine.

"Despite the fact that we are talking about 200-300,000 deported and forcibly removed children, today we have only accurate information about 19,499 such children," Gerasymchuk said.

Data on the deportation of young Ukrainians is collected by the National Information Bureau of Ukraine.

"Thus, as far as 19,499 children are concerned, there is personal data for each of them. We understand who these children are and where they were abducted from. However, this does not mean that we know where this child is," Gerasymchuk said.

Forced displacement of children not only to the Russian Federation but also to Belarus

At the state level, Ukraine properly responded to the declaration of the head of the Red Cross Society of Belarus Dmitry Shevtsov saying that the organization headed by him "participated, takes and will take an active part" in the evacuation of Ukrainian children – allegedly, "these children come to Belarus for rehabilitation." Shevtsov said this on the air of one of the Belarusian TV channels.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba called on the (6) International Criminal Court to issue an arrest warrant for Shevtsov, who "publicly confessed to the crime of illegal deportation of children from the occupied territories of Ukraine."

Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the United Nations Sergiy Kyslytsya, at a meeting of the Security Council on 21 July asked relevant United Nations officials, in particular the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, to respond to (7) the involvement of the head of the Belarusian Red Cross in organizing the forcible removal of Ukrainian children from the temporarily occupied territories.

As for the position of Belarus, it was voiced by Lyudmila Makarina-Kibak, a deputy of the House of Representatives of the National Assembly of the Republic of Belarus. "The kidnapping charges have no legal basis. Children come to us in accordance with international requirements and with the assistance of international organizations and funds of the UN system, the Red Cross, etc.," she said. (8)

The International Federation of the Red Cross and the Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) issued a statement on this matter (9). The organization claims that "they were not informed about Shevtsov's visit to the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine" and that they have already referred the case of the Belarusian representatives to the Committee on Compliance and Mediation, which, according to Article 32 of the IFRC Statute (10), "resolves any violations of integrity or disagreements related to national member societies or any body in the Federation."

The International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent was also approached (11) by the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights Dmytro Lubinets with a demand to ensure that the Belarusian Red Cross requests full information about children from the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine who were on "rehabilitation" and "rest" in the Republic of Belarus during 2021, 2022 and 2023.

386 children returned to Ukraine

To date, 386 children have been returned to Ukraine. According to Gerasymchuk, there is no frequency in the return of children. One of the biggest problems with returning children is that it concerns about 200-300,000 children, and only information about the deportation and forced removal of slightly more than 19,000 has been filed.

As for the return of children: in order to collect information faster, the portal "Children of War" was created at the President's Office last summer.

The platform "Children of War" (12) was created on behalf of the Office of the President of Ukraine by the Ministry for Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territories of Ukraine together with the National Information Bureau, the Office of the Prosecutor General, the National Police, the Office of the Verkhovna Rada Commissioner for Human Rights, the Office of the President for the accumulation, processing and partial publication

of information about children under martial law, namely: the number of wounded and dead children, deported children, those who have been found and those who are wanted.

The return of each Ukrainian child is, in fact, a separate, individually designed special rescue operation

Unfortunately, Gerasymchuk notes in an exclusive interview with Interfax-Ukraine (13) that today there is no single mechanism for the return of our children. "We do not have negotiations with Russia for such returns. They do not recognize these children as detained, deported, forcibly displaced. They call it "evacuation." Moreover, negotiations mean that we could make exchanges but we do not have Russian children to exchange. We did not detain any of them, we did not kidnap anyone. The Russians should simply return all Ukrainian children immediately.

All 386 children were not returned through negotiations. There have never been any approvals or organized groups on the Russian side. All this is now happening case by case. That's why it's happening so slowly.

Adoption by Russian families

Of course, there are no complete statistics, Gerasymchuk (14) notes. There are confirmed cases of adoption by Russians but in many cases, adoptions are not made public or are registered as "temporary custody."

As far as we know, the Russian Ombudsman of Lviv-Belova "temporarily takes care" of a child from Ukraine in this way, although she even told the President of the Russian Federation that she "adopted" the boy.

Gerasymchuk said (15) that there were several return cases of children already "adopted" in Russia.

There are also cases of children who were sent to camps. Parents signed documents by which they agreed to send their children to a camp for three weeks. The Russians pledged to return them but the children were told by the Russians: "You will not return", "Your parents abandoned you", "They do not need you" or "A Russian family is waiting for you," despite the fact that a number of them continued to talk to their parents on the phone. Children were transported to camps for six months – from camp to camp. Six months later, they were considered as left without parental care and were sent to Russian families. Afterwards, they were granted Russian citizenship, and their names were changed.

Russians have a clear genocidal policy, Gerasymchuk (16) notes. They aim to either destroy the identity of Ukrainian children or replenish their nation at the expense of the children they kidnap.

Human Rights Without Frontiers, NGO(s) without consultative status, also share the views expressed in this statement.

(1) <https://www.vedomosti.ru/society/news/2023/02/20/963624-svishe-53-mln-bezhentsev-s-ukraini-i-iz-donbassa-pribili-rossiyu>

(2) https://uk.wikipedia.org/wiki/Лубінець_Дмитро_Валерійович

(3) <https://www.slovoidilo.ua/2023/02/17/новина/suspilstvo/ombudsmen-nazvav-kilkist-ditej-nezakonno-vyvezenyh-ukrayiny-rf>

(4) https://uk.wikipedia.org/wiki/Герасимчук_Дар%27я_Михайлівна

(5) <https://fakty.com.ua/ua/ukraine/suspilstvo/20230619-rf-mogla-vykrasty-z-ukrayiny-do-300-tys-ditej-povernuty-vdalosya-mensh-nizh-400-gerasymchuk/>

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- (6) <https://twitter.com/dmytrokuleba/status/1681643294290313217?s=46&t=JHHzChDbvSf3JHpnTV6Hcg>
- (7) <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-politics/3738897-kislitsa-poprosiv-oon-vidreaguvati-na-ziznanna-glavi-ch-bilorusi-u-deportacii-ukrainskih-ditej.html>
- (8) https://twitter.com/Euroradio_EN/status/1681936578350919680
- (9) https://www.ifrc.org/article/statement-response-belarus-red-cross-secretary-generals-visit-luhansk-and-donetsk-and-his?fbclid=IwAR29MNEqx1_SI3G1ZZ0T6jqJBQ1XYideZLVt4oDnphtyZtrM052t-2dgxCQ
- (10) <https://www.ifrc.org/statutory-texts>
- (11) <https://telegra.ph/Reakciya-na-dii-Biloruskogo-CHervonogo-Hresta-07-20-2>
- (12) https://childrenofwar.gov.ua/?fbclid=IwAR2z1pz0ycb-UT5eVeO6VX-Zc_v3CJNmfFci_zesn71sHtRITK8Yfk-UZLQ
- (13) <https://interfax.com.ua>
- (14) <https://interfax.com.ua/news/interview/917543.html>
- (15) Ibid.
- (16) Ibid.