



# Security Council

Seventy-ninth year

*Provisional*

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New York

*President:* Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield/Mr. Wood . . . . . (United States of America)

*Members:*

Algeria . . . . .	Mr. Koudri
China . . . . .	Mr. Geng Shuang
Ecuador . . . . .	Mr. Montalvo Sosa
France . . . . .	Mr. De Rivière
Guyana . . . . .	Ms. Persaud
Japan . . . . .	Mr. Yamazaki
Malta . . . . .	Ms. Gatt
Mozambique . . . . .	Mr. Fernandes
Republic of Korea . . . . .	Mr. Hwang
Russian Federation . . . . .	Mr. Nebenzia
Sierra Leone . . . . .	Ms. Karim
Slovenia . . . . .	Mr. Žbogar
Switzerland . . . . .	Mrs. Baeriswyl
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Dame Barbara Woodward

## Agenda

Maintenance of peace and security of Ukraine

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*The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.*

### **Adoption of the agenda**

*The agenda was adopted.*

### **Maintenance of peace and security of Ukraine**

**The President:** In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Canada, Latvia, Poland and Ukraine to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Ms. Catherine Russell, Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund; Mr. Nathaniel Raymond, Executive Director of the Humanitarian Research Lab at the Yale School of Public Health; and Ms. Kateryna Rashevskaya, Legal Expert at the Regional Centre for Human Rights.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I also invite Her Excellency Ms. Hedda Samson, Chargé d'Affaires a.i. of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I give the floor to Ms. Russell.

**Ms. Russell:** I thank you, Ambassador Thomas-Greenfield, for bringing us together to speak about the consequences of the war in Ukraine on the lives of children, their families and their communities.

Last month, the escalation of the war in Ukraine passed the 1,000-day mark. The United Nations has verified that at least 2,406 children have been killed or injured since February 2022, an average of two children every day. Behind every number is a child with a name, a life story and loved ones whose hopes and dreams have been shattered. These are the United Nations-verified numbers only; we know that the true number is likely far higher. More and more children are directly caught up in the conflict. The United Nations verified more child casualties during the first nine months of 2024 than we did during all of 2023. That is the true cost of war, but it does not end there.

The scale of displacement is staggering. Nearly 3.6 million people are displaced inside Ukraine, and almost twice as many, 6.7 million people, have become

refugees. In Ukraine, the war is upending the lives of children. In some areas, it has forced families and children to live underground because of the constant risk of attacks. Children spend up to six hours every day sheltering in basements and other damp, dark spaces under blaring air raid sirens, fearing for their lives.

Over the past 1,000 days, almost 1,500 educational institutions and more than 660 health facilities have been damaged or destroyed. In cities such as Kharkiv, classrooms and playgrounds have been replaced with underground makeshift schools, some of them in metro stations. With the onset of winter, children are exposed to freezing temperatures. This has been made worse by attacks on energy infrastructure, which have multiplied over the past months and reduced the country's electricity capacity to just over half of what is required for winter months. Some parts of Ukraine are experiencing power outages for 18 hours a day. As a result, many children in Ukraine are left without essentials such as heating, safe water and sanitation.

The war is taking a terrible toll on children's mental health and robbing them of their childhood. Children are impacted by the constant threat and fear of attacks or violence, the loss of loved ones, the separation of families due to displacement and the disruption of education, including isolation due to long-term online learning. The consequences of such trauma have a long-lasting impact on children's mental health. One assessment found that a third of parents reported their children exhibiting signs of mental distress. With every passing day of war, more and more children will suffer, while facing the risk of lifelong mental health consequences.

UNICEF and partners are working tirelessly to meet the immediate humanitarian needs of children and their families in Ukraine, including access to safe water, education and psychosocial support. This year, UNICEF and partners have supported access to drinking water for 5.1 million people in Ukraine and provided mental health-psychosocial support services to more than 630,000 children, adolescents and caregivers.

We are working with municipalities to keep heating systems going throughout the winter and working to keep schools open and safe. In 2024, we supported the access of more than 450,000 children to education. We are doing our utmost to protect children and to ensure that children understand how to protect themselves from land mines and explosive remnants of war, which

contaminate one quarter of the country. But much more is needed to address the suffering of children and families. We again call for the support of members of the Security Council and the parties to the conflict to take immediate steps to protect children caught up in this nightmare.

First, all parties to the conflict must abide by international humanitarian law and human rights law and end grave violations against children. Attacks on energy infrastructure and the civilian infrastructure that supports children, such as health facilities and schools, must immediately cease.

Secondly, parties must refrain from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. Parties must also refrain from the use of land mines and other weapons, such as cluster munitions, which are inherently indiscriminate and have a disproportionate impact on children. Eastern Ukraine was already one of the world's most mine-contaminated stretches of land, even prior to the recent escalation, a reality that has now extended to other parts of the country.

Thirdly, UNICEF remains deeply concerned about the number of children who have been separated from their families. We urge parties to prioritize family tracing and reunification and to refrain from taking any actions that would alter a child's nationality or make it more difficult for children to be reunited with their families. All parties and all stakeholders must focus on solutions that are in the best interest of each individual child. UNICEF continues to offer its support for the return and reintegration of all children, in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

And finally, the United Nations and partners should have safe and unfettered humanitarian access to all children and families in Ukraine who need aid or protection services, including in non-government-controlled areas. We appreciate the generous support of Member States in funding the humanitarian response and call on them to continue providing the necessary resources to address both the immediate and the longer-term needs of Ukraine's children. Investment in the future of children is fundamental. Humanitarian efforts, while vital, cannot be a substitute for a political solution to end the war and suffering. Children are depending on the Council to provide solutions. We cannot — and we must not — let them down.

**The President:** I thank Ms. Russell for her briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Raymond.

**Mr. Raymond:** I thank you, Madam President, and the representatives of Member States for allowing me to brief the Council this morning.

Yesterday our team released *Russia's Systematic Program of Coerced Adoption and Fostering of Ukraine's Children*, the most recent report from the United States Department of State-supported Conflict Observatory programme. It is the findings of this more than 20-month-long investigation, which utilizes the collection and analysis of open-source data and commercially available satellite imagery, that I am here to discuss with the Council specifically today. The Humanitarian Research Lab's inquiry identified 314 children from Ukraine who, following Russia's February 2022 invasion of the country, have been placed in this systematic, Kremlin-directed programme of coerced adoption and fostering. Those identifications resulted from cross-corroboration of multiple points of data to a high confidence standard, including but not limited to photographs, travel itineraries, physical characteristics, official Russian documents and other specific details related to each child.

At the heart of this investigation is the discovery of three interconnected, Russia-affiliated child placement databases in which children from Ukraine were placed for adoption or fostering as if they were orphans from Russia. In one case, the database involved was financially supported by President Putin's Office itself. The dossiers for each child that the Yale School of Public Health Humanitarian Research Lab has identified have now been transferred to Ukraine's Government, including its law enforcement, and the Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court. The children the Humanitarian Research Lab was able to find were exclusively, we believe, from Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, but information reviewed by the Humanitarian Research Lab analysts indicates that children from Zaporizhzhya, Kherson and Kharkiv oblasts as well — areas captured by Russia after February 2022 — are also likely to have been included in the programme. Just under half of the children the Humanitarian Research Lab identified are part of sibling groups present in the programme, meaning their brothers and sisters. In at least one case, a sibling was separated by Russia from their brothers and sisters as part of placement with citizens of Russia.

The total number of children who Russia has placed in its adoption and fostering pipeline is unknown and cannot be determined from the data analysed for this report. Without Russia providing the Government of Ukraine and the International Committee of the Red Cross with the actual lists of the children it has taken, we cannot estimate how many children are in its custody. However, we know this: 148 of the 314 children identified by the Humanitarian Research Lab were listed in this trio of child placement databases and were adopted. The placement of children in those databases by Russia occurred after the illegal annexation in September 2022 by Russia of internationally recognized territory belonging to Ukraine, and that is important. Before that point, the children were held at temporary accommodations, including one funded by the Office of the President of Russia himself, at what the Humanitarian Research Lab refers to as “midpoint locations” prior to the illegal annexation for up to six months. After that point, they were listed for adoption.

According to analysis of online photos and commercially available satellite imagery, President Putin’s personal presidential air wing and Russia’s aerospace forces transported the children from Ukraine into and within Russia in 2022. Of the 314 children identified by the Humanitarian Research Lab, 208 have been placed with citizens of Russia through adoption or some form of temporary or permanent guardianship, and — this is critical — 67 of the 314 children have been formally naturalized as citizens of Russia.

The naturalization of children originally from Ukraine as citizens of Russia is a core aspect of the entire operation. The programme relied on detailed legal manoeuvring by President Putin himself; Maria Lvova-Belova, Russia’s Children’s Rights Commissioner; Anna Kusnetsova, a member of the Duma and a party official in United Russia; and others to ensure that those activities, while violating international human rights and humanitarian law, complied with Russia’s federal law governing the adoption of Russian children. Russia’s adoption laws require that children be citizens of Russia before they can be adopted. As a result, presidential declarations, legal amendments as a matter of public record passed by the Duma and other procedural moves were used by the Kremlin, both to fast-track the renunciation of the children’s citizenship in Ukraine by proxies and to facilitate the issuance of Russian Federation citizenship to the children themselves. Involved in that pipeline were officials of

the Ministry of Education, including headmasters of boarding schools.

Therefore, as President Putin and Lvova-Belova were allegedly violating international humanitarian and human rights law by deporting protected persons — that is, kids — from Ukraine to Russia, an alleged war crime, they have been involved in a higher order of alleged crime, namely, the alleged crime — a crime against humanity — of transfer of people from one ethnic or national group to another, which is prohibited under the 1998 Rome Statute. The historical antecedent for that alleged crime is the eighth Nuremberg trial, known as the RuSHA trial, in which Nazis and their collaborators were found guilty on multiple charges, including the specific act of the forced transfer of Polish children to Germany for so-called Germanification, which included the destruction of their birth certificates. The same alleged crime is occurring now in the twenty-first century, and this time it is Russia that is committing it.

In conclusion, it is now time for Russia to do what it was legally required to do under the Geneva Conventions at the start of the war that it began: Russia must provide Ukraine, the International Committee of the Red Cross, UNICEF and other relevant authorities a full list of the children it has taken, including those in the database systems that we have reviewed. Until Russia gives up that information — something that it is legally and morally required to do — it will be impossible to fully assess exactly how many children from Ukraine are waiting to go home.

**The President:** I thank Mr. Raymond for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Rashevskaya.

**Ms. Rashevskaya:** I thank you, Madam President, for inviting me to address the Council today.

When the rights and the lives of children are at stake, there must be no silent witnesses. Children simply have no role in armed conflict. However, for more than 10 years, Ukrainian girls and boys have been targeted by the aggressor States. Thousands of Ukrainian children were killed and wounded. Approximately 15,000 have been left without parental care or have become orphans as a result of the Russian aggression. Kindergartens, schools and hospitals have been damaged or destroyed, resulting in almost 3 million Ukrainian children finding themselves in a situation of extreme vulnerability, expecting what may be the harshest winter of their

lives. Ukrainian children are still being raped, tortured and unlawfully detained by Russian soldiers. That was confirmed by the report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2024/384). The Russian armed forces have been included twice on the so-called list of shame for committing grave violations against Ukrainian children. However, Russia has not yet developed an action plan with the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict in order to end and prevent further violence.

Anyone who supports Ukraine understands that Russians have taken more than 19,000 Ukrainian children. Under the guise of evacuation, accompanied by numerous violations of international law, those children find themselves sometimes 8,000 kilometres away from their homes in Russian orphanages or foster families. Let me recall that it was the unlawful deportation and forcible transfer of Ukrainian children that led the International Criminal Court to issue arrest warrants against Vladimir Putin and the Commissioner for Children's Rights in his Office, Maria Lvova-Belova. Approximately 90 per cent of deported children remain under Russian control, despite global initiatives for their repatriation, including invaluable mediation by the Vatican and Qatar and potential support from South Africa. In February 2024, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child called on the Russian Federation to end the deportation of children from Ukraine and to provide information on the number of deported children and their whereabouts for their identification and timely return. Russia continues to ignore those recommendations, but still we fight to return our children to their homes — because not only is it their right, but it is also a passport to a better future for those children and for Ukraine.

Today more than 1.5 million Ukrainian children are caught up in the occupied territories, where they are not merely bystanders. Russia targets entire families in order to prevent the transmission of Ukrainian cultural values and identity, including citizenship, from one generation to the next. The forcible imposition of Russian citizenship in the occupied territories is a deliberate policy of the aggressor State. Children without Russian documents face discrimination even in accessing healthcare, not to mention educational and other services.

Along with Russian citizenship, Ukrainian children also receive duties, including the defence of their new motherland and military service. In order to prepare

our children to fulfil that duty, each year, the Russian Federation, with the assistance of Belarus, displaces more than 40,000 Ukrainian children from the occupied territories to re-education camps where they are transformed into loyal patriots of Russia. The network of those camps comprises at least 13 institutions in the occupied territories, 18 in Belarus and 67 in Russia. Most of those camps are involved in pro-Russian militaristic initiatives. For example, at the Avangard camp in the Volgograd region, Ukrainian boys and girls were trained in fire, tactical and engineering training, as well as in parachute jumping. When countries that disregard the basic principles of the international legal order build a system to raise children as soldiers, that is a threat not only to Ukraine, but also to global peace and security, because that is a clear sign that those countries are preparing for a new war of aggression.

Ukrainian education in the occupied territories was unlawfully replaced by a Russian education. The occupying Power is attacking schools through their politicization and militarization, which constitutes a clear violation of the right to education. The indoctrination of Ukrainian children in the occupied territories is being carried out in particular by Russian colonizers who, under the Zemsky Uchitel federal programme, receive €1 million and contribute not only to the forcible change of the demographic composition of the occupied territories, but also to the eradication of the Ukrainian national identity of our children.

This year, the lack of access to Ukrainian language education in the occupied Crimean peninsula was recognized as a violation of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination by the International Court of Justice. Russia is not complying with that judgment, or with two orders on interim measures in the context of Ukrainian applications. At the same time, all violations documented in the occupied Crimean peninsula concerning Ukrainian children before 2022 are being repeated in areas where Russia has established control since 2022.

Today I address the Council with a clear call: to reduce the number of Ukrainian children affected by the Russian aggression. The Security Council has all the necessary leverage to ensure Russia's compliance with international law, including the implementation of the decisions of international judicial and quasi-judicial institutions. We must deepen our understanding of specific grave violations against children — including



attacks on schools, which are not only physical but also ideological, especially in occupied territories. We must work to return deported children and ensure their rights and hopes for a future of peace.

I am persuaded that, if we are to achieve true peace in Ukraine and throughout the world, we have to begin with our children. Having a country that is truly fit for children does not simply imply the absence of war; it means having a safe country where every child can grow in peace, dignity and safety without constant threats from neighbouring States. Let us do so, once and for all.

**The President:** I thank Ms. Rashevskaya for her briefing.

I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of the United States.

I want to thank the Executive Director of UNICEF, Ms. Catherine Russell, and our civil society briefers, Mr. Raymond and Ms. Rashevskaya, for their important and sobering briefing on Ukraine's children.

Often when we discuss devastating conflict — like Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine — we speak in broad strokes. We try to convey the horrors of war through numbers: the number of missiles, the number of those dead or injured, the number of those displaced or without electricity. But the victims of all wars are not just numbers. They are people with names and stories, hopes and dreams — like Milena, the young girl I met during my visit to Ukraine two years ago, who told me all she wanted to do was go back to school and see her best friend again. Her eyes beamed with hope, and I think of her all the time. I think of all of the young children who have been displaced and forcibly deported.

I think of all those whose lives were cut tragically short, like Polina, a 10-year-old girl — one of the first children killed in Russia's full-scale invasion. She and her parents were shot dead while trying to flee to safety. Alisa, a 7-year-old from Sumy oblast, was killed alongside her grandfather when a Russian cluster bomb struck a school. Serhii, a 2-day-old baby, was killed by a Russian rocket attack as he lay in the maternity ward next to his mother. He was small even for a newborn, at just under six pounds and less than 20 inches long. He did not live long enough to receive a birth certificate.

Tragically, I could go on and on and on. The list of young people murdered and maimed by Russian forces is long, as is the list of children forcibly deported.

“Forcibly deported” — what does that mean in layperson's terms? It means that Russian forces have stolen children and sent them to Russian-occupied parts of Ukraine's sovereign territory or deported them into Russia itself, where all trace of them is often obscured, as we heard from both of our civil society briefers today.

Russia's forces have assigned those children new Russian names, given them Russian passports and subjected them to Russian “military-patriotic” indoctrination programmes. They have punished children for speaking Ukrainian, lied to them about the fates of their families and communities and forced them into adoptions with Russian families. In other words, Russia has sought to systematically erase those children's identities. It is no wonder the country appears in the Secretary-General's annual report on Children and armed conflict (S/2024/384) for violations against children committed by its officials, including killing and maiming children and attacking schools and hospitals. Moscow's horrors are also laid out in the report written by Mr. Raymond and others at the Yale Humanitarian Research Lab. We heard about that directly from Mr. Raymond today, and I have a copy of the report right here in front of me. It is very detailed. It is devastating. It is damning. I urge all Council members to read it for themselves. As we heard, it underscores, in excruciating detail, the atrocities orchestrated and overseen by the highest levels of the Russian Government — by the man at the top, President Putin, as well as by Maria Lvova-Belova, Russia's so-called Presidential Commissioner for Children's Rights, and many others.

Make no mistake: Russian officials and Russian forces have committed war crimes and crimes against humanity. Thus far, Russia has remained intransigent and unrepentant, frustrating international efforts — and I heard Kateryna today say she is very frustrated — including those required under the Geneva Conventions, to identify, locate and reunify missing children with their families and legal guardians. As a result, only a heartbreakingly small number of those children have returned home to Ukraine. For our part, the United States, together with partners around the world, has pursued measures to hold Russian officials to account. In March, we joined the International Coalition for the Return of Ukrainian Children. We continue to support Ukraine's national authorities, international efforts and civil society in pushing for the safe return of Ukrainian children and for accountability.

Today I can announce the United States Department of State is pursuing visa restrictions for five additional Russia-backed or Russia-installed officials for their involvement in human rights abuses of Ukrainian children in connection with their forced deportation, transfer and confinement.

As I have said many times, children never start wars, but they are always victims of war. They are robbed of the chance to go to school. They are robbed of the certainty their home will be there when they return. They are robbed of warmth in the winter months. They are robbed of freedom. They are robbed of life. I leave Council members with the words of Milana, an 11-year-old from central Ukraine. This is a portion of a heart-wrenching poem she shared with the world:

“I want to make a flower wreath,  
To chase the fields of grass and wheat.  
To gaze at stars, in skies so vast.  
Forget these years of pain amassed.  
I want to forget the nights full of fears,  
Get rid of the sorrow, to calm our tears.  
I need to be patient, come what may,  
And now, with hope, I will softly pray.”

For Milana, and for all of Ukraine’s children, we must call for the Kremlin to end its war of conquest immediately and to withdraw from Ukraine’s sovereign territory within its internationally recognized borders. History has shown that appeasing aggression only begets more aggression. We saw it in Georgia in 2008. We saw it in Crimea in 2014. We saw it in eastern Ukraine in the months leading up to the full-scale invasion. We risk seeing it again now. If the Kremlin achieves its war aims and changes Ukraine’s borders by force or ends Ukraine’s existence as a sovereign and independent country, Russia will continue its siege elsewhere and more people — more children — will suffer. We must not allow that to happen. The United States, therefore, will continue to stand with Ukraine as it bravely defends its freedom. We will continue to push for a just peace in line with the United Nations Charter. And we will continue to call on Russia to return all Ukrainian children to their homes and allow others to live in warmth and peace.

I resume my functions as President of the Council.

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements.

**Mr. Žbogar** (Slovenia): I would like to thank the briefers for their valuable and sobering contributions today. I would also like to thank the United States for organizing this important briefing.

At the outset, let me underline the invaluable role that UNICEF and other humanitarian organizations are playing in Ukraine, where the war is having a devastating impact on children, as we just heard today. Death, injuries and trauma are clear, with devastating consequences on physical and psychosocial well-being for the country’s 7.5 million children. It is of the utmost concern that almost all of the six defined grave violations against children in armed conflicts occur in Ukraine. The 2023 report of the Secretary-General on Children and armed conflict (S/2023/363) clearly notes and quantifies those violations. At the same time, the report lists the Russian armed forces and affiliated armed groups as parties that commit grave violations affecting children in situations of armed conflict.

In the past year, we have witnessed a concerning increase in child casualties, averaging at least 16 children dead or injured every week. With attacks on civilian infrastructure, there are no safe havens for them: neither at home, nor in schools or hospitals. Millions of Ukrainian children live in constant fear, some spending hours sheltering under the sound of air raid sirens daily. Displacement leaves girls particularly vulnerable to heightened levels of gender-based violence. That comes on top of approximately 1.7 million children lacking safe drinking water, and 3.4 million lacking access to centralized sanitation. Amid plunging temperatures and the systematic destruction of civilian energy infrastructure, that represents another grave risk of harm and disease.

Just two weeks ago, on 20 November, we commemorated the thirty-fifth anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. After more than 1,000 days of war, that core international human rights instrument represents another unimplemented international agreement for the children of Ukraine. Many have been killed, injured, deprived of a carefree childhood and a safe family environment, and are without access to education and healthcare. Thousands of Ukrainian children were separated from their families, forcefully transferred or unlawfully deported within the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine and to Russia. Their whereabouts, for most of them, remain unknown and their future uncertain. International monitoring mechanisms documented

these deeply concerning violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law. We underline the key importance of accountability. The suffering of Ukrainian children has to come to an end. The profound promise to every child to protect and fulfil their rights in order for them to reach their full potential, which is at the core of the Convention, must be upheld and respected by all.

They say that, when a war occurs, the first casualty is the truth. I would argue that the very next victim is the future of a nation. It does not matter if a war is won or lost. The stress and trauma that children afflicted by war must brave causes psychological wounds that can echo through generations. There is still a chance to save these children's future, but this war must end, and it must end now.

**Mr. Hwang** (Republic of Korea): I would first like to acknowledge the United States for convening today's important meeting. I also want to express my gratitude to UNICEF Executive Director Russell, Mr. Raymond and Ms. Rashevskaya for their informative and sobering briefings.

Last month we witnessed a striking contrast in the international community. On 19 November we marked 1,000 days of war in Ukraine, a conflict that has stripped countless children of their fundamental rights. And the following day, we collectively commemorated the thirty-fifth anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child — a global pledge to safeguard the dignity and future of every child. That juxtaposition highlights the urgent need to bridge the gap between commitment and action. Russia's persistent attacks on civilian objects, including residential areas, schools, hospitals and critical infrastructure, have created perilous conditions for Ukrainian children's lives. Two thirds of Ukraine's energy infrastructure lies in ruins, leaving millions with power shortages as the war's third winter approaches. Despite the fact that Russia was one of the first countries to ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child, its despicable actions starkly betray its responsibilities under the Convention's article 38, which obligates States to respect international humanitarian law, protecting children in armed conflict. In that context, I would like to make three points.

First, the recent report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2024/384) identified hundreds of grave violations against children in Ukraine. They include killing and maiming, attacks on

schools, abductions and denials of humanitarian access, resulting in the Russian armed forces and affiliated groups being listed as perpetrators in the report's annex for the past two years. As a permanent member of the Council, Russia must cooperate with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, including by developing a joint action plan to end the grave violations against children, and must demonstrate tangible progress to avoid being relisted in future reports.

Secondly, I want to discuss the forced deportation of children. The unlawful transportation of children during conflict is a grave breach of international law and a direct assault on a nation's future. It is alleged that almost 20,000 children are suspected to have been forcibly relocated since February 2022, and Mr. Raymond and Ms. Rashevskaya's testimonies in that regard today were deeply troubling. Among those cases, the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine documented the transfer of 46 children from Kherson to Crimea in October 2022 as a permanent transfer that amounts to a war crime. Those responsible for such acts must be held accountable.

Last but not least is education. The wanton destruction of schools and other educational facilities continues to severely disrupt children's education and will have lasting effects on their future lives. Nearly 40 per cent of Ukrainian students are learning online, and many are facing severe learning losses. During the Korean War, children in my country similarly endured immense suffering in the form of displacement, family separations and a loss of access to education. The conflict on the Korean Peninsula resulted in 1 million civilian casualties and left behind tens of thousands of orphans and widows, with deep scars that lingered for generations. However, even in the midst of that chaos, children strived to continue their education in branch schools and tents in refugee camps. Even when more than half of the country was occupied, our parents persevered with their higher education while enduring hunger, destruction and trauma. We see a kindred commitment to education in Ukraine. My country's post-war recovery illustrates how even the deepest scars of conflict can indeed give way to enduring resilience and progress. Through humanitarian efforts, including close collaboration with UNICEF in Ukraine and neighbouring countries, we will continue to support Ukrainian children. The Republic of Korea remains



steadfast in supporting Ukraine, its children and a brighter future for all Ukrainians.

**Mr. Nebenzia** (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): “But they are children”, said the Ukrainian public with a smile when children danced on Maidan Square in 2013, chanting “Hang the Russkies high” and hurling Molotov cocktails at law enforcement officers. “Buttheyarechildren” — all one word — became a meme. In an ordinary Ukrainian village where everyone speaks Russian and goes to Russia to work, two Bandera followers settled. Five years on, all those teenagers have become Banderites and march under Nazi flags, as a resident of the village has testified. Now those unfortunate young people are either dead or will die on the front in the service of a vainglorious, dull-witted Ukrainian president whose term has expired and who has led his country to disaster to please the United States and its satellites.

At one of our meetings in this Chamber (see S/PV.9032), we showed an eighth-grade Ukrainian geography textbook, which states in black and white that every geographic location with the stem “gal” in its name can be traced back to Halychyna, which, for anyone unaware, is an area in western Ukraine. That includes Gaul, Portugal and Galilee. If anyone here thinks that that is a bad joke, they now have the chance to familiarize themselves with this pseudo-scientific pearl of wisdom. I personally know a young man from Ukraine who used those so-called “textbooks” at school, and he told me that he moved to Russia in part because he could no longer endure such insanity. That is genuine remoulding of the brain of the kind that unscrupulous Western defenders of Ukraine attribute to Russia. But some Council members have no interest in that. It seems that they have a kind of switch in their heads that turns off their consciousness when they hear such things.

We note that the United States has been consistently and deliberately politicizing the work of the Security Council from the first day of its current presidency, as it seeks to shore up the priorities of the outgoing Democratic Administration, which just lost the election. Yesterday we saw an attempt to impose a provocative anti-government narrative on the meeting requested by Syria by inviting a briefer from the notorious White Helmets non-governmental organization (see S/PV.9798). Today in the Chamber we have been obliged to listen once again to hackneyed and oft-refuted falsehoods about Russia’s alleged

abductions of Ukrainian children. The United States and its satellites clearly decided to take that story out of mothballs to shift the focus from its recent escalatory steps, which are designed to aggravate and expand the geography of the Ukrainian conflict and risk causing a direct clash between nuclear Powers. I am referring to the permission to use long-range army tactical missile systems and Storm Shadow missiles for strikes deep into our territory, which fundamentally changes the nature of the conflict. However, they will have to discuss that at a separate meeting that we have requested for 20 December specifically for that purpose.

Going on the American presidency’s intentions, it is obvious that today’s meeting is supposed to have a strong emotional impact, because no one can remain indifferent to the fate of innocent children. And the fact that our colleagues are unable to provide documentation backing up their allegations, because they are conscious, purposeful lies, does not bother any of the ringleaders of today’s meeting. Nor are they deterred by the fact that a number of facts that are important for assessing the situation in the area of child protection in the context of the Ukrainian crisis were not included in the statements by the organizers of today’s meeting and will likely not be included in the statements to be made by our Western colleagues. Let me try to rectify that shortcoming, since we are meeting here today.

Indeed, in any conflict, children are one of the most vulnerable segments of the population, and there is no question that they need to be protected. However, we must not approach this topic selectively. We must not forget that the issues related to the protection of children in Ukraine began shortly after the anti-constitutional coup d’état on the Maidan in February 2014, when the nationalist and neo-Nazi regime in Kyiv, which came to power with Western support, turned against the country’s Russian-speaking population, including its children. Those children and their parents were not only denied the right to speak and study in their native language, but attempts were also made to deprive them of their national, religious and historical identity and to brainwash them. Why are none of the self-appointed experts on the topic of children mentioning that today?

The new authorities have stooped very low in an effort to achieve their goals. To see that one must only visit the Alley of Angels in Donetsk, where a monument to the children of Donbas who died at the hands of nationalists has been erected. According to approximate data, since 2014, more than 24,000 Donbas

children have been affected by Ukrainian shelling. Approximately 300 children have been killed and 1,000 have been injured. Between 2014 and September 2022, approximately 1,600 children disappeared without a trace in the Kyiv-controlled territories of Donbas. Since the beginning of 2022, the structures of the Kyiv regime have removed approximately 65,000 children from the Donbas, Kherson and Zaporizhzhya regions, whose whereabouts are unknown. Even now, against the will of their parents, many of whom prefer to wait for the Russian military and end up in Russia, children are regularly forcibly removed from the regions under the control of Kyiv, many of whom are then lost. Of course, we will not hear a word about that shameful situation today.

Nor will our Western colleagues tell us about the return from Ukraine, on 22 November, of 46 inhabitants of the Kursk region whom the Ukrainian armed forces had forcibly removed during their failed incursion into that peaceful Russian region, in which Ukrainian militants showed their true colours by killing and raping civilians and looting their belongings there. We cited those specific facts at the two informal Arria formula meetings in August and September. Among those who returned were 12 children, including one newborn and one child under the age of three. No one in this Chamber will mention that, because all those facts are unflattering for Ukraine, and therefore, they are carefully censored and repeatedly replaced with unsubstantiated accusations against Russia.

For example, the allegations that Ukrainian children are being abducted by Russia are being used by Kyiv and its Western sponsors as a bait-and-switch. The Russian authorities are evacuating children from the war zone in full compliance with their obligations under international humanitarian law and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The absolute majority of children arrived in Russia together with their parents or other relatives. They were fleeing shelling by the Ukrainian armed forces. In the host and reception centres, we control and collect information on the people who arrive, including minors. If a family is separated for one reason or another, the Office of the Commissioner for Children's Rights has a clear algorithm for reuniting the children with relatives. That has been happening consistently and openly since the beginning of the special military operation. Received requests are processed quickly. People receive assistance with the submission of documents. Russia is carrying out that

work in cooperation with the International Committee of the Red Cross, Qatar and the Vatican.

With the help of Qatar, a working channel of communication has been established with the Ukrainian side to exchange information, verify data and coordinate family reunifications. Since October 2023, with the assistance of Doha, significant progress has been made in family reunifications. On 28 November, seven more children were reunited with their relatives in Ukraine.

There are no adoption programmes in Russia for children from the area of the special military operation. Orphans and children without relatives have been placed only under the temporary preliminary guardianship or temporary custody of Russian citizens. Nor is there any basis for the allegations of forced naturalization of Ukrainian children. The decree on the streamlined Russian citizenship procedure, which is usually referred to when that accusation is made, makes it possible to obtain Russian citizenship on humanitarian grounds. It does not require the renunciation of Ukrainian citizenship, but it allows individuals to receive social support measures provided for under federal and regional law and accelerates access to new opportunities, such as enrolment in educational institutions in Russia.

Other accusations are also being made, which, owing to their absurdity and inconsistency, we see no point in dwelling on them today, especially since the evidence put forward by those who are trying to smear Russia does not hold water. In that regard, minors who had allegedly been abducted by Russia have been suddenly found in European countries. For example, 160 Ukrainian children, whose removal Kyiv had hastened to accuse Russia of, were recently found in Germany.

All the information we have mentioned is publicly available. However, since those facts are inconvenient for the collective West and its Ukrainian underlings, they are consistently ignored. But we have gotten used to that, because the United States and its satellites are not interested in the truth. They are interested only in accusations against Russia, and no one is going to prove the veracity of those accusations. Nevertheless, I hope that sensible colleagues on the Council will take note of at least some of what I have mentioned today. Furthermore, I would like to express the hope that the United States delegation, which has brazenly assumed the role today of protector of Ukrainian children, will hold a similar Security Council meeting, before the end

of its presidency, on the children of Gaza, where more than 17,000 children have already died.

The main and, in fact, the only threat to Ukrainian children comes from the actions of the Kyiv regime, which sees them as nothing more than future cannon fodder to be used when the older Ukrainians, forcibly sent by Kyiv's expired ringleader to a senseless meat grinder, have died for Western geopolitical interests and for those who are backing the war until the last Ukrainian, pushing to send more and more forcibly mobilized people there. At the rate at which Ukraine is losing on the battlefield now, it will soon be the children's turn. That is exactly what Hitler did when he was in his bunker and entrusted the defence of Berlin to the Hitler Youth, among others. Hitler's accomplices are today considered heroes in Ukraine. We urge those who have claimed today that they care about the children of Ukraine not to allow the talentless actor Zelenskyy to sacrifice the lives of young Ukrainians to save his own skin.

**Mr. Fernandes** (Mozambique): Mozambique thanks the United States for convening this meeting. We also thank the briefers for their insights on the subject matter. We welcome the representative of Ukraine at this meeting.

We remain deeply concerned by the deterioration and unprecedented escalation of the conflict in Ukraine, where the situation continues to worsen day after day. As we see no encouraging signs of halting on the horizon, the humanitarian consequences are increasingly distressing. The conflict's progression is particularly challenging as the region approaches the harsh winter months which will inevitably exacerbate the already dire living conditions of affected populations.

Children and women are the most vulnerable, bearing the devastating brunt of this protracted conflict in Ukraine. Reports of violations of children's rights are profoundly tragic. Children killed, injured, missing, forcibly displaced, sexually abused, malnourished and systematically deprived of essential healthcare and educational services underscore the conflict's devastating humanitarian impact.

We therefore call on the parties to ensure the protection of civilians, in particular women and children, and to fulfil their obligations under international humanitarian law and international human rights law. The principles of distinction, precaution and proportionality must be strictly observed by all

parties to the conflict. At this critical juncture, any miscalculation could potentially precipitate a global catastrophic situation.

As the conflict drags on, its negative consequences on innocent civilians become increasingly profound and irreversible. As the warring parties allocate more resources and place strategic emphasis on military solutions, the prospect of genuine peace becomes increasingly elusive.

Mozambique consequently advocates for a comprehensive political and negotiated resolution as the only viable way to end this conflict and establish a foundation for lasting and sustainable peace between the two countries. We reiterate our call for the immediate cessation of hostilities and the return to direct negotiations between the parties.

**Mr. Montalvo Sosa** (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank the briefers for their informative presentations.

We are approaching the threshold of three years since the beginning of the conflict in Ukraine. During that time, the humanitarian crisis has only worsened. The escalation of violence, coupled with the use of increasingly lethal weapons, multiplies the risks of escalation, with unpredictable consequences. At the centre of that tragedy, the civilian population, especially the most vulnerable, continue to bear the brunt of a war they did not choose.

As we heard today, children in Ukraine face an unprecedented crisis. More than 2,400 children have been killed or injured since the conflict began, which equates to 16 child casualties every week. Similarly, reports regarding the deportation of Ukrainian children are alarming. The destruction of schools and health facilities has deprived millions of children of fundamental rights, such as education and medical care. Shortages of essential resources, such as clean water and electricity, expose children to serious diseases, especially with the onset of winter. Millions of children face a future marked by prolonged displacement, insecurity and psychological trauma. In eastern Ukraine, communities have been living under the shadow of violence for nearly a decade. There is an entire generation of children and young people who know war as their only reality.

The parties must comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law and international human rights law and take all necessary precautions

to avoid harm to civilians and civilian objects. The international community must redouble its efforts to ensure a sustained and coordinated humanitarian response that prioritizes the most vulnerable. That includes strengthening essential services such as mental health, psychosocial and legal support, particularly for children and women who have suffered irreparable trauma. Ecuador recognizes the efforts of UNICEF and other humanitarian actors who, in the midst of complex circumstances, have continued to provide vital assistance to children and civilians affected by the conflict. Likewise, Ecuador appreciates the efforts of Ukraine and friendly countries to promote initiatives that allow for the safe return of deported and displaced children. The implementation of Ukraine's joint plan to prevent grave violations of children's rights is fundamental to protect children from the impacts of war.

While children warrant special consideration for their best interests, we could equally devote entire meetings to discussing the consequences of the conflict for women, the elderly, people with reduced mobility and other vulnerable groups. We could analyse its impacts on food and energy security or the effect on international supply chains. We could also reflect on the risks of an escalation that compromises international stability and peace.

All these interconnected factors highlight the urgency of ending this war. We urge the parties to commit to a good-faith political and diplomatic process oriented towards peace and to avoid actions or speeches that aggravate tensions or increase the risks of a wider confrontation.

We call upon the international community and especially the Council, to intensify efforts to pave the way for a just and lasting peace that respects the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine and assures the children of Ukraine and the region that tragedies such as this will not be repeated.

Respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of States is a sacred principle for Ecuador. We therefore call on the Russian Federation to comply with the ruling of the International Court of Justice and to withdraw its troops from Ukrainian territory in order to move towards the ultimate goal of peace on the basis of the Charter of the United Nations.

**Mr. Koudri** (Algeria) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, my country's delegation would like to thank

Ms. Catherine Russell, Executive Director of UNICEF, for her valuable briefing. We also listened carefully to the briefings delivered by the civil society representatives.

We meet here today to discuss the situation in Ukraine, which, unfortunately, continues to witness an armed conflict and further escalation. It is unfortunate that the only noted dynamics are those governed by the logic of polarization and confrontation.

The intensification of the conflict in Ukraine has led to further losses in human lives, especially among civilians and innocent children. Childhood is considered a synonym of happiness and liveliness throughout the world. Children represent hope and a bright future. The children in Ukraine and other areas of conflict in the world, who are the victims of those conflicts, must not be excluded from enjoying their basic right of living in security and safety.

In the light of the current situation, my country's delegation stresses the utmost importance of protecting children in armed conflict. All parties to a conflict must abide by international law, including international humanitarian law, and provide sufficient protection and support to children, including psychosocial and social support, so that they are able to recover from the impact of the conflict and build a better future. My country's delegation also stresses the need to guarantee the basic rights of children, including their right to health and education, regardless of security conditions.

Targeting civilians, including children, and civilian infrastructure, especially energy facilities, as winter approaches, is forbidden by international law and must be fully avoided. Protecting children in armed conflict is an investment in building a safer and more stable future, as children are tomorrow's citizens, and protecting them from grave violations contributes to building peaceful societies.

In conclusion, Algeria once again appeals to all parties to favour a diplomatic approach and engage in a genuine dialogue that could lead to putting an end to the conflict once and for all. We firmly believe that holding a constructive and inclusive dialogue and undertaking serious negotiations are the key to reaching a peaceful solution, in line with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations. Moreover, the parties' security concerns must be addressed. The international community must therefore spare no effort in creating the conditions conducive to achieving that end and facilitating dialogue between the relevant parties.



**Mr. De Rivière** (France) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank Ms. Russell, Mr. Raymond and Ms. Rashevskaya for their briefings.

For almost three years now, Russia has been waging an illegal war of aggression against Ukraine, which has entailed unacceptable suffering for Ukrainian children. According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, more than 12,000 civilians have been killed and almost 27,000 have been wounded since 24 February 2022. More than 4 million people have been displaced, and more than 14 million people are in need of assistance. Among all those victims were tens of thousands of children. Russia has committed war crimes against them, such as the missile strike on the Okhmatdyt Children's Hospital on 8 July. Such acts led to Russia being mentioned in the annex to the annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2024/384). When Russia's indiscriminate strikes hit Ukraine's residential areas, energy infrastructure, hospitals and schools, they deny the country's children access to essential services. They harm their future: UNESCO estimates that 4,163 educational facilities have been damaged since the war began.

France condemns the forcible transfer of Ukrainian children to the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine and their illegal deportation to Russia, which is subjecting them to a policy of forcible assimilation. France demands that Russia return Ukrainian children to their families, legal guardians and communities. We remain committed to securing that return and supporting the efforts and mediation undertaken to that end, including by the International Coalition for the Return of Ukrainian Children, which is co-chaired by Canada and Ukraine. In that connection, we welcome the recently held Ministerial Conference on the Human Dimension of the Peace Formula, held in Montreal. France is pursuing efforts to take in Ukrainian children and ensure that they have access to education and healthcare. Our contribution to UNICEF for 2024 includes €1 million earmarked for the reconstruction and the running of two centres for the protection of children's rights, in Kharkiv and Dnipro.

France condemns the war crimes committed in Ukraine. The perpetrators must not go unpunished. We reaffirm our support for the International Criminal Court and the Ukrainian courts to ensure that they are held to account. The work of the International Independent Investigation Commission on Ukraine

remains essential. France welcomes the successful completion of the process of Ukraine's ratification of the Rome Statute on 25 October. France remains committed to upholding international humanitarian law and international human rights law, in particular with respect to children. Upholding those rights is an integral part of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace, in accordance with the resolutions adopted by the General Assembly.

**Mr. Yamazaki** (Japan): I thank the United States for convening this important meeting. I would also like to thank Ms. Russell, Mr. Raymond and Ms. Rashevskaya for their sobering briefings.

It has been more than 1,000 days since Russia began its aggression against the sovereign nation of Ukraine, violating the Charter of the United Nations. Russia's unprovoked aggression continues to devastate the lives of Ukrainian children. More than 12,000 civilians have been killed, including more than 600 children, since February 2022. Tragically, the actual death toll is likely to be much higher than those confirmed numbers. We are extremely outraged by the growing number of widespread and large-scale missile and drone attacks by Russia in all Ukrainian regions, which have caused devastating damage and casualties. The situation has now reached another phase, as Democratic People's Republic of Korea's troops have been deployed to Russia and are now engaged in combat against Ukraine. We once again condemn in the strongest terms the unlawful, unjustified and unacceptable military cooperation between Russia and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

Russia's attacks on critical civilian infrastructure are deplorable and cannot be tolerated; they are seriously affecting Ukrainian children, who deserve to live in dignity and grow up in a safe environment, surrounded by friends and family and without fear. It is horrifying that at least 580 medical facilities, including children's hospitals, have been attacked. In addition to the casualties among medical personnel and patients that those attacks cause, it is reprehensible that first responders face grave danger and the threat of secondary strikes while providing aid and conducting rescues. In particular, the use of explosive weapons and ordnance, including landmines, in populated areas has dire consequences for child safety and infrastructure in the short and long terms. Those weapons are the main cause of child casualties, restrict children's access to

humanitarian assistance and impede the reconstruction of infrastructure critical for children, such as schools.

In that regard, my delegation is profoundly distressed by Russia's continuous disregard for international law, including international humanitarian law. Attacks against civilians and civilian objects are clearly prohibited by international humanitarian law. The international community will not tolerate impunity for those responsible, and the perpetrators of violations of international humanitarian law and all other heinous acts must be identified and held accountable. Thousands of educational facilities have been damaged or destroyed, and an entire generation of children is being deprived of proper education as Russian attacks have driven schools online or underground, in shelters. Education serves as a cornerstone for the future of Ukraine. Ensuring educational access for children affected by the war is therefore critical. Japan has partnered with UNICEF to support continued learning for children, including those in front-line areas. In 2024 alone, Japan contributed \$7.95 million to UNICEF and \$14.6 million to UNESCO for multisectoral support targeting conflict-affected children, women and communities in Ukraine.

The international community should continue joint efforts to support the vulnerable, including children, who suffer injustice. We reiterate that Russia must immediately cease its aggression and withdraw from Ukraine to ensure that children in Ukraine can receive a safe education and enjoy their rights. Japan also strongly condemns child abductions by Russia. We urge Russia to repatriate abducted children to reunite them with their loved ones immediately.

Adding to their suffering, children in Ukraine are experiencing a harsh winter, under attack by Russia's aggression. The targeted devastation of Ukraine's energy infrastructure gives rise to profound concerns regarding the severity of the winter, which may surpass all previous hardships endured since the onset of the aggression. In that regard, last month, Japan provided power-related equipment, such as one gas turbine unit, 15 units of variable-frequency drives for water pump facilities, two gas-piston cogeneration units and 32 small generator units. Japan will continue its support to restore and enhance the supply of electricity and heating to help the people of Ukraine, including children, endure the severe winter.

Once again, Japan reiterates its strong solidarity with the Ukrainian people and will uphold its commitments to support the country. Japan will continue to stand with Ukraine and firmly advocate for the protection of children in Ukraine.

**Ms. Persaud (Guyana):** I thank the Executive Director of UNICEF, Ms. Catherine Russell, and Mr. Raymond and Ms. Rashevskaya for their briefings.

Guyana commends the focus of today's meeting on the plight of children in Ukraine. We deeply regret that this war continues to have devastating consequences for millions of children, not only robbing them of the joys of childhood but also impacting their futures. Hundreds have already lost their lives, while many more have been injured, displaced or forced to face an uncertain future. Living each day in constant fear while enduring relentless hostilities, prolonged displacement and severe shortages of essential resources, including safe water, electricity and other necessities, children in Ukraine have already paid too high a price on account of this war.

As attacks against critical civilian infrastructure continue to intensify, so too does the suffering that children are forced to bear. Disrupted water, heating and electricity services have left more than 1.7 million children across Ukraine without safe water, while 3.4 million lack access to centralized sanitation, thereby heightening their risk of disease amid plummeting temperatures. Attacks in populated areas have caused large numbers of child casualties and injuries. When will it end?

Every boy and every girl has the right to a life without fear or want; it is no different for children in Ukraine. They have not asked for this war but will be forced to carry its trauma and scars well into adulthood. Guyana deplores the high toll that the war has taken on the lives of innocent men, women and children and continues to call for an immediate end to the hostilities and to all attacks against civilians and civilian objects.

We have noted that, despite professed respect for international humanitarian law, schools and hospitals continue to be targeted by missile strikes with seeming impunity. The United Nations has reported that at least 1,496 educational institutions and 662 health facilities have been damaged or destroyed since Russia's invasion of Ukraine almost three years ago. That does not augur well for children's access to education and health services.

Moreover, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has documented human rights violations against civilians of all ages, including cases of arbitrary detention, torture, summary executions, sexual violence, transfers and deportations of children. Guyana condemns all such violations. We continue to call for full accountability and for the parties to the conflict to comply with their obligations under international law, including those applicable to them under the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, as well as the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949 and the Protocols Additional of 1977. We also call on the Russian Federation to provide access to the United Nations to the temporarily controlled or occupied territories of Ukraine so that allegations of grave violations against children in those areas can be verified.

Guyana thanks UNICEF for the valuable work in support of the children in Ukraine. We also commend the international community for its response to the growing humanitarian needs and support for the victims. We maintain that the only path to lasting peace is through de-escalation and diplomacy. We urge the United Nations and all Member States to channel efforts into silencing the drums of war and building lasting peace. The lives of millions of children hang in the balance. They are counting on us to have the courage to take the necessary steps to bring them back from the abyss into which they have been thrown.

In conclusion, I reiterate Guyana's call for lasting peace in Ukraine and pledge our continued support to all efforts aimed at a peaceful and sustainable end to this war.

**Mrs. Baeriswyl** (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): I too would also like to begin by thanking the Executive Director of UNICEF, Ms. Catherine Russell, and the two civil society representatives, Mr. Raymond and Ms. Rashevskaya, for their briefings.

We just heard today, as we have so many times before, that the difference between a childhood experienced in a time of peace and one experienced in a time of war defines an entire life. In Ukraine, hundreds of thousands of children live in conflict situations. Many of them are affected by destruction, displacement, separation from family members and friends and the disruption of education and health systems. More than 2,406 children have been killed

or injured since February 2022 in Ukraine. According to UNICEF, at least 16 more are added to that number every week. I maintain that children must be protected and must never be targeted.

In the context of our known positions on Russia's military aggression against Ukraine, we raise the following points with regard to the protection of children.

First, children are paying a heavy price for the ongoing attacks on civilian infrastructure. Time and again, homes, schools, hospitals and energy infrastructure have been damaged, destroyed or even targeted in this war. Yet international humanitarian law prohibits attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure. Children, being particularly vulnerable, are entitled to special protection at all times. That is even more relevant as Ukrainian children face prolonged displacement and severe shortages of essential goods and services.

Secondly, the war permanently changes the lives of an entire generation of children. Many children spend the equivalent of six hours a day sheltering in basements under air raid sirens. We wish to echo UNICEF's concern that war does not play out only on the battlefield, but also in the lives of families and in the immense resilience it demands of parents and their children in Ukraine.

Thirdly, Switzerland is deeply concerned about the unlawful deportations and transfers of Ukrainian children within the occupied territories and to Russia, as documented by the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine. Many parents do not know where their children are or how to contact them. Unlawful deportations and transfers constitute serious violations of the Fourth Geneva Convention and war crimes. With regard to the arrest warrants issued by the International Criminal Court in that respect, Switzerland reiterates its support for the Court and stresses that the independence of that judicial institution must be respected. We deplore all forms of threats or measures taken against the Court, its officials and those who cooperate with it.

International law, including international humanitarian law and human rights law, grants special protection to children. Children must be protected in all circumstances and their rights must be respected. The best way to protect children is with peace. Switzerland reiterates its call on Russia to immediately cease all hostilities and withdraw its troops from the entire

territory of Ukraine. At the same time, we support all initiatives aimed at promoting peace, in accordance with international law, including the Charter of the United Nations, and reiterate our support for the Secretary-General in exercising his good offices in support of diplomatic solutions.

In conclusion, I would like to amplify the voice of a mother from Dnipro:

“Every day of the past 1,000 days has been a struggle to protect my children. I simply want them to feel safe and warm and have a place to call home”.

Let us do everything in our power to ensure that children and their parents in Ukraine can finally live in peace and build a secure future.

**Mr. Geng Shuang** (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I would like to thank the Executive Director of UNICEF, Ms. Russell, as well as the other two briefers, for their insights.

The crisis in Ukraine continues to drag on. The fighting on the ground has intensified, posing the risk of an escalation and expansion of the crisis. Much of the major infrastructure in the conflict zones has been damaged to varying degrees. People are facing a serious lack of supplies and difficulties in ensuring basic public services, including water, heating and electricity. With the onset of another winter, the local population, especially children and other vulnerable groups, are about to face the dual challenge of a hot conflict and a cold winter, and the humanitarian situation is worrisome. China once again calls on the parties to the conflict to comply strictly with international humanitarian law, make every effort to ensure the safety of civilians and civilian infrastructure, abide scrupulously by resolution 1261 (1999) and work to strengthen the protection of children in armed conflict effectively.

Children are the most innocent victims of armed conflict. The ultimate way to protect and preserve them in armed conflict is to end and resolve those conflicts so that they can be spared the scourge of war. To that end, we must first and foremost promote the de-escalation of the conflict in Ukraine. As we speak, an increasing number and variety of weapons with growing lethal capability are entering the battlefield there. That is deeply worrisome and disturbing. We call on both parties to the conflict to exercise calm and restraint, push for de-escalation as soon as possible and avoid causing further damage and suffering.

Secondly, we must achieve a ceasefire and a cessation of hostilities. Ceasefires are the only way to protect civilians and prevent further bloodshed. At the moment, the international community's discussions on the Ukraine crisis are increasingly geared towards negotiations and to moving closer to peace. We call on both parties to the conflict to respond positively to the international community's call for peace, demonstrate political will, meet each other halfway and initiate peace talks as soon as possible. We call on the international community to provide support for that, create the conditions that can enable it to happen and work together to maximize peace efforts and foster synergy towards peace talks.

Thirdly, we must restore a lasting peace. The Ukraine crisis is the culmination of security tensions in Europe that have all ignited simultaneously. The key to achieving a final settlement still lies in upholding the principle of the indivisibility of security, as well as in building a balanced, effective and sustainable European security architecture and thereby restoring lasting peace and stability to the European continent.

China has always maintained a consistent position on the issue of Ukraine. We have always stood on the side of peace and dialogue and been committed to facilitating peace talks and seeking a political solution. Since the outbreak of the conflict, we have laid out a four-point proposal about what must be done to achieve a political solution, in addition to issuing position papers in that regard and working with Brazil and other global South countries to launch the “Friends for Peace” group on the Ukraine crisis at the United Nations. We are ready to continue working with the international community to support peace efforts and contribute to a political settlement of the crisis.

**Ms. Gatt** (Malta): I too would like to thank Executive Director Russell, Mr. Raymond and Ms. Rashevskaya for their sobering briefings.

The ongoing conflict in Ukraine represents one of the gravest humanitarian crises of our time, with children bearing a disproportionate burden of its devastating consequences. As we heard from the briefers, the numbers speak for themselves. What particularly struck me personally was the statistic that two children are killed every day. Every day, the toll on children is immense. They are being robbed of their childhood. It is imperative for the international community to prioritize their protection and ensure



that their voices and needs remain at the forefront of all discussions and actions. The immense suffering endured by the youngest and most vulnerable members of Ukrainian society underscores the urgent need to uphold international humanitarian law and human rights law. That responsibility is grounded in international frameworks such as the Safe Schools Declaration and the Paris and Vancouver Principles, which prioritize the protection of children in armed conflict and demand our concerted efforts to safeguard their rights and future.

Malta calls for immediate and coordinated international action to address the deportation and displacement of Ukrainian children. We stress the importance of family tracing, reunification and ensuring unhindered access to humanitarian aid for affected children. Furthermore, Malta strongly condemns any coercion exerted on children and parents in areas of Ukraine temporarily controlled or occupied by the Russian Federation to enrol in schools following the Russian curriculum. Such actions undermine children's cultural and educational rights. We are also deeply concerned about the ongoing killing and maiming of children, as well as the devastating impact of explosive weapons with wide-area effects, particularly in populated areas. We want to highlight the life-altering consequences of mines, especially for children, which is why 160 countries have signed the Anti-Personnel Mine-Ban Convention. Furthermore, the continued targeting and military use of schools and hospitals constitute grave violations against children and must be clearly condemned. They exacerbate the suffering of Ukraine's children and hinder their access to safety, education and healthcare.

Malta urges the Russian Federation to grant the United Nations immediate and unfettered access to areas of Ukraine temporarily under its control or occupation. That access is critical to ensuring the protection of children and the provision of necessary humanitarian support. We remain steadfast in our commitment to upholding international law and safeguarding the rights of children in Ukraine during this conflict. We once again stress the need for full accountability for all crimes committed by Russia in Ukraine. In particular, in that context, we refer to the arrest warrants issued by the International Criminal Court for the war crime of the unlawful deportation and transfer of Ukrainian children.

In the context of today's discussion, we strongly call for a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in Ukraine,

in line with the Charter of the United Nations. We will support all efforts aimed at achieving that goal. Until then, Ukraine has a right to defend itself under Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations. Children everywhere, including in Ukraine, have a right to grow up unhindered by the scourge of war. In that spirit, we once more call on the Russian Federation to immediately end the war it started and to withdraw all its troops and military equipment from the entire territory of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders.

**Ms. Karim** (Sierra Leone): I would like to thank you, Madam President, for convening this meeting. I also thank Ms. Russell, Executive Director of UNICEF, Mr. Raymond, of the Yale School of Public Health's Humanitarian Research Lab, and Ms. Rashevskva, Legal Expert at the Regional Centre for Human Rights, for their insightful and sobering briefings. I welcome the participation of the representative of Ukraine in today's meeting.

UNICEF's reports on the war in Ukraine indicate that as of 18 November, at least 2,406 children have become casualties, including 659 killed and 1,747 injured. That amounts to an average of 16 children killed or injured every week, or at least two child casualties every day. It is reported that children have been killed in their beds, in hospitals and in playgrounds, leaving families devastated by the loss of young lives or by their life-altering injuries. Children in the Donbas region across eastern Ukraine have now endured more than 10 years of conflict, a good proportion of them for their entire lives. Such violations against children are unconscionable and unacceptable.

Millions of children across Ukraine are living in constant fear as they endure relentless hostilities, prolonged displacement and severe shortages of essential resources, including clean water, electricity and other necessities. Sierra Leone is also deeply concerned about the fact that the relentless bombing and shelling not only account for 99 per cent of all child casualties but also force children to live in constant fear, with a profound impact on their mental health and welfare, with some 1.5 million children displaying signs of mental health issues. The trauma affecting those children is compounded by grief at the loss of loved ones, separations from family, friends and familiar routines and prolonged displacement from their homes. The Executive Director of UNICEF, Ms. Catherine Russell, has also reported that millions of children in

Ukraine are spending an equivalent of up to six hours a day sheltering in basements under air raid sirens.

In addition to casualties, the conflict has caused widespread damage and destruction to vital civilian infrastructure, including homes, schools, hospitals and energy facilities. Constant attacks on energy infrastructure have decimated power generation, leaving millions of families with limited electricity, heating, water and sanitation services. Approximately 1.7 million children are without safe water, and 3.4 million lack access to centralized sanitation, heightening their risk of disease amid plummeting temperatures. As Ukraine approaches its third tough winter, Sierra Leone is deeply concerned that the repeated attacks on energy infrastructure will result in further disruption of essential services such as water, gas and heating. Over the past 1,000 days, at least 1,496 educational institutions and numerous health facilities have been damaged or destroyed, according to United Nations data. Increased attacks against and damage to energy facilities, resulting in frequent and unpredictable electricity cuts, have further disrupted learning for the millions of children who are enrolled in online learning.

Access to health has also been severely impacted, with 66 World Health Organization-verified attacks on healthcare facilities in Ukraine from August to September. More than half of health centres have been rendered non-functional in some parts of the east and south. In Donetsk oblast, the relocation of health facilities to other parts of the country has posed serious challenges with regard to healthcare access in the region. To make matters worse, humanitarian access to the occupied territories remains fully constrained, with up to 850,000 children in occupied areas of the Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhzhya and Kherson regions beyond the reach of assistance.

Sierra Leone commends UNICEF, alongside its local partners, and other humanitarian agencies for their continued response to the specific needs of the most vulnerable children close to the front lines and those displaced from their childhood homes. The response embeds recovery efforts, where feasible, so that children are given the best possible chance to survive and thrive again.

Sierra Leone reiterates that all parties to the conflict must respect international humanitarian law and human rights law in Ukraine and end grave violations against

children. Children must be protected from harm, including by taking the necessary precautions to spare them from attacks. Attacks on energy infrastructure and other civilian infrastructure on which children rely — such as health facilities, schools, social services and heating systems — must cease. We wish to emphasize the recommendations, including from UNICEF, to ensure the protection of children. Sierra Leone urges all parties to refrain from operating in and around civilian infrastructure, including water and sanitation systems, health facilities and schools. Military operations around nuclear sites and other critical civilian infrastructure are unacceptable and contrary to international humanitarian law. Schools and hospitals should not be used by parties to conflict, even if they no longer function.

Civilians must be allowed safe and unhindered passage to safe areas without discrimination and with their humanitarian needs met, wherever they are. Evacuations for humanitarian purposes must be a life-saving measure of last resort that is voluntary and based on a free and well-informed choice. Temporary evacuations of children, which are subject to strict conditions under international humanitarian law, should be done only with the consent of parents or legal guardians and monitoring and tracking mechanisms for those children must be maintained. The best interests of children separated from their families or guardians, across front lines or international borders, must be respected and upheld. Parties should facilitate family tracing and reunification and enable the return and reintegration of unaccompanied and separated children through engagement with UNICEF and other specialized agencies.

Finally, I re-echo the words of Munir Mammadzade, the UNICEF representative to Ukraine:

“No child should live in constant fear for their safety. Attacks on populated areas must stop and children in Ukraine protected wherever they are, from homes to schools and playgrounds.”

**Dame Barbara Woodward** (United Kingdom): I start by thanking the Executive Director of UNICEF, Ms. Russell, Mr. Raymond and Ms. Rashevskaya for their very powerful briefings.

For more than 1,000 days, Ukrainian civilians have had their rights to life, liberty and security threatened as a result of Russia's full-scale invasion. Ukrainian children have borne the brunt of it, spending days in

shelters rather than in classrooms or playgrounds. Earlier this year, the United Nations reported that children in front-line areas had spent up to 5,000 hours, or seven months, underground. In less than three years, nearly 2,500 children have been killed or injured — that is at least 16 children each week. I met some of them during my visit last year. Millions of children — each child with a name, a face, a dream of the future — continue to suffer due to the ongoing attacks and occupation. Their homes, schools, playgrounds and even hospitals have had their heat and energy cut off and, in many cases, have been destroyed. Russia's attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure are illegal. Members of the Security Council have repeatedly called on Russia to cease those attacks, and yet they continue.

On top of that, Russia continues to deport and indoctrinate Ukrainian children. As an occupying Power, Russia has an obligation not to forcibly transfer or deport the Ukrainian civilian population from and within the occupied territory. Yet the Government of Ukraine reports that 19,000 Ukrainian children have been forcibly deported to Russia or temporarily Russian-occupied territories — a practice we saw previously in Crimea. An estimated 6,000 Ukrainian children have been relocated to re-education camps. In those camps and in schools within the temporarily occupied territories, Russian authorities subject children to indoctrination through use of a curriculum that rewrites history and, in some cases, involves military training. We are deeply concerned by reports that the Ukrainian children forcibly taken from Ukraine are being adopted in Russia. To strip children of their identity and their families in that way is a violation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and a systematic attempt to erase Ukrainian identity — and with it Ukraine's future. We thank the Humanitarian Research Lab at the Yale School of Public Health for its work in further uncovering the intentional and widespread coerced adoption of children from Ukraine, including 166 children placed directly with citizens of Russia.

We are determined to hold those responsible to account. The International Criminal Court has already issued indictments related to that crime, including against President Putin himself. It is not a humanitarian evacuation — it is a systematic erasure of Ukrainian culture, with significant obstacles put in place to prevent Ukrainian children being reunited with their families. We call on Russia to cease those deportations immediately, return all Ukrainian children home

and stop its attacks on children's homes, schools and the infrastructure that would keep them warm this winter — in short, to stop destroying childhood for Ukrainian children.

**The President:** I now give the floor to the representative of Ukraine.

**Ms. Zariivna (Ukraine):** I want to thank the United States presidency for convening this crucial discussion, as well as the other representatives and briefers for their remarks. Of course, that does not go to Russia; they do not belong here, from either a legal or a moral perspective. They have occupied the Soviet permanent seat and interpret that as license to invade sovereign States and brandish their nukes. Their imperial exhibitionism, threats and deceptions in the Council must finally come to an end.

Ukraine is at a critical juncture of the Russian aggression against it. The next six months could be decisive. Much depends on the determination of international partners. Change is possible. However, some things can no longer be changed. Russia will never be able to alter its authorship of the atrocities committed in Ukraine. Russia has written the future textbooks for historians, human rights defenders and lawyers worldwide, who will study evil in its modern manifestation. One of the most horrible and horrifying chapters in those future books will be the Russian crimes against Ukrainian children.

For two years now, a permanent Security Council member's army — Russia's — has been listed as a grave violator against children. Instead of safeguarding peace, Russia betrays the very principles it swore to protect. It must remain on that list of shame next year, and beyond, until its atrocities against Ukrainian children end. Russia will not call a war a war. They brand occupation as liberation. They dare call stealing our children an act of rescue. They also present terror attacks against residential areas as strikes on military targets. That is all in line with the Orwellian practices of the Russian State: war is peace; freedom is slavery. However, no matter how they twist words, the truth is devastating: Russia's aggression hits Ukrainian children the most.

Here is a heartbreaking statistic of this brutal war: at least 16 kids lose their lives or get wounded every week. Often, death finds them thousands of miles from the front lines. Think of it. Imagine being just 14 years old, only starting to live. Imagine having one's

own room, a private space at last. Imagine sitting by a window, dreaming, only to be gone a moment later. That is what happened in Kyiv in October. A Shahed missile slammed Mariyka Troyanivska's room on a high floor. It took her life in an instant. In Lviv, a Russian missile took four lives from one family: Evgenia Bazylevych and her three daughters were gone in a moment. The youngest, Emilia, was just six. We can hardly imagine their father's sorrow. Those were not military targets. Those were homes many kilometres away from the front lines. They were ordinary people, children. That was cold-blooded murder.

We are facing immense suffering and a profound violation of children's rights. It is not just murder; it is torture, sexual violence and the destruction of family life, homes, schools and safety. And let us be clear: we do not even know the full scale of this tragedy. Hundreds of thousands of children remain in Russian-controlled areas — out of reach to us or international bodies. Quite often, we know nothing about their fates. What we do know is horrifying. They might be buried under rubble, like those bombed in the Mariupol theatre, or like those simply waiting for a train to take them to safety at the Kramatorsk station in 2022. They could be wounded and lose limbs. That is not uncommon. According to United Nations agencies, there are nearly 2,000 such cases so far.

Sexual violence, including rape, is another grave threat. Among documented sexual crimes Russian military personnel committed against minors, the youngest victim was only four years old. Under occupation, victims have no access to medical care, no psychological support, no legal assistance. Unfortunately, we can only collect those facts after the liberation of those territories. Stories from Bucha, Irpin and Izium remain etched in our universal consciousness, another testament to Russia's true intent.

Beyond direct violence, Russia systematically destroys our children's future. In Kharkiv, our second-largest city, students attend classes underground. Sirens interrupt. Missiles force evacuations. Blackouts bring darkness. That is not learning. That is survival. According to Ukraine's Ministry of Education, nearly 4,000 educational institutions have been damaged. One out of 10 has been completely destroyed. Hospitals are not safe either. Let me remind the Council of something: In July, a Russian missile struck Okhmatdyt, our national children's hospital. For many of those children, this is the hospital of last hope. Hundreds of children

were inside: children fighting cancer; children in the middle of surgery; and children desperately needing treatment. They had to be rushed to shelters. Two doctors died while saving those children. The Russians have damaged or totally destroyed over 1,600 medical and healthcare facilities. That is not warfare. That is terror against the most vulnerable. Those are war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Because of the war, millions of Ukrainians, including children, have become refugees. That would never have happened without Russia's war of choice. But there is something even more sinister happening — the largest kidnapping campaign in modern history. Ukraine is searching for nearly 20,000 children who were subjected to illegal deportation and forced transfer. Yet the actual figure could be much higher. However, we cannot know for sure, as Russian officials systematically refuse to provide information. But to give members some idea, Russia's Commissioner for Children's Rights, Maria Lvova-Belova, has boasted about settling more than 700,000 Ukrainian children in Russia. Russia has designed a cruel journey of destruction for those children. First they destroy their identity. They are forbidden from speaking Ukrainian or from calling themselves Ukrainians. They are forced to sing the Russian national anthem. Some were in their mid-teens when the invaders came, and today Russia is forcibly mobilizing them, making them fight against their own country and sending them to kill their own people. The Geneva Conventions are clear. That is a war crime.

As we heard from the briefer, in its latest report the Yale Humanitarian Research Lab identifies 314 Ukrainian children who have been forcibly adopted by Russian families from occupied Donetsk and Luhansk. At least 67 of them have been forced to accept Russian citizenship. And that has been done elsewhere as well. Take the case of Marharyta Prokopenko. She was only 10 months old when she was forcibly deported from a Kherson children's home, suddenly taken from a hospital on the pretext that she needed a medical examination and separated from her sibling. Inna Varlamova, the wife of a Russian political leader, Sergey Mironov, arranged her transfer to Moscow. They adopted her illegally, changed her name and falsified her place of birth.

I would like to show the Council two documents. Here is Marharyta Prokopenko's real birth certificate. She is a Ukrainian child, born in Ukraine. And here is



what Russia did to her. It renamed her Maryna Mironova and claimed falsely that she was born in Russia. That is Russia's version of humanitarian law — wiping out children's existence. Picture this. A baby girl, unaware of who she was or where she was born — let me remind members that she was only 10 months old when all of this happened — is adopted not simply by a Russian family, but a family that is part of Russia's political leadership. Her place of birth is altered, her name changed and her identity destroyed. After that, what language will she speak when she grows up? What will she know about her roots? And what about her brother, 3-year-old Maksym? He was kidnapped, too, and we know nothing about his whereabouts. Nor do we know the whereabouts of about 50 young children stolen from the same children's home in Kherson. They too have been deported, torn away from safety, easily harassed and brainwashed, waiting to be returned. In Ukraine, host families and guardians are ready to embrace them.

Those are war crimes. The evidence is clear and documented by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine, the Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. That is why, on 17 March 2023, the International Criminal Court issued arrest warrants for President Putin and Commissioner Lvova-Belova. We call on Member States to execute those warrants and ensure accountability. Earlier this year, the Children's Rights Committee demanded that Russia disclose information about Ukrainian children taken to its territory. Like many previous demands, it was ignored.

Ukraine is determined to bring home every child who has been forcibly taken by Russia — every single one. We are not alone in that fight. Together with Canada, we established the International Coalition for the Return of Ukrainian Children, complementing the efforts made under President Zelenskyy's initiative Bring Kids Back UA. We now have 41 nations and the Council of Europe on board. They have joined our cause. Working together, we have brought 1,022 children back. The Montreal Ministerial Conference on the Human Dimension of Ukraine's Peace Formula produced the vital Montreal Pledge — a set of commitments focusing on returning all captured and deported Ukrainians, especially our children. We commend Qatar, the Holy See and South Africa for their willingness to mediate, but we need more help, more action and more

solidarity. We ask every nation that has not yet done so to join the Montreal Pledge, stand with these children and help them return. They are victims who deserve justice. After all, within these walls, justice must mean something real.

In the context of children and armed conflict, Ukraine has created a national prevention plan, leading to its unique joint prevention plan. The joint prevention plan was developed together with the United Nations, the first voluntary document of its kind under the children and armed conflict mandate. Ukraine appointed a Government national coordinator. Meanwhile, Russia is ignoring its obligations. We appreciate the work of Special Representative of the Secretary-General Gamba de Potgieter and her Office, UNICEF, other United Nations agencies and all child protection organizations. We are grateful to the representatives of more than 30 diplomatic missions in Ukraine for creating a group of friends to support Ukraine with the children and armed conflict mandate. But more must be done. We expect everyone to continue to press Russia to comply with its obligations as a violator of children's rights. Once again, Russia must be forced to meet its obligations under international law. It must be compelled to allow access to the occupied territories, stop its deportations and forced citizenship, end the political indoctrination of children, provide information about transferred children and cooperate to bring them home.

Russia understands only the language of force. Its aggression is wounding and tormenting our children. We therefore retain our legitimate right to defend ourselves by any lawful means. But while we are striving hard to end this war, any impunity will encourage the aggressor again and again. We therefore call on the international community to stop Russia and prevent any recurrence of its acts. We urge all those who have not yet joined us to actively engage in the efforts to bring a comprehensive, just and lasting peace to Ukraine based on the Charter of the United Nations.

And one last thing, since Russian representatives are still here, the case of the Kherson Children's Home is just one of many. Those kids had to hide in a church basement when Russia's army entered the city. And then members of the Federal Security Service found them and deported them. They know exactly where those children are. I call on them to stop tormenting them and bring the kids back to Ukraine.

**The President:** I now give the floor to the representative of Poland.

**Mr. Szczerski** (Poland): Let me start by thanking the delegation of the United States for convening this important briefing. I am also grateful to the Executive Director of UNICEF, Ms. Catherine Russell, and the civil society briefers, as well as to the representative of Ukraine for her statement, which was more of a testimony.

As a country whose families have borne the scars of the Second World War, including the murder and deportation of Polish children by Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, and as a proponent of the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child, Poland considers the protection and well-being of children a global imperative for the international community. It is utterly deplorable that Russia, a signatory to the Convention, not only fails to protect the rights of Ukrainian children but also actively violates them, deliberately disrupting their lives and jeopardizing their future.

Since the beginning of its aggression against Ukraine, Russia has repeatedly demonstrated blatant disregard for international humanitarian law and human rights law. Hundreds of Ukrainian children have been killed, thousands injured and countless more forced to flee their homes, including to Poland, having been previously separated from their lost families and friends. Across Ukraine, children live in constant fear of violence and the loss of loved ones.

The report of the Yale School of Public Health *Russia's Systematic Program of Coerced Adoption and Fostering of Ukraine's Children*, which we just heard about today, is devastating. Such actions are the essence of a colonial policy. Ukrainian children are being abducted and forcibly assimilated by Russians — to put it simply, Russified, which we know about from our history. Their identities are being erased and replaced with a new one, as we just heard. That is a glimpse of the worst horrors that were thought to be confined to the dark pages of the Second World War.

We unequivocally condemn the abduction of Ukrainian children as a grave war crime. All individuals involved in those heinous acts must be held accountable. The world must stand united in denouncing that senseless violence and providing unwavering support to the children of Ukraine.

We endorse the International Criminal Court's decision to issue arrest warrants for Vladimir Putin and Maria Lvova-Belova, Russia's Ombudsperson for Children's Rights, despite how cynical that sounds, for the deportation of children. We also express our strong support for initiatives such as the Bring Kids Back initiative and Working Group 4 of Ukraine's peace formula.

Poland welcomes the inclusion of the Russian armed forces and affiliated armed groups in the 2023 report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2023/363) as parties committing grave violations. We call on the international community to support Ukrainian initiatives to facilitate the return of Ukrainian children to their homes.

Poland stands steadfastly with Ukraine and its children. Since the start of Russia's invasion, Polish citizens, public administration and civil society have rallied to support Ukrainian refugees. While Russia abducts and forcibly assimilates Ukrainian children, Poland strives to assist Ukrainian refugee children in retaining and nurturing their national identity. They attend Polish schools where they can continue education in the Ukrainian language and enjoy the same social and health benefits as Polish citizens. We hope that, after the war, they will be able to return to their home country and to help rebuild it to make it even better.

**The President:** I now give the floor to Mrs. Samson.

**Mrs. Samson:** I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU) and its member States. The candidate countries North Macedonia, Montenegro, Albania, Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Georgia and the European Free Trade Association countries Iceland and Liechtenstein, members of the European Economic Area, as well as Andorra, Monaco and San Marino align themselves with this statement.

I thank the United States presidency for today's initiative. It serves as an important and necessary reminder that children are a major victim of Russia's aggression against Ukraine. I thank UNICEF Executive Director, Ms. Russell, and the civil society representatives for their briefings and their efforts to promote child protection in Ukraine.

We are deeply alarmed by the devastating impact of Russia's aggression on children. The numbers speak for themselves. According to the Office of the

United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, more than 2,200 children have been killed or injured since the start of the invasion. Thousands of schools across Ukraine have been damaged or destroyed. In July, Russia hit Ukraine's largest children's medical centre, Okhmatdyt hospital. Children are deeply affected by Russia's deliberate strikes on Ukrainian energy infrastructure.

The situation is so severe that in his report on Children and Armed Conflict (S/2023/363), the Secretary-General listed Russia's army and affiliated armed groups as responsible for committing grave violations against children in Ukraine. We reiterate our demand on Russia to uphold its obligations under international humanitarian and human rights law and urge it to work with the United Nations to develop an action plan to end and prevent grave violations against children.

We remain deeply concerned about the fate of all Ukrainian children forcibly transferred by Russia within the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine or unlawfully deported to Russia and Belarus. It is a blatant violation of international humanitarian law and human rights law, and the Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine concluded it amounts to war crimes. We condemn Russia's attempted re-education and indoctrination efforts, as well as the violation of the personal status of Ukrainian children, including nationality, identity, name and family relations, as documented also by the dedicated Moscow Mechanism report of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and other international monitoring mechanisms. The EU reiterates its urgent call on Russia and Belarus to immediately ensure their safe return to Ukraine and their reunification with parents or guardians, in full cooperation with the United Nations.

Russia and its leadership must be held fully accountable for waging that war of aggression and for other crimes under international law. We recall the six arrest warrants issued by the International Criminal Court, including those against President Putin and Commissioner for Children's Rights Lvova-Belova for the war crime of the unlawful deportation and transfer of Ukrainian children.

We commend the work of United Nations entities, such as UNICEF and the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, and their engagement with

Ukrainian authorities to strengthen the protection of children. We welcome the joint prevention plan signed by the Government of Ukraine with the United Nations to prevent grave violations against children. We also welcome initiatives to help bring Ukrainian children home to their families and communities, including the International Coalition for the Return of Ukrainian Children.

Last Sunday, on their first day in office, President of the European Council Costa, EU High Representative Kallas and Commissioner for Enlargement Kos travelled to Kyiv to demonstrate the EU's unwavering support to the Ukrainian people and their struggle for a just and lasting peace.

Children should not have to grow up in the midst of war. Children, whether Ukrainian or Russian, should not have to suffer the loss of their parents on the battlefields of Russia's aggression in Ukraine.

International law must prevail against Russia's unprovoked war of aggression. The aggressor must immediately, completely and unconditionally withdraw all its forces from the entire territory of Ukraine.

**The President:** I now give the floor to the representative of Latvia.

**Mr. Ilgis (Latvia):** I would like to thank the United States presidency for convening this important meeting and would like to address the Council on behalf of the three Baltic States — Estonia, Lithuania and my own country, Latvia.

We align ourselves with the statement just delivered on behalf of the European Union.

We thank all briefers for their valuable contributions and thank the Advisor to the Head of the Office of the President of Ukraine for her sobering and heartbreaking statement.

The ongoing full-scale invasion of Ukraine that began almost three years ago has had a devastating impact on the lives of millions of children, forcing them to endure unimaginable hardship and trauma. Russia's brutal war of aggression against its neighbour has robbed children of their childhoods, leaving them traumatized by violence, displacement and uncertainty.

Russia has learned that it cannot destroy Ukraine on the battlefield. It therefore purposely and systematically violates international law in an attempt to try to weaken the resilience of Ukrainians as its tactics.

Killing, forcibly transferring and deporting Ukrainian children is the most dreadful part of Russia's policy. More than 2,400 children have been reported killed or injured due to the war, while the actual numbers could be much higher. More than 20,000 Ukrainian children have been forcibly deported or transferred by Russia, subjected to illegal adoption and assimilation in Russia and elsewhere. Only around 1,000 children have been reunited with their families. Make no mistake, that is not just an unintended side effect of Russia's aggression, but a deliberate and integral tactic of Russia's warfare, aimed at erasing Ukraine's future. It is a war crime.

The Baltic States strongly condemn Russia and its accomplices for executing these horrible criminal acts. Urgent collective action is needed to stop Russia's atrocities and facilitate the immediate and safe return of all Ukrainian children. Furthermore, as members of the International Coalition for the Return of Ukrainian Children, the Baltic States call on all partners to join the Coalition.

We commend international efforts, especially those led by Qatar, to mediate the return of Ukrainian children who have been unlawfully deported or forcibly transferred by Russia. We also urge UNICEF and the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict to actively engage in the return of the deported Ukrainian children.

The international community must make every effort to demand accountability from Russia and its accomplices. The arrest warrants issued by the International Criminal Court in 2023 for Vladimir Putin and Maria Lvova-Belova were an important step towards bringing the perpetrators to justice. Russia and its leaders must be held accountable for the crime of aggression through an international tribunal that enjoys broad support and legitimacy. We also fully support and urge the international community to implement the binding order of the International Court of Justice to halt the military offensive by Russia against Ukraine.

The Baltic States are supporting the efforts of the Office of the Prosecutor General of Ukraine to strengthen its capacity to investigate and prosecute international crimes committed in Ukraine. In parallel, we are providing practical support by assisting the implementation of international projects and undertaking our own initiatives in the Baltic States in the field of child protection and care. Ukrainian children deserve a future free from fear and violence.

In conclusion, let me reiterate that the Baltic States support Ukraine's inherent right to self-defence and reaffirm our full solidarity with Ukraine's efforts to restore its territorial integrity and sovereignty within its internationally recognized borders. Ukraine's peace formula is the only viable path to achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in Ukraine. We encourage all Member States to join it and continue supporting a just peace based on the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and international law.

**The President:** I now give the floor to the representative of Canada.

**Mr. Rae (Canada):** Let me start by taking a moment to thank you, Madam President, for your leadership, service and friendship. I may not have another opportunity to say those words in the Council, so I wanted to say them here to you personally. I also want to thank our briefers — Executive Director Russell, Mr. Raymond, Ms. Rashevskaya — and the representative of the President of Ukraine, Ms. Daria Zarivna, for their important presentations today.

I would like to reaffirm Canada's unwavering support to Ukraine, consistent with its inherent right to defend itself, as enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations. Our meeting today highlights a profound threat to Ukraine's future and to its children.

I also want to say that, from Canada's own history, we know something of the terrible consequences of children being taken from their families and communities, either to residential schools or, more recently, for forced adoptions. That is part of our history, about which we are trying to learn more and from which we are still recovering. The trauma of those events, 150 years ago, is with us still. The purpose of the policy that was perpetrated at the time was described as the need to take the Indian out of the child. Let us not make the mistake of trying to take the Ukrainian out of the child. Children are entitled to their identity, language and culture. They are entitled to be home.

As the Secretary-General has reported, through its invasion, Russia has exposed Ukraine's children to all six grave violations of children in armed conflict, and many have been forced to flee their homes under constant threat of attack. Russia has exploited that situation to unlawfully deport and transfer thousands of Ukrainian children into Russia, under the pretence of providing protection.



As we heard today from the representative of the Yale School of Public Health, Russia's unlawful actions towards Ukraine's children have not come about spontaneously. They have, in fact, been organized at the highest levels. It shows that hundreds of Ukrainian children have been placed into Russia's systematic programme of what can only be described as coerced adoption and coerced fostering. This report is just the tip of the iceberg. We are aware of reports that thousands more Ukrainian children may be impacted, subjected to re-education camps and even forced to take on new Russified names.

*(spoke in French)*

In October, Canada, Norway and Ukraine hosted a ministerial conference in Montreal on the human dimension of Ukraine's peace formula. My Prime Minister welcomed 73 states from Africa, Asia, Europe, the Middle East and Latin America, as well as international organizations, in order to find concrete ways to repatriate all prisoners of war, illegally detained civilians and illegally deported or forcibly transferred children.

Fifty-four states approved the Montreal commitment, launched at the conference. This is a shared commitment to take collective action to share information on detainees, ensure legal releases and

maintain humane treatment, including after those people return to their communities and face the lifelong consequences of this war.

*(spoke in English)*

The peace formula that Ukraine has put forward is underpinned by the key principles of respect for the United Nations Charter and upholding international law. Without those key principles and the engagement of all parties, it simply will not be possible to achieve a just and lasting peace for Ukraine. But in addition to looking at resolving the conflict between two countries, we also have to look at the human consequences of this truly terrible conflict. That is why the peace formula centres upon those who have suffered most from this unnecessary war — this war of choice, this war of such enormous cost and tragedy. It centres upon children. We believe strongly that any peace agreement in Ukraine that does not adhere to the United Nations Charter and international law would, in effect, erase its victims and have grave implications for international peace and security in all corners of the world. Canada remains committed to working with Ukraine and with all States Members of the United Nations to achieve the objectives of peace, reconciliation, justice and, above all, doing the right thing for children.

*The meeting rose at 12.30 p.m.*