

Dear Chair Graham,
Dear Ranking Member Schatz,
Dear Committee members,
Excellencies,
Dear Friends,

On behalf of the Embassy of Ukraine and the Government of Ukraine, let me thank the United States Senate and Committee on Appropriations for organizing this highly important hearing.

I have a distinct honor to present my witness testimony today not only as the Ambassador of Ukraine to the United States, but also as a mother of two children. The destiny of Ukrainian boys and girls abducted by Russia is not an abstract issue to me. I think of my own children every time I imagine what it means to wake up one day and to learn they are missing, taken across the border, beyond my reach. No parent, anywhere, should ever have to live through that nightmare.

Since the beginning of Russia's full-scale aggression, thousands of Ukrainian children have been forcibly taken from their homes, separated from their families or removed from orphanages and foster care institutions in the temporarily occupied territories and transferred to Russia or Belarus in violation of international law.

These children have been subjected to pressure to change their names, their language, their identity, and even their citizenship. This is not humanitarian evacuation. This is an attempt to erase who they are and where they belong.

Ukraine, together with international partners, has managed to bring back only a small fraction of these children. Each child's return is a miracle of diplomacy, coordination, and extraordinary courage from parents who travel through multiple countries and war zones to reclaim their sons and daughters. But for every child who makes it home, many more remain missing, hidden, or trapped in systems that are designed to keep them away from Ukraine and from the truth of what has happened to them.

As a mother, I cannot accept that any government would treat children as trophies of war or bargaining chips in political negotiations. Children are not assets to be moved on a geopolitical chessboard. They are human beings with names, families, memories, and rights. Their right to family life, to identity, to culture, to their own language and country, is protected by international conventions that Russia has chosen to ignore.

Russia launched its war of aggression against Ukraine more than eleven years ago. It occupied part of our territories and decided it could claim our children as its own. As early as 2015, Russia was already taking Ukrainian children from occupied Crimea - transporting them by train to Moscow. As a symbol, and as a trophy of its treacherous war. This international crime was cynically labeled as “evacuation” or “rescue.”

Those quote and quote “rescue missions” were the first steps of Russia’s well-thought and coordinated state policy. And the world has recognized it as such.

On July 9, 2025, the European Court of Human Rights confirmed that between 2014 and 2022, Russia abducted Ukrainian children and transferred them into unrelated Russian families. The Court also established that indoctrination of children is a state policy of the Russian Federation, aimed at destroying Ukrainian identity. What began in Crimea has evolved into a large-scale, systematic strategy targeting Ukrainian children.

As an Ambassador, I must say it straightforwardly: the forced transfer and deportation of children from occupied territory is a grave breach of international humanitarian law and can constitute a war crime. Bringing Ukrainian children back home must not be treated as a secondary humanitarian concern. It must be a central condition for any discussion about peace and future of relations with Russia.

As of November 2025, the Ministry of Justice of Ukraine has officially confirmed 6,395 cases of deportation and forced transfer of Ukrainian children. Around 20,000 records - from state institutions, civil society, and international partners — are currently under review, each requiring individual verification. These figures are not final. This work continues every day.

We still do not know the full picture in the occupied territories. There are no humanitarian missions. No international organizations. No mechanisms for reporting or documenting crimes. We already know of cases of sexual violence and torture of children by Russian forces - and we learned about them only after de-occupation or after the children were returned from deportation.

Physical abduction is no longer the only tool. Russia is “reprogramming” our children in place - in occupied schools, children’s camps, social institutions, and even in families under occupation. About 1.6 million Ukrainian children are currently under Russian control - in the occupied territories or inside Russia itself. To keep these children, Russia blocks every escape route: obstructs humanitarian

evacuation, shells green corridors, cuts communications, and imposes total information isolation.

Then the process becomes gradual and silent. A child is issued foreign documents, sometimes given a new name and even a new date of birth. Then the child is forbidden to speak their native language. Any expression of Ukrainian identity becomes a risk. First, the child is taught fear of being Ukrainian. After then - shame. And ultimately - detachment from their roots. Propaganda and militarized education follow. Step by step, the child is turned into a carrier of hostile narratives. They are taught to hate Ukraine and everything Ukrainian.

These are not random actions. This is a state-controlled policy and a system. Today, more than 210 sites are known where such indoctrination takes place. This is not the initiative of isolated fanatics. These are government-sponsored institutions funded from the federal budget and Russia's Ministry of Defense. One of the largest centers, in Yevpatoria, where children from the Kherson region were taken for military-patriotic training was funded by the Kremlin's "Presidential Grants Fund". This is the institutionalization of a crime.

Under the framework of the Bring Kids Back UA initiative launched by the President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Ukraine is doing everything in its power to locate these children, document each case, and build mechanisms for their safe return and reintegration. We have created national programs dedicated to this issue, and we are cooperating with international organizations, civil society, and foreign governments. But we cannot succeed alone. These children are scattered across a vast territory. They are often moved between regions, placed with foster families without proper consent, or enrolled in institutions and camps where they are subjected to systematic propaganda and future militarization.

Russia refuses to provide information about Ukrainian children to the United Nations, the ICRC, or any humanitarian organization. They block international missions from entering occupied territories, denies access to places where children are held, and creates new bureaucratic obstacles to prevent their return.

This is why the role of our partners is vital. We need governments, parliaments, international organizations, and NGOs to use every possible channel—diplomatic, legal, informational—to demand access to these children, to insist on transparent lists, and to support the practical steps that bring them home.

We welcome initiatives of the United States Congress that highlight this crime and call for accountability.

Such hearings and resolutions are not symbolic gestures; they create political pressure, they mobilize resources, and they send a powerful message to every Ukrainian parent whose child is missing - you are not alone.

There are three lines of action we request from you.

First, please help us keep this issue at the top of the international agenda. Do not let it be buried under other headlines or treated as an unfortunate side effect of war. The deliberate deportation and russification of children is a policy choice, and it must have consequences.

Second, I ask for your continued support of Ukraine's efforts under the Bring Kids Back UA initiative. This is where U.S. leadership and appropriations can have direct, measurable impact. Scaling the mechanisms that make returns possible requires sustained funding for sanctions enforcement, legal action, and targeted measures against the individuals and institutions responsible for the deportation, transfer, and illegal adoption of Ukrainian children. It requires support for tracing, documentation, and case management so that every child is accounted for with credible, verifiable evidence. And it requires investment in the long and difficult process of reintegration, because the story does not end when a child crosses back into Ukraine. These children need psychological support, education, stability, and a community around them to heal from what was deliberately done to them. This committee can help ensure that accountability is not an abstract principle but a real consequence. The architects and implementers of this policy must know the world is watching and that legal and political repercussions are inevitable.

Third, insist on the unconditional return of these children within the peace process. This issue cannot become a political bargaining chip or used as leverage. Children are not to be exchanged for territories and political concessions. Their return is a basic prerequisite for justice, for sovereignty, and for any sustainable peace.

Our goal is simple: every child must come home. Not most of them, not many of them, but every single one of them. Until that happens, our work is not finished, and our conscience cannot be at peace.

Children cannot be instruments of war.

Using this opportunity, I would like to ask you kindly to adopt as soon as possible Designating the Russian Federation as a State Sponsor of Terrorism Act, which was introduced in September to designate Russia as a state sponsor

of terrorism under U.S. law if it fails to return Ukrainian children that have been kidnapped during the war.

Thank you.