

Testimony for the Record  
Submitted for the  
Appropriations Committee  
Subcommittee on State,  
Foreign Operations, and Related Programs  
for the Hearing “The Abduction of Ukrainian Children by the Russian Federation”  
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Chairman Graham, Ranking Member Schatz, and esteemed Committee members:  
Thank you for the opportunity to come before you not only as the founder of Save Ukraine, and the former Ukrainian Deputy Commissioner of Children, but as a father, and as a witness to one of the gravest crimes of our century: the systematic abduction, trafficking and militarization of Ukraine’s children by the Russian Federation. I give testimony in this moment of historic urgency - not experienced in generations - but with the same Russian goals as Stalin’s Holodomor to erase Ukraine. Not just by bombs but by stealing our innocent children. Our little children continue to suffer a biblical plague conducted by a modern pharaoh. I plead with you - from the bottom of my heart - to require Russia to let our children go.

Rescuing our children will preserve the integrity and security of the United States, NATO and Ukraine.

Many of you are grandparents. So imagine your grandchild walking into school and being told: “You may no longer speak English - only Russian. Your American name is forbidden. From today you will raise a Russian flag, swear loyalty to Russia and Putin, and study from books that say the United States never existed.” Imagine their favourite English books thrown into a fire; soldiers entering classrooms with rifles; teachers warning that speaking English is “extremism.” And imagine your grandchild being sent to a “summer camp” where they crawl under barbed wire, throw grenades, and are taught that you — their own family — are the enemy.

At least 20,000 children have been abducted by Russia. They have then been militarized, or deported to Russia and trafficked into Russian families. The Russians have made it very difficult to track our children. They are stripped of their names, birthdates, language, faith, and families.

This is a deliberate strategy to erase their identities and Ukraine's future, More than 1.6 million Ukrainian children are now imprisoned behind Russia's new Iron Curtain - that has descended across Ukraine. And they indoctrinated to believe that the US and NATO are the true enemies which they have to fight - now and forever.

Save Ukraine, is Ukraine's largest NGO - providing a full spectrum of services to children in need - from organizing dozens of dangerous rescue missions inside Russia and the Occupied Territories - across thousands of miles through our Underground Railroad. It continues with the holistic medical, mental and trauma recovery and safe reintegration of children and families into new communities. Save Ukraine has documented testimonies of each of the 1,062 children we have rescued. It is abundantly clear that Russia's efforts are designed to hurt and destroy entire families - Punishment for resistance is severe and deliberately Intended to instill fear. They describe streets filled with Russian soldiers, armoured vehicles at every corner, and parents terrified to let their children go outside because the military presence is everywhere. Fifteen-year-old Sasha told us how one day Russian soldiers grabbed him off the street, put him in a truck, and forced him to dig trenches every day. Girls constantly report harassment and intimidation by Russian soldiers. Homes are raided at any hour of the day or night. Children tell us they must keep their phones "clean" at all times — deleting messages, photos, anything that could reveal their Ukrainian identity — because a single image or conversation can lead to brutal consequences.

Military training is compulsory. Rescued boys and girls describe being taught to throw grenades, crawl through trenches, assemble and disassemble Kalashnikovs, and storm mock buildings. During one so-called "psychological test," a Russian officer asked a boy: "How do you feel about killing? Are you ready?"

When the boy refused to answer, the soldier threatened him: "We will take you first — you will serve on a submarine."

1. A teenager mother was told during excruciating childbirth labor that she would only receive a necessary C- section - that would save her life and that of her baby - if she accepted a Russian passport. She reluctantly agreed. Then was told that the only way that she could take the baby home was if he was listed as Russian on his birth certificate.
2. One boy told us that the hardest thing for him wasn't being taken—it was watching his friend die. Russian forces had found a message thread with Ukrainian soldiers on his friend's phone. They *ripped out his teeth and eyelids*. They *cut off his fingers*. He couldn't survive the torture. Later, the news said he had died of a "blood clot." But the truth is—they killed him.
3. Russians created a website to advertise Ukrainian children for adoption in Russia, complete with pictures and descriptions of the children's personalities.

This is the most brazen act of public trafficking I, or anyone in children's protection has ever seen a government undertake.

The longer Russia wages its war against Ukraine and the West, the more sophisticated their efforts become to systematically entrap Ukrainian children. As many children in occupied territories begin reaching the age of military conscription, more and more of these children will attempt escape.

We are very grateful for this Committee's recognition of the urgency to rescue our children. We ask that your efforts include forcing Russia to identify all stolen children as well as ensuring their release to their families in Ukraine.

We urge you to support systems that enable the rescue, recovery and reunification of children - at a larger scale - for the sake of our collective security. Thank you for your moral leadership and for continuing to stand with the children of Ukraine.  
Slava Ukraini!