

## **Statement by the International Coalition for the Return of Ukrainian Children on the unlawful deportation and forced transfer of Ukrainian children by the Russian Federation**

We, the members of the International Coalition for the Return of Ukrainian Children, reiterate our unwavering commitment to the protection of children affected by Russia's illegal, unprovoked, and unjustifiable full-scale military invasion of Ukraine, in line with international humanitarian law and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

In the context of its war of aggression against Ukraine, the Russian Federation has unlawfully deported and forcibly transferred Ukrainian children to its territory and from temporarily occupied areas of Ukraine, as documented by international bodies, including the International Criminal Court. Thousands of these children remain in Russia, away from their families and communities.

During their bilateral meeting held in Istanbul on June 2, 2025, the Government of Ukraine presented the Russian Federation with an initial list of 339 Ukrainian children unlawfully deported to the Russian Federation or forcibly transferred from temporarily occupied areas of Ukraine, and it formally requested their immediate and unconditional return. This constitutes a critical humanitarian step and a genuine opportunity for the Russian Federation to demonstrate good faith through concrete confidence-building measures. In light of the statements made by the representatives of the Russian Federation on July 23, 2025, we call on the Russian Federation to:

- act promptly and meaningfully on the initial list of children presented by Ukraine, ensuring their immediate and unconditional return to their families and communities in Ukraine;
- facilitate the return of all unlawfully deported and forcibly transferred Ukrainian children, in accordance with international law and relevant UN resolutions;
- provide full and verifiable information on all unlawfully deported and forcibly transferred Ukrainian children under the effective control of the Russian Federation, including their whereabouts, well-being, legal status, health condition, and ensure unhindered access for international humanitarian organizations to assess their situation and safeguard their rights and well-being; and
- cease to alter the identity of children, including changes to their citizenship, placement in Russian families or institutions, ideological indoctrination, and exposure to militarization.

We take this opportunity to reaffirm our shared commitment to the protection of children in armed conflict. We note with concern that the UN Secretary-General's 2025 Annual Report on Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC) recorded the highest number of verified violations to date.

As a global community, we must ensure that the protection of all children affected by Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine remains at the forefront of our humanitarian action and diplomatic efforts.

The return of Ukrainian children is one vital step in this broader imperative, to ensure that children are never used as pawns of war. All actions must be guided by the best interests of the child in accordance with international law.

We, the members of the International Coalition for the Return of Ukrainian Children, reaffirm that compliance with international humanitarian and human rights law is a binding obligation for all parties to armed conflict—notably in ensuring the protection of children, safeguarding their identity and dignity, and enabling conditions for their safe and voluntary return, in accordance with international norms and principles.

Signed: Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, Costa Rica, Council of Europe, Croatia, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Moldova, Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Ukraine, United Kingdom, European Union (observer) and Switzerland (observer).