

QUESTION ON NOTICE / Spoken

QoN 001 – Inquiry into the Rights of Women and Children

Hearing Date: 16 August 2023

Topic: Ukraine

Senator Linda Reynolds

Question

I asked questions about the report of 16,000 Ukrainian Children having been trafficked, deported or stolen into Russia. Have you got any further update on that?

Answer

There has been no change to the Australian Government's position on the forcible transfer and/or deportation of Ukrainian children by Russian authorities. The unlawful deportation or transfer of civilians, including children, during an armed conflict is a war crime. The International Criminal Court found there are reasonable grounds to believe President Putin and his Commissioner for Children's Rights, Maria Lvova-Belova, are responsible for the war crimes of deporting and transferring children from occupied areas of Ukraine to Russia. The Australian Government has also imposed targeted financial sanctions and travel bans on both President Putin and Commissioner Lvova-Belova.

On 4 May 2023, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) released the [findings](#) of an expert mission to Ukraine that had investigated the forcible transfer and/or deportation of Ukrainian children to Russia. The OSCE report could not provide a precise estimate of the number of children affected but did confirm that a large number of Ukrainian children had either been forcibly deported or transferred within Russian-controlled territory. It concluded that forcibly deported Ukrainian children had been subject to "numerous and overlapping violations" of their rights. It also noted that many of these children were exposed to military training and "to pro-Russian information campaigns often amounting to targeted re-education."

The report found that Russian authorities appeared to be creating obstacles to the return of Ukrainian children to their country and families. Even if Ukrainian families managed to locate their children, their efforts to return them to Ukraine were invariably met with logistical and financial blocks.

The OSCE report made several recommendations, including that Russia:

- cease the forcible transfer/deportation of children from Ukraine
- in cases where life-saving evacuation was required, allow safe passage via humanitarian corridors for all civilians, especially children, to the territory of their choice
- compile lists of all children who had been forcibly transferred/deported, and facilitate family reunifications for all of them

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- stop the current practice of expediting Russian citizenship for Ukrainians, especially children
- prevent the adoption of children with former or current Ukrainian citizenship unless compliant with international law
- stop “patriotic education” of Ukrainian (or formerly Ukrainian) children.