



Permanent Mission of Ukraine
to the International
Organizations in Vienna

**STATEMENT BY THE DELEGATION OF UKRAINE
AT THE 1021st FSC PLENARY MEETING
(14 September 2022)
Agenda item 1, Security Dialogue: Children and Armed Conflict**

Mr Chairperson,

At the outset, I would like to express our gratitude to the Belgian Chairpersonship for dedicating today's Security Dialogue to such an important issue as Children and Armed Conflict.

We thank our distinguished panellists: Ms Virginia Gamba de Potgieter, Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms Rita Izsák-Ndiaye, Personal Representative of the CiO on Children and Security, Mr Geert Cappelaere, Director of UNICEF Partnership Office, as well as Mr Andrii Chernousov, representative of the NGO «Voices of Children» for their comprehensive presentations. We also welcome the organisation of the thought-provoking joint side-event by the FSC Chair and the Chair of the Human Dimension Committee this morning, which became a very relevant cross-dimensional approach to highlight the OSCE tools to this particular issue.

Ukraine aligns itself with the statement by the European Union. I would also like to make some additional points in my national capacity.

Since the very beginning of the Russian aggression against Ukraine in 2014, thousands of Ukrainian children have been among the most vulnerable groups of civilians affected by war. After the Kremlin regime launched its full-scale armed invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, the situation has deteriorated significantly. Killing and maiming of children; recruitment and use of children by armed forces and armed groups; sexual violence against children; attacks against schools and hospitals; abduction of children;

denial of humanitarian access for children – all these terrible crimes that constitute the Six Grave Violations of children's rights during armed conflicts identified by the United Nations are not just a theoretical concept but an everyday distressing reality for Ukraine.

The Office of the Prosecutor General of Ukraine reports of at least 383 children killed and 749 wounded as a result of the Russian war against Ukraine (*as of 13 September 2022*). Regrettably, the real number of casualties among children may be even higher since Ukrainian law-enforcement agencies have very limited access to information in the temporarily occupied areas. We should not also forget about thousands of children who experienced war trauma that may have substantial psychological consequences for their lives for years to come.

Active hostilities and permanent shelling of residential areas restrict thousands of children from access to services that are covering basic needs. Numerous cases of denial of humanitarian access are registered in the territories where the hostilities are going on or in adjacent areas. Thousands of children are experiencing a shortage of food and water and remain cut off from medical care and education. Even in the areas not affected directly by hostilities many schools and hospitals cannot function normally due to the permanent threat of air or missile attacks by the Russian occupation forces.

Mr Chairperson,

The situation in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine is no less troubling. Openly violating the provisions of the IV Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War of 1949, which obliges the occupying power not to change the civil status of children, the occupiers forcibly deport Ukrainian children to the Russian territory. According to the Ukrainian National Informational Bureau «Children of War», at least 7,552 cases of forcible deportation of children were registered. However, the real number of deported children is much higher.

It should be mentioned that the Russian authorities focus special attention on those children who lost their parents in the war. These children are not only forcibly moved to Russia but also subjected to forced adoption. This practice was in fact facilitated at the state level on 30 April 2022, when Russian president Vladimir Putin signed the decree to simplify the procedure for obtaining Russian citizenship for Ukrainian orphans and children left without parental care.

It is also of our particular concern that children in the occupied territories are being exposed to military propaganda that is hiding behind the so-called «patriotic education». It is not a recent phenomenon of Russian propaganda but a deliberate Russian policy aimed at the destruction of the very existence of the Ukrainian nation inter alia by affecting the cultural and national identity of young Ukrainians.

Let me recall that three times in the UN General Assembly resolutions «Problem of the militarization of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, Ukraine, as well as parts of the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov», the international community condemned militarisation of education aimed at indoctrinating children in the temporarily occupied Crimea to join the Russian military forces.

Despite all calls of the international community, the Russian side did not stop using education as an instrument of war propaganda. The change of curricula in schools was one of the first steps by the Russian occupation administration in the temporarily occupied areas of Ukraine. Unsurprisingly, this process was primarily directed against the teaching of history of Ukraine, Ukrainian language and literature.

In August, in the then occupied city of Balakliya, Russian occupiers purposefully removed Ukrainian all textbooks from schools. Under the far-fetched pretext of fighting non-existent Nazism in Ukraine, they first began to fight against the Ukrainian language and culture.

At the same time, education is not the only instrument used by the Russian Federation to affect children. Russian special services widely use the Internet and mobile applications to involve children in their illegal activities. Just recently, the Security Service of Ukraine identified and stopped the use of a game application in which users (mainly children) had to search for the so-called «boxes» with virtual prizes. Predictably, such «boxes» were located in the areas where special military and critical infrastructure facilities are located. Such involvement of children in illegal intelligence activities is only one example of the Russian toolbox aimed at engaging children in the war. It must be condemned by the international community as unacceptable.

Esteemed colleagues,

Despite the extremely difficult security and economic situation in the country, the Government of Ukraine continues to invest its tireless efforts in the protection of children from the horrors of war and ensuring their safety and security. It is among the top priorities

of national social policy to ensure proper access for children to humanitarian aid, medical care and psychological protection as well as to restore the educational process as soon as possible.

In March 2022, the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine established the Coordination Headquarters for the Protection of Children's Rights During Martial Law. The main aim of this body is to coordinate the activities of different authorities both at local and national levels. Moreover, a special national portal «Children of War» was created for the search and rescue of missing children as well as for the documentation of related war crimes. In close cooperation with its international partners, Ukraine will continue to take all possible steps to overcome the terrible consequences of the Russian aggression.

Without any doubt, the crimes against children committed by the Russian Federation in Ukraine will not go unpunished. They will be investigated and the perpetrators will be brought to justice. We remain convinced that all responsible for the numerous crimes will not be able to avoid the strictest responsibility.

In closing, let me reiterate that Ukraine as a party to core international instruments related to the protection of the rights of children, remains determined to have constructive dialogue and cooperation with the international community in order to stop and prevent violations against children affected by Russia's war of aggression against my country.

Thank you, Mr Chairperson. I ask that this statement be attached to the Journal of the Day.