

Written Testimony

Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission
U.S. House of Representatives

Hearing on: "Ukraine: Abducted Children and Mechanisms for Accountability"

Militarization and Indoctrination of Ukrainian Children in Russian-Occupied Territories and the Need for Expanded Sanctions Against Those Responsible

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Where does the United States really stand on Russia's criminal abduction of Ukrainian children?

Overall, our response has been disgraceful.

What has been done?

We cannot be proud of bipartisan legislation that has been introduced but not acted upon. Languishing legislation accomplishes nothing.

We cannot be proud of Congressional hearings to spotlight the "barbaric" kidnapping of children, featuring testimony on re-education programs and forced adoption into Russian families, when such hearings have not moved legislation forward in the legislative process.

Yes, it was good that First Lady Melania Trump initiated a direct channel in 2025 to secure the return of a few children, but there are at least 20,000 children who have been abducted and the most productive efforts to return children have been made by private groups.

The United States has abandoned any leadership role on the abducted children by withdrawing from the International Centre for the Prosecution of the Crime of Aggression against Ukraine (ICPA) and our inadequate efforts at sanctioning the individuals and institutions responsible for these criminal abductions.

When a child goes missing in the United States, law enforcement must immediately accept a report with no waiting period, entering the child into the FBI's National Crime Information Center (NCIC) database. Authorities prioritize the first few hours, often activating AMBER Alerts for abductions, while the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) provides national support.

She is not child, but missing Nancy Guthrie of Tucson has been a national headline for weeks.

20,000 plus children are abducted from Ukraine as part of an official Russian program, ripping them from their families, communities, and county to brainwash them, to tell them their families do not want them, changing their names and placing them with Russian families – to make them Russian and anti-Ukraine, and the United States' response is halfhearted at best.

Congress and the Administration have said they are outraged but words without action are meaningless.

There may be limitations on what can be done but so far, the United States has not even taken sanctioning the Russians – people and institutions – seriously.

Country	Sanctioned individuals	Sanctioned entities
Ukraine	260	68
EU	76	14
Switzerland	73	12
Canada	71	12
USA	60	6
Australia	49	2
New Zealand	48	4
UK	43	3
Japan	25	2

* These figures are from November, 2025

Ukraine has identified and sanctioned 260 individuals and 68 entities*.

The United States has sanctioned 60 and 6 – ranking 5th among countries acting to sanction abduction war crimes.

It is time the United States acts like a leader in demanding the return of all Ukraine's abducted children.

If legislation is needed to sanction the guilty parties, it needs to be introduced and passed into law.

Genuine leadership in addressing these war crimes deserves nothing less.

Now in our 36th year in the United States and Ukraine the U.S.-Ukraine Foundation has since last year, under the banner of our Forget-Me-Not campaign, created our Center for Reuniting Families of Ukraine dedicated to addressing the plight of abducted Ukrainian children, survivors of conflict-related sexual violence, prisoners of war, and women and children whose lives have been shattered by Russia's aggression.

The Center's mission is threefold: (a) Educating policymakers and the international community on the scope and urgency of these crimes. (b) Supporting the safe return and reintegration of abducted and rescued children, survivors of sexual violence, and former POWs. (c) Identifying and promoting best practices for comprehensive and effective assistance to all victims of Putin's war.

To expand the Center's reach, we created the Friends of Ukraine Network (FOUN) International Task Force on Human Rights, co-chaired by Carl Gershman, former President of the National Endowment for Democracy, and Irwin Cotler, former Canadian Minister of Justice. One of the Task Force's key missions is to seek justice and hold the perpetrators accountable.

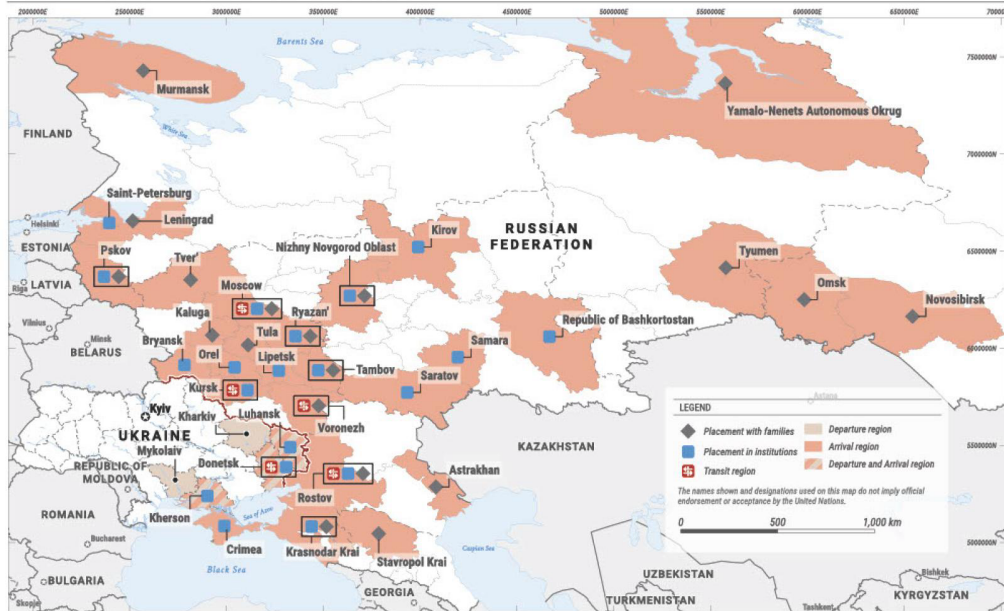
We use the Forget-Me-Not flower to send the message that no matter how long the abducted children are in Russian hands, we want them, and the world to know they are not and will not be forgotten.

Finally, a United Nations' map shows where these abducted children have been taken inside the Russian Federation.



UKRAINE / RUSSIAN FEDERATION: Investigations concerning deportations and transfers of children by Russian authorities: locations of departure, transit and latest reported destination
Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine

March 2026



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Through state-sponsored programs such as Yunarmiya, a militarized youth movement supported by Russia's Ministry of Defense, children are systematically indoctrinated, trained in combat-related skills, and taught to view war not as a tragedy but as a patriotic obligation.

Russia's youth army, Yunarmiya, now claims 1.8 million members—a number exceeding the combined active military forces of the United States and all EU countries. Among them are hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian children forcibly absorbed from occupied territories. In total, nearly 1.6 million Ukrainian children remain under Russian control. Many were taken under the pretext of “evacuation,” placed with Russian families, or enrolled in reeducation programs intended to erase their Ukrainian identity and loyalty to their country.

Russia is further expanding the militarization of youth through DOSAAF, a Soviet-era military training organization that prepares civilians for combat roles. In occupied territories, DOSAAF training has been integrated into schools and made mandatory for children as young as 14, lowering the previous threshold of 18.

The consequences are already visible. Children from Donetsk and Luhansk, territories under Russian control since 2014, are now fighting against Ukraine.

Some have received military awards for killing fellow Ukrainians; others have died under the flags they were forced to serve.

What is taking place is not simply cultural repression. It is the systematic grooming of children for participation in Russia's current and future wars. Through propaganda, forced assimilation, and paramilitary training structures, Russia is preparing Ukrainian children to fight not only against their own country, but in whatever conflicts Russia chooses to wage next.

This deliberate militarization of children from occupied territories represents a grave violation of international law and must be recognized as part of the broader pattern of Russia's war crimes against Ukraine's civilian population.

It is time for the United States to match Ukraine's sanctioning of the individuals and entities guilty of these war crimes.

Thank you for your consideration of this testimony.

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