

For Immediate Release

4 YEARS OF THE RUSSIAN FULL-SCALE INVASION OF UKRAINE

UAZA Calls on Russia to Stop Killing, Abducting and Militarising Ukrainian Children and African Citizens

Pretoria/Cape Town 24 February – Today, we mark 4 years of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia. Ukrainian community members have come to the streets in front of the Russian Embassy and Consulate in Pretoria and Cape Town to say “STOP THE KILLINGS”.

“For four years, Russia has continued to separate children from their families and communities, stripping them of their names, language and identity. Over 20,000 abducted children are subjected to daily indoctrination and militarisation, with only around 2,000 returned. The International Criminal Court has issued arrest warrants, and South Africa has supported the United Nations resolution demanding the return of Ukrainian children — yet the children are still not home,” says Kateryna Aleshyna, President of the Ukrainian Association of South Africa.

“Now, having lost so many of its own citizens and still unable to take over Ukraine, Russia is exploiting vulnerable Africans across the continent, sending them to the front lines,” Aleshyna adds.

The abduction of Ukrainian children is not an isolated byproduct of war; it is a deliberate component of the Russian state’s genocidal policy toward Ukraine.

Since 2022, Russian legislation has allowed changes to citizenship, name, surname, and date of birth of Ukrainian children without parental consent. As of 2025, the Russian Federation has not stopped but continues efforts to deport Ukrainian children to “re-educate” them. The process of children’s deportation continues in 2025. Due to these violations of human rights, the International Criminal Court has issued warrants of arrest.

- **20,000–35,000 Ukrainian children forcibly deported** and abducted by Russia
- The whereabouts of many children are not shared with the Ukrainian government or international organisations; children are unlawfully held across 57 regions of the Russian Federation
- Russia blocks families and caregivers from reclaiming children; only around 2,000 children returned (as of January 2026)
- 380+ children forcibly adopted into Russian families
- The International Criminal Court issued arrest warrants for Vladimir Putin and his Commissioner for Children’s Rights, Maria Lvova-Belova, for the deportation of Ukrainian children
- Children are separated from their families and communities, their citizenship is changed without consent, and they are denied the right to Ukrainian identity, language, and culture

- In January 2024, the ICJ ruled that Russia violated the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination by restricting Ukrainian-language education in occupied areas
- Boys aged 14–17 were the most targeted group in 2022–2023; children of all ages, from playschool onwards, are subjected to indoctrination and militarization
- More than 1.6 million children continue to live under occupation

South Africa

- supported the UN General Assembly resolution on the return of Ukrainian children in December 2025, demanding the immediate return of all abducted children
- President Cyril Ramaphosa called for the return of Ukrainian children during the African Peace Mission (June 2023)
- Archbishop Thabo Makgoba urged the South African Government to support the return of children
- Over [thirteen South African](#) child rights and human rights organisations have signed a petition calling for the return of Ukrainian children

#BringKidsBackUA

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