

For Immediate Release

UAZA calls on South Africans not to participate in Russian “election observation” in occupied territories of Ukraine

PRESS RELEASE

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The Ukrainian Association of South Africa (UAZA) calls on state representatives, parliamentarians, civil society organisations, and citizens of South Africa to consider the human rights and international law implications of participating in so-called “election observation” organised by the Russian Federation in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine.

“Being an observer in the russian 2026 elections, when they are also held in the illegally occupied territories, is comparable to validating, by one’s presence, an election conducted under apartheid South Africa,” says Oksana Lissi, the President of the Ukrainian Association of South Africa.

From 18 to 20 September 2026, russia is holding its parliamentary elections, and plans to extend the voting to the illegally occupied areas of Ukraine. The United Nations has stated that russian so-called elections in occupied Ukrainian areas have “no legal grounds”. The UN General Assembly’s Resolution ES-11/4, adopted on 12 October 2022 by 143 states, condemned russia’s attempted illegal annexation of Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions and affirmed that such actions have no validity under international law.

None of the four Ukrainian regions that russia has illegally declared annexed is fully occupied. Despite suffering more than 1.5 million military casualties, russia has captured little more than 1% of Ukraine’s territory since 2023.

South African President Cyril Ramaphosa has repeatedly stressed that the principle of territorial integrity should be upheld within Ukraine.

The issue extends beyond the principle of territorial integrity to the rights and protection of people in the occupied territories. [UN human rights monitoring](#) has documented arbitrary detention, torture and ill-treatment, restrictions on fundamental freedoms, religious persecution and the imposition of russian laws, citizenship and education systems in occupied Ukrainian territory. At least 182 civilians (148 men, 27 women, 5 boys, 2 girls) have been executed in areas controlled by russian authorities, including in places of detention.

UAZA therefore calls on South African state representatives, parliamentarians, civil society organisations and citizens

- **to refrain from participating in such “observation” missions and**
- **to uphold the principles of human rights, international law, sovereignty and territorial integrity.**

The situation in Ukraine's russian-occupied territories

To transform the population of the occupied territories by 2030, Russia aims to relocate at least 5 million people from its regions to the occupied territories. Financial incentives of 3-5 million rubles, as well as preferential mortgage programmes, are offered to Russian families as an incentive to relocate to illegally occupied Ukrainian territories. These policies are in violation of international humanitarian law, which assumes the prohibition on an occupying power transferring parts of its own civilian population into occupied territory.

In the occupied territories, Russia continues its practice of militarisation and indoctrination of Ukrainian children. More than 1.6 million children continue to live in territories under Russian occupation and face policies aimed at erasing Ukrainian identity. On 17 March 2023, the International Criminal Court issued an arrest warrant for Vladimir Putin concerning the alleged unlawful deportation and transfer of children from occupied areas of Ukraine to Russia. The warrant creates obligations for States Parties to the Rome Statute to cooperate with the Court, including in relation to arrest and surrender.

The International Court of Justice ruled in January 2024 that the Russian Federation violated its obligations under the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination through the way it implemented school education in the Ukrainian language in occupied Crimea, finding a pattern of racial discrimination.

South Africa has repeatedly affirmed its support for the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity. UAZA believes that the situation of people living under occupation provides an important opportunity for South Africa to demonstrate a people-centred foreign policy approach and promote human rights. Participation as an observer in a Russian election conducted in occupied Ukrainian territory risks conferring legitimacy through presence on an electoral process that the United Nations has declared to have no legal grounds.

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