

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Ukrainian Independence Day – Ukrainians Continue the Fight for Just Peace, Freedom and Human Rights

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On 24 August, Ukraine's Independence Day, members of UAZA in Cape Town, Durban, and Johannesburg will call South Africa to action with posters saying #BringKidsBackUA – 20,000 stolen children – and #StandWithUkraine.

34 years ago, on this day, **Ukrainians regained their freedom** of speech, freedom of religion, and democracy. 11 years ago, in February 2014, Russia invaded Ukraine and continues its aggression, aiming to destroy the Ukrainian state and Ukrainian identity. As peace talks to stop Russia continue, the Ukrainian Association of South Africa draws attention to issues that should not be forgotten in the negotiations—**forcefully deported Ukrainian children**.

UAZA is grateful to European states for their support and to the US for its willingness to stop the war. Since taking office, **President Trump has seven times urged Putin to agree to a ceasefire, yet Russia continues its brutal killings of civilians and flattening Ukrainian cities**. In July 2025, Russia has sent [over 6000 drones](#) and killed or injured [6,754 civilians](#). Putin has continuously attacked Ukraine while President Zelensky was meeting with President Trump in Washington.

The UN system has proved to be unable to assure peace and security when the aggressor sits on the Security Council and threatens nuclear war. That is why every country's voice is critical. South Africa's stance is especially important:

- In June 2023, President Cyril Ramaphosa called on Putin to return over 19,500 Ukrainian children illegally deported to Russia. Putin refused.
- In November 2024, South Africa expressed readiness to become a mediator in the return of Ukrainian children kidnapped by Russia.
- In April 2025, President Zelensky handed President Ramaphosa a list of 400 children.

We call on South Africa to:

- **Stand firmly with Ukrainian children** and ensure their immediate and unconditional return to their families and communities in Ukraine.
- **Stop economic cooperation with Russia** until the Kremlin ceases to alter children's identity, including changes to their citizenship, placement in Russian families or institutions, ideological indoctrination, and exposure to militarisation.
- **Uphold Ukraine's territorial integrity;** and

- Take leadership on the continent by demanding **de-occupation of the Zaporizhzhya Nuclear Power Plant** and ensuring nuclear safety.

Timing of the gatherings:

22 August – Cape Town 3:00 – 5:00 pm

24 August – Cape Town 12:00 – 2:00 pm (Woodstock)

- Durban 3:00 – 5:00 pm, Umhlanga Promenade
- Johannesburg 12 - 14 pm Sandton

Why Are Ukrainian Children Being Forcefully Deported??

Since 2014, when Russia invaded Ukraine, UN Human Rights Commission annually reported that Russia is violating human rights and forcibly transfers Ukrainian children onto its own territory.

Ukraine documented almost 20,000 of deported children. The whereabouts of deported children are not released neither to the Ukrainian government nor to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

On 30 May 2022, Vladimir Putin signed a decree that **streamlined the process of adopting Ukrainian orphans or those without identified parental care and giving them Russian citizenship**. Deported children do not have the right to refuse Russian citizenship. Instead, Russian authorities during the process of adoption are often changing a child's name, surname and personal data.

The forcible transfer of children of one group to another for 'Russification' purposes through adoption by Russian families and/or transfer to Russian-run orphanages or residential facilities like 'summer camps' is a violation under Article II of the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, (the Genocide Convention), to which both Ukraine and the Russia are parties.

Russia denies the right of Ukrainian children to their identity and has set up processes to re-educate them into "Russian patriots" to prepare them for service in the Russian army. During summer 2025 Russia aims to "re-educate" 53,000 Ukrainian children from the newly occupied territories.

More about forcefully deported Ukrainian children: https://cdn.prod.website-files.com/6527f28cf9d7ef4b2fa24097/66d04bc8016483dc25f656a2_Safeguarding_Children_from_Forced_Transfers_and_Deportation_White.pdf

Why Ukrainian Territorial Integrity Matters?

Allowing Putin to seize Ukrainian land would mean rewarding the aggressor for his aggression. In 1994, under the Budapest Memorandum, Ukraine voluntarily relinquished the world's third-largest nuclear arsenal in exchange for security assurances from the US, the UK and Russia.

African states have stood firm in defending [Ukraine's territorial integrity](#) — not a single African country voted against the UN resolution affirming it, which shows unity of support for UN Charter. Allowing powerful states to redraw borders at will would set a dangerous precedent and risk bloodshed across the African continent.

While the Kremlin has declared four Ukrainian regions as part of its constitutional territory, Russia has failed to capture any of them militarily and now seeks to take over Ukrainian homes through political manipulation.

More about UN Reform and Territorial integrity: <https://www.uaza.co.za/policy-briefs/>

Why Nuclear Safety?

In March 2022, Russia militarily occupied Europe's largest nuclear facility and one of the world's ten largest nuclear power plants, consisting of six reactors with a total capacity of 6,000 MW- the Zaporizhzhya Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP). The occupation of the plant is the first instance in history where a nuclear power plant has been militarily occupied and has been operated for more than three years during active warfare.

Russian state company Rosatom plays a key role in this precedent. The violations of the International Atomic Energy Agency's seven nuclear safety pillars — the physical integrity of facilities, operability of safety systems, autonomy of staff decision-making, secure off-site power, uninterrupted logistics, effective radiation monitoring and reliable communication with regulators — have already been documented at ZNPP.

In May 2025, the International Labour Organization (ILO) reported that 13 Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant employees had been abducted, including three cases this year. The whereabouts of at least one detained worker remains unknown. [The organisation also documented](#) forced labour, coerced union membership and serious occupational safety risks for staff.

More than 40 documented witness accounts by human rights organisations such as Truth Hounds [suggest](#) that since March 2022, Rosatom experts were [fully aware](#) of the pressure that the military personnel were putting on the nuclear operators to sign contracts with Rosatom. It is a systematic breach of international humanitarian law and nuclear safety norms, and of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.

More about ZNPP and what does it mean for African states: <https://www.uaza.co.za/policy-briefs/>

“To be free is not merely to cast off one’s chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others” Nelson Mandela

#StandWithUkraine #StoprussianAggression