

UAZA Urges the Department of Education to Protect South African Schoolchildren from Russian Militarisation and Indoctrination

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Cape Town, South Africa, 25 July 2026 - On 24 July, one of the schools in the Western Cape published a social media post describing the participation of one of its learners in a photography competition held in the Russian Federation and co-sponsored by the Russian presidential fund. The post included a photograph of the South African schoolboy wearing a Russian military uniform, alongside multiple images of military equipment, as well as an image that appears to depict the Ukrainian flag in a derogatory manner. The prominent display of military symbols and imagery in the context of a children's educational activity raises serious concerns that South African children, together with other children invited to Russia, may have been subjected to militarisation, ideological indoctrination and exposed to hatred of other nations as part of the promotion of Russia's war against Ukraine.

UAZA calls on the Department of Education to prevent the militarisation and indoctrination of South African schoolchildren, as it is against the principles of [the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, which seeks to protect children from military recruitment, militarisation and participation in armed conflict.

We would like to draw the attention of parents and educators across South Africa to the findings of the independent experts of the OSCE Moscow Mechanism. Despite its ongoing and systematic violations of the OSCE's humanitarian principles, the Russian Federation remains a participating State of the Organization, which concluded that in Russia “[Militarization extends beyond the classroom through State-sponsored military-patriotic youth organisations and re-education camps](#)”. The experts also recommended that all states take measures to prevent their children from participating in Russian programmes that expose children to militarisation or ideological indoctrination:

[“Ensure that children of third countries do not travel to and take part, including through private arrangements, in the so-called recreational camps in the occupied territories, as well as the Russian Federation, and elsewhere.”](#)

[Investigations into recruitment by the Russian armed forces](#) suggests that international students, including African, are among the primary targets for recruitment.

The experts of the OSCE Moscow Mechanism suggest that there are reasonable grounds to believe that Russia's systematic deportation, militarisation and ideological

indoctrination of children may amount to crimes against humanity under Article 7 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

While Russia has been ideologically indoctrinating and militarising Ukrainian children since the beginning of its armed aggression against Ukraine in 2014, the use of a South African child in military imagery associated with the Russian Federation, particularly during an educational activity, suggests that the process of militarisation involves all children who travel to Russia and warrants urgent investigation by the relevant South African authorities.

UAZA calls upon the South African Government and the Department of Education to protect the rights and best interests of South African children by:

- issuing guidance advising **against participation by South African schoolchildren in programmes that involve travel to Russia** until sufficient safeguards are in place to ensure that they are not exposed to military propaganda, militarisation or ideological indoctrination;
- investigating whether, and to what extent, Russia's state-run system of militarisation and ideological indoctrination of children may contribute to the recruitment of South Africans into the Russian armed forces, and assessing any potential risks to South African children participating in such programmes.

#BringKidsBackUA | #StandWithUkraine

In December 2025, South Africa voted in favour of the UNGA Resolution on *Return of Ukrainian Children*. In June 2023, President Cyril Ramaphosa called on President Vladimir Putin to return Ukrainian children. In April 2025, President Ramaphosa received a list of 400 forcibly deported Ukrainian children from President Volodymyr Zelensky, with the expectation that South Africa would facilitate their return.

At least 20,610 Ukrainian children have been forcibly deported by Russia. The International Criminal Court has issued arrest warrants for Vladimir Putin and Maria Lvova-Belova for the alleged war crime of the unlawful deportation and transfer of Ukrainian children. To date, there is no publicly available information indicating that any Ukrainian child has been returned with the direct support or facilitation of South Africa.

Since 2022, Russian legislation has allowed changes to the citizenship, name, surname and date of birth of Ukrainian children without the consent of their parents or legal guardians. As of 2026, Russia has continued its efforts to deport Ukrainian children and subject them to so-called "re-education". The fate and whereabouts of many Ukrainian children remain unknown.