

Media release

What: Ukraine is gathering the Global Peace Summit. South African Human Rights Organisations call on Russia to return Ukrainian children. South Africa can bring more stability to the world

Key takeaways:

- The Global Peace Summit for Ukraine will take place in June. South Africa should participate
- Peace in Ukraine will benefit ordinary South Africans via a more stable economy, more social development, fewer human rights violations and less famine on the continent
- 13 South African civil society organisations have called on Russia to return Ukrainian forcefully deported children by 1 June 2024

THE GLOBAL PEACE SUMMIT FOR UKRAINE

15-16 June 2024, Ukraine will hold the Global Peace Summit in Switzerland, which anticipates the participation of over 150 countries. It is critical that the South African delegation be among the all peace-loving countries of the world and contribute to the just long-lasting peace for Ukraine based on international law and the UN Charter.

We are convinced that South Africa's participation, which led the African Peace mission to Ukraine and Russia and is making significant efforts to find options for achieving peace in Ukraine, is fundamentally important.

The key objectives of the summit are to discuss the areas that directly influence multiple interests of South Africa in the global arena and include:

- Confirming the inadmissibility of the use of nuclear weapons and ensuring the safety of nuclear facilities.
- Ensuring free navigation in the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov, which is vital for global food security.
- Addressing humanitarian issues, including the exchange of prisoners and the return of illegally detained, deported, and displaced persons, especially children.
- Reaffirming the commitment to states' sovereignty, independence, unity, and territorial integrity within their internationally recognised borders.
- Restoring a comprehensive, just, and lasting peace for Ukraine based on the UN Charter and key principles of international law.

Why peace in Ukraine matters for South Africa?

- 1) Just peace in Ukraine is important for global stability and will support the economic development of South Africa;
- 2) The annexation of territories of independent sovereign countries by force will result in more global spending on defence rather than on developmental issues. Global military spending increased by 6.8% to a record high of \$2.4 trillion in 2023, resulting in a

significant decrease in spending on developmental, social, and environmental goals globally.

- 3) Without peace in Ukraine, South Africa will suffer from increased migrant pressure. Ukraine is among the leading grain producers globally. Russia was blocking export of Ukrainian grain and is systemically destroying Ukrainian agriculture sector. The war has already caused \$80bn in damage to Ukraine's farm sector. It has made Ukraine the country most contaminated by landmines, with over 25,000 km² farmland affected. The war has destroyed over 18,000 tractors and a fifth of Ukraine's grain silos¹.
- 4) It will prevent another Nuclear accident and will support the development of peaceful nuclear technology on the continent. Since March 2022, Russia is occupying the largest Nuclear Power Plant in Europe, the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Station. This occupation of the nuclear facility poses significant risk to the global nuclear security regime, and for the peaceful development of nuclear technology.
- 5) South Africa can reduce the human rights violations and suffering of civilians. Civilians in Ukraine are under constant bombing, oppression, torture, rape and murder. Over 222,000 homes have been destroyed, along with 426 hospitals and 3,800 education centres, from preschools to universities². Russia promotes violence not only in Ukraine but also on the African continent³.

Russia says it wants peace, is this true?

- 1) In October 2022, Russia has signed changes to its Constitution claiming four regions of Ukraine: Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia, and Kherson oblasts being part of the Russian Federation. Russian forces do not control the majority of the territory they claim they annexed. The first step towards peace would be to stop claiming unoccupied territory of Ukraine and to cancel the changes in the Russian constitution.
- 2) Deoccupying Zaporizhzhia nuclear power station will be a strong move to show that Russia is ready to stop causing ecocide and share nuclear risks.
- 3) Russia is forcefully deporting Ukrainian children. There are over 19,456 unlawfully deported Ukrainian children that have been identified in Russia, but the total number is estimated to be much larger. Putin has signed the legislation that allows to change the citizenship of Ukrainian children without consent. Children's name, surname and date of birth might be changed in this process. Returning Ukrainian children is an important step towards peace according to the South African president Cyril Ramaphosa.

South African civil society organisations have called to return 19,456 unlawfully deported Ukrainian children by June 1

¹ <https://kse.ua/agricultural-war-damages-review/>

² <https://kse.ua/about-the-school/news/155-billion-the-total-amount-of-damages-caused-to-ukraine-s-infrastructure-due-to-the-war-as-of-january-2024/>

³ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2021/11/car-russian-wagner-group-harassing-and-intimidating-civilians-un-experts>

South African civil society organisations have called to return Ukrainian children by 1 June 2024, International Children's Day, celebrated worldwide to recognise and protect the rights of children⁴.

- African Women Leaders Network-South Africa
- Centre for Human Rights, University of Pretoria
- Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation
- Democracy Works Foundation
- Institute for Justice and Reconciliation
- In Transformation Initiative
- Foundation for Human Rights
- Lawyers for Human Rights
- Mmabatho Foundation for Women's Development
- Public Interest Practice
- Southern African Human Rights Defenders Network
- Southern African Liaison Office
- Ukrainian Association of South Africa

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⁴ <https://www.uaza.co.za/unlawful-deportation-and-transfer-of-ukrainian-children/>