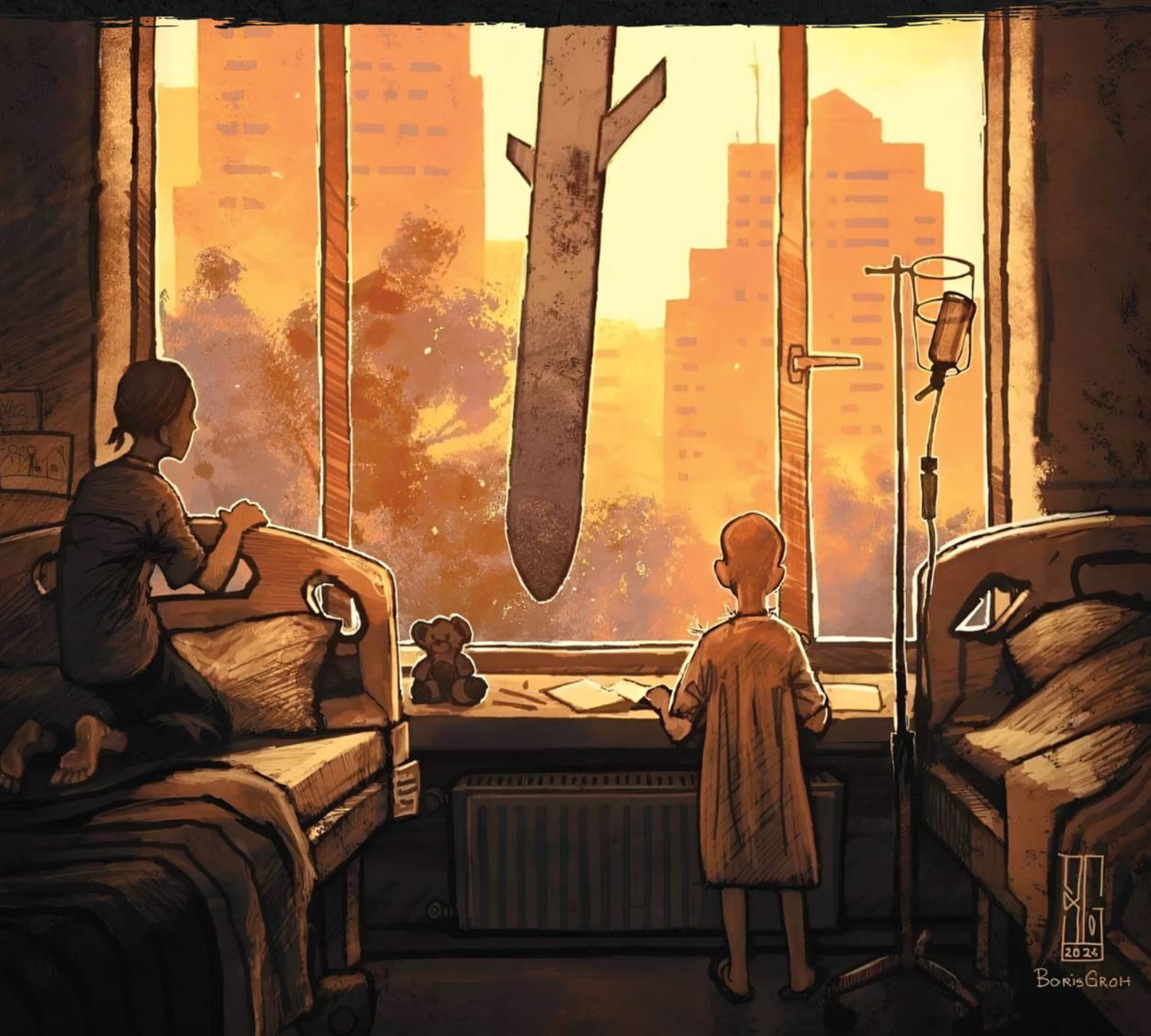




Омбудсман України  
Ombudsman of Ukraine

# LOST CHILDHOOD



2024

BORIS GRAH



# UKRAINIAN CHILDREN BECOME VICTIMS OF BARBARIC ACTIONS OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION

Since 2014, Russia has been committing war crimes and crimes against humanity on the territory of Ukraine, targeting peaceful cities, civilians and children.

**As a result of the Russian aggression:**

- **562** dead children
- **1,471** wounded children
- **1,966** missing children
- **19,546** deported and forcibly transferred children
- **15** sexually abused children

*Data from the beginning of the full-scale invasion as of July 22, 2024.*

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**This is not just statistics. Behind each figure is the fate of a particular child who was supposed to have a happy childhood, bright dreams and a peaceful future.**

This terrible counter will not stop as long as the terrorist country continues its genocidal war against Ukraine.

# RUSSIANS ATTACKED THE MOST VULNERABLE – SICK CHILDREN!

Illustration:  
Hetman brushes

On July 8, 2024, the Russians committed another act of terrorism against the civilian population of Ukraine. The level of cynicism of this attack is incomprehensible. **A Russian missile was deliberately launched at the largest children's hospital in Ukraine, Okhmatdyt, where children with the most complex diagnoses are treated, from severe prematurity to blood oncology.**



Photo: Gleb Garanich, Reuters

**All hospital buildings were damaged, and one of them is beyond repair.**

Every year, the hospital performs about 7,000 complex surgeries. It also provides state-of-the-art diagnostics and treatment of onco-haematological diseases and performs bone marrow transplants for sick children.

Lost childhood

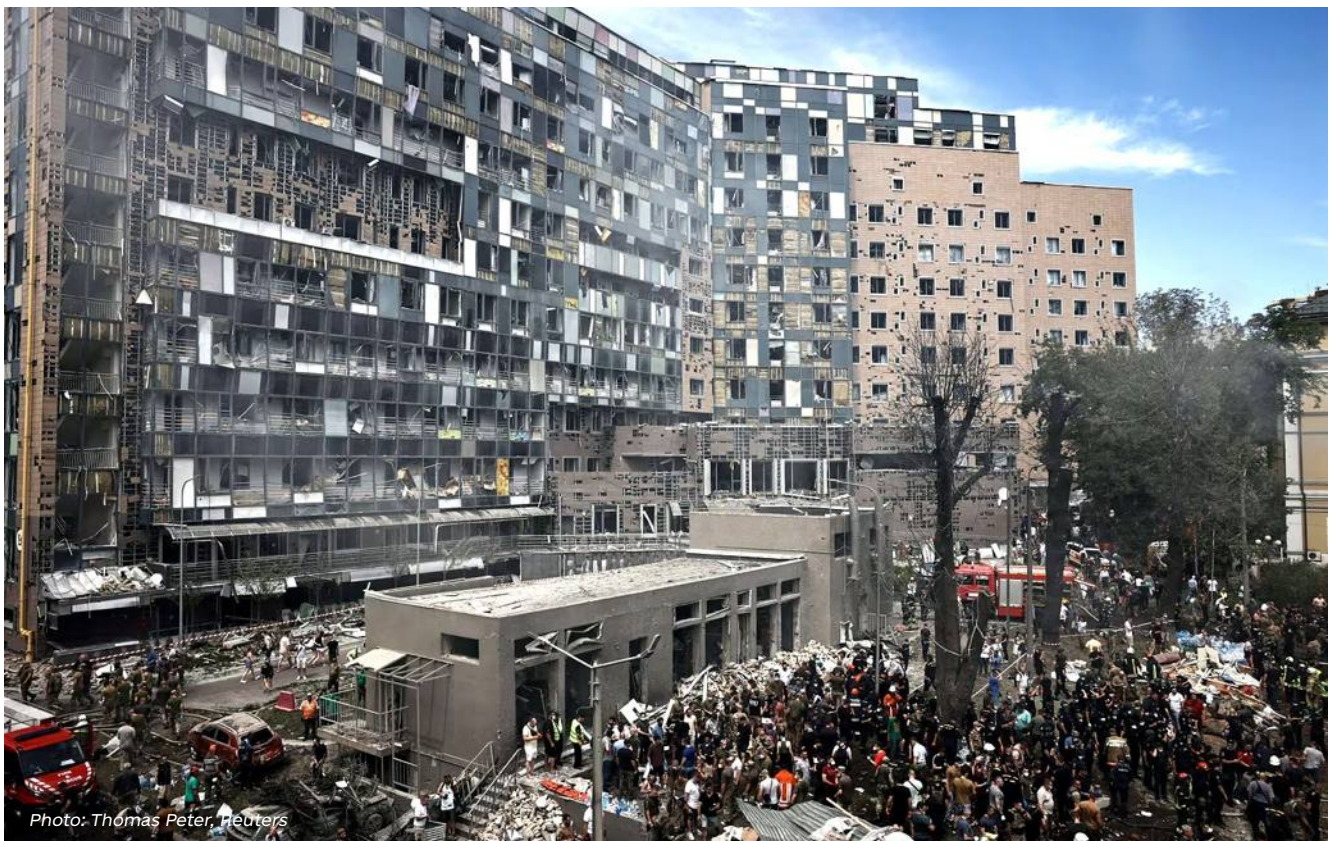


Photo: Thomas Peter, Reuters



In terms of staff and equipment, Okhmatdyt is a European and probably world-class medical facility. **At the time of the strike, the hospital had about 600 patients and the same number of medical staff.**



**At the time of the missile attack on Okhmatdyt, three heart surgeries were underway in the hospital, one of them with an open chest. The doctors continued the operations even after the attack.**

The shockwave threw the cardiac surgeon onto the operating table, but he and his anaesthetist colleague managed to switch the baby to manual CPR and evacuate to another hospital to complete the operation.

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Children fighting for their lives with the disease are also forced to flee from Russian missiles.

**2 people died as a result of the attack. More than 50 people were injured, including 7 children.**



Lost childhood

*Young patients are waiting to be transferred to another hospital*

**Due to the attack, sick children are deprived of the opportunity to receive quality treatment using professional equipment.** Restoring expensive equipment will take a long time. This will have long-term consequences for the sick children.



**The two-year-old Mykyta, who has Lyell's syndrome, is one of the victims of the attack on the hospital.**



# RUSSIA KILLS UKRAINIAN CHILDREN!

Russian terror against civilians is what Ukrainian children are forced to face. Regular rocket attacks on residential areas lead to irreparable consequences.

Russia has killed **562** Ukrainian children (as of July 22, 2024).

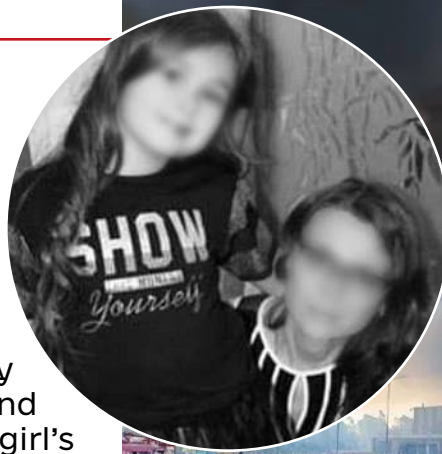


**POKROVSKY DISTRICT**  
(January, 2024).  
Private household.  
**5 children were killed.**

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**KHARKIV** (May, 2024).  
Shopping centre.  
**2 children died.**

The victims included a mother and her 12-year-old daughter. The whole family, except for the eldest daughter, had gone shopping on their day off. However, the mother and daughter never returned. The girl's father survived and was hospitalised.



**ODESA** (March, 2024).  
Residential building.  
**A woman and her four-month-old son died.**

While clearing the rubble of the destroyed house, rescuers found the body of a four-month-old baby in the arms of his mother. They had been killed by a Russian drone. The baby's father, who managed to escape, hoped for a miracle. However, the man lost both his wife and child. He was left with a little daughter. As a result of that night attack, 4 people were killed and 7 others were injured.

Photo: Suspilne Odesa

**KYIV** (July, 2024).  
Residential building.  
**Five children died.**



While clearing the rubble, rescuers of the State Emergency Service of Ukraine found photos of the boy's family

Among the victims was the family of a 10-year-old boy, Maksym, who was a karate practitioner and a prize-winner at local and national competitions. He was found in the bathroom with his mother Zoryana and younger sister Nastya. 'Ukraine has not only lost its child. It has lost a future athlete who could have become a member of the Olympic team,' says Maksym's coach, Serhii Pinchuk.



**ZAPORIZHZHIA** (March, 2024).  
Private house.  
**An 8-year-old girl died.**

This little girl loved to draw and do gymnastics. However, a Russian missile hit her bedroom where she was resting with her father. After the explosion, the girl's grandmother, who lives in the house opposite, rushed to dig out her son and granddaughter with her bare hands. The woman hoped to the last that they had managed to hide in the basement. Unfortunately, they both died. The child was less than two months shy of her ninth birthday.



Photo: Ukrinform



**KHARKIV** (February, 2024). Private household.  
**Three brothers, aged 7, 3 and 10 months, died along with their parents.**

A young family of a mother, father and three young sons were killed in their own home overnight by a Russian drone attack. 'Let the whole of Russia see what they have done! I will never forgive them. For my children, for my grandchildren. What have they done?' said the grieving grandmother during the funeral.



# UKRAINIAN CHILDREN SUFFER INJURIES AS A RESULT OF RUSSIAN AGGRESSION

No child in the world should experience the cruelty of war! And all those who issue and execute orders that lead to the deaths and injuries of children must be held to the highest standards of accountability!

**1,471** children **were injured** as a Result of the Russian Aggression (as of July 22, 2024).

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Photo: Oleksandr Magula (AP)

**KHARKIV REGION**  
(July, 2023).

A man carries a child out of a house damaged by a Russian missile attack.

**KHARKIV REGION**  
(January, 2024).

The 10-year-old Sashko and his cousin Alina were on their way to the grocery store. At that moment, a Russian shell landed near the children. The boy kept his severed leg pressed to his body to prevent it from bleeding. Unfortunately, his sister did not survive.



Photo: Libkos





**Suburbs of KHERSON**  
(November, 2023).

A 2-month-old girl was seriously injured as a result of Russian attack. The child was diagnosed with a closed head injury, concussion, bruised lungs and kidneys.



Lost childhood

**ODESA** (May, 2022).

This is 7-year-old Sasha. A Russian missile targeted the room where the girl was staying with her mother. Sasha was taken to hospital with numerous injuries – the child required amputation of her lower limb. She had 7 months of rehabilitation, 2 prostheses and a lot of pain and tears ahead of her.

Nevertheless, even this did not stop the girl from doing what she loves – gymnastics. Sasha continues to compete, win awards and inspire other children who have also lost limbs as a result of the Russian aggression.



# THE UKRAINIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM HAS SUFFERED SIGNIFICANTLY DUE TO RUSSIAN AGGRESSION

**3,798** educational institutions have suffered from bombing and shelling. 365 of them were completely destroyed.

About **900 thousand Ukrainian schoolchildren** have to study remotely.



Photo: Pavlo Bishko, Zaborona

*Destroyed school in the village of Cherkaska Lozova, Kharkiv region*

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The aggressor claims that it strikes exclusively at military objects in our country. However, this is a blatant lie – **every seventh school in Ukraine has been destroyed or damaged**. In addition, children have to go into shelters all over Ukraine during air raids, which causes significant stress for them and prevents them from learning.

Distance learning is also hampered by problems with electricity, as more than 70% of Ukraine's power generation capacities has been **destroyed or damaged as a result of Russian strikes on the country's energy infrastructure**.



*Students dance a graduation waltz in the yard of their bombed school in Chernihiv*



# DEPORTATION OF CHILDREN – DELIBERATE POLICY OF GENOCIDE

**19,546** children – deported and forcibly transferred to Russia (as of July 22, 2024).

The forced transfer and deportation of Ukrainian children to Russia began in 2014 during Russia’s armed aggression against Ukraine. And since 2022, it has taken on new horrific proportions! This is a gross violation of the fundamental rights of the child and international law, including the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

**The mass abduction of children and attempts to assimilate them into a foreign culture constitute a genocide under the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.** This Convention has been ratified by the Russian Federation itself!

## Occupiers Take Ukrainian Children from the Temporarily Occupied Territories and Make Every Effort to Re-educate Them and Erase Their National Identity!

Journalists from The New York Times found that the occupation authorities transferred 46 children from the orphanage during the occupation of Kherson. The orphanage staff hid the children in the basement of a church, but in April 2022, the Russian military found them and forcibly displaced them.

*Russian-appointed ‘director’ of the Kherson orphanage and Russian deputy in occupied Kherson in August 2022.*



Lost childhood



*In June 2024, it became known that the Russian invaders had taken another group of 43 children from the temporarily occupied Berdiansk for a so-called holiday to Chuvashia. There, children are apparently exposed to intense cultural and ideological influence.*

*Ukrainian children from Berdiansk in the Chuvash Republic, June 2024.*



## Forcible Transfer of Ukrainian children to Russian families with the Participation of Senior Russian Officials

One of the most dangerous consequences of the deportation is the forced transfer of Ukrainian children to Russian families, which began with the annexation of Crimea and has intensified since the start of the full-scale invasion.

**Russian authorities, including the Russian Presidential Commissioner for Children's Rights, are actively involved in these crimes.** This resulted in the transfer of at least 380 Ukrainian children to Russian families in April-October 2022 alone!



*Ukrainian children on the Russian adoption websites.*

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In April 2024, a Russian woman took custody of a boy who had been taken from the occupied territory of Donetsk region, along with his brother and sister, to Russia and placed in a boarding school in the Moscow region. The Russian woman refused to take the child's brother and sister. **As a result, the boy was adopted, and his name, surname, patronymic and place of birth were changed, despite the child's resistance.**



## Russia Puts Four Abducted Ukrainian Children on Adoption Website



Journalists from the Financial Times have revealed that **Russia abducted four children from Ukraine** in the first months of the full-scale invasion and illegally put them up for adoption. They found the children on the Russian adoption website. **The abducted children are between 8 and 15 years old**, and their identities have been confirmed by their families and the Ukrainian authorities. The Russians changed the names and ages of the children on the website, without indicating their Ukrainian origin, to make identification more difficult.



Photo: Financial Times

## Russian Politician Illegally Adopted a 10-month-old Ukrainian Girl!



The head of one of the leading Russian political parties, Serhii Myronov, and his wife 'adopted' a child taken from Ukraine! **The 10-month-old Marharyta Prokopenko** was in the orphanage in Kherson during the Russian occupation. From there, she was taken to Russia allegedly for 'examinations and rehabilitation'. **Later, the girl's name and citizenship were changed!** Thus, Margarita became 'Maryna Mironova'!

Lost childhood

**The two-year-old boy Illia Vashchenko** was taken together with the little girl, but the boy was diagnosed with an illness, which led the Russian politician to abandon him. The child's fate is currently unknown. **Russia does not respond to the Ukrainian side's attempts to return these children to their homeland.**



**Adoption of Ukrainian Children in the Russian Federation is Illegal. The Forced Transfer of Children from One Ethnic Group to Another is Genocide!**



# ERASING THE UKRAINIAN IDENTITY OF CHILDREN IN THE TEMPORARILY OCCUPIED TERRITORIES (TOT)

After the International Criminal Court issued arrest warrants for the Russian President and the Russian Presidential Commissioner for Children’s Rights, they realized that the world’s attention was focused on the abduction of Ukrainian children. Therefore, the occupation authorities have intensified the forced Russification and re-education of children on the ground in the temporarily occupied territories.

## FORCED RUSSIFICATION OF EDUCATION



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**Through Total Indoctrination, Forced Assimilation, Identity Change, Brainwashing, and Control, Russia is Pursuing a Policy of Genocide Against Ukrainians.**

Human Rights Watch has published a report on Russia’s violations of international law regarding the right to education in the TOT of Ukraine, where about a million Ukrainian schoolchildren are located, as well as in the previously occupied Kharkiv Region.

**The occupation authorities are imposing the Russian school curriculum, which is saturated with outright anti-Ukrainian propaganda. History textbooks justify the Russian invasion and portray modern Ukraine as a “Neo-Nazi State.”**

*Russian textbooks brought by the occupation authorities to a school in the village of Borova, Kharkiv Region, Ukraine, 2022.*



Photo: Human Rights Watch

## The report describes horrific violations of the rights of children and participants in the educational process!



- In occupied Melitopol, a student was punished for **speaking Ukrainian at school**. They put a sack over his head, took him several dozen kilometers away to another district, and left him to his fate. He was forced to return home alone.
- Teachers are subjected to pressure and torture, as in the case of a school principal in Kharkiv Region who was illegally detained and tortured for refusing to hand over school documents.
- Parents whose children are studying remotely under the Ukrainian curriculum are threatened and forced to send their children to “Russian” schools. Some parents have been forced to hide their children because of this.
- Schoolchildren are forced to undergo military training.
- Schools are required to report students who have reached the age of majority and can be mobilized into the Russian army.



Photo: Human Rights Watch

In this open-air cell at the police station in Kupiansk, Kharkiv Region, the Russian occupation authorities held Ukrainians, including educators.

Lost childhood



**Schools in the TOT of Ukraine are replacing or retraining school teachers, which some Russian politicians directly call “cleansing”.**

*Lesson “Russia in the world”.  
Skadovsk, Kherson Region.*



The “Conversations about Important Things” extracurricular education program for children in the TOT has been in place since September 2022, and was introduced by the Russian Ministry of Education.

- Classes are held every Monday after the mandatory school assembly with the performance of the Russian national anthem and the raising of the Russian flag. Such “conversations” are part of the “patriotic education” of the aggressor country.



- These classes often serve as a point of contact between children and Russian politicians who come to the children’s classes.

- So-called “lessons of courage” are also held on Russian national holidays and memorial dates, where the Russian army is glorified.

- The purpose of these lessons is to “foster respect for the Russian armed forces” and to form children’s readiness to join the Russian army. Often, Russian veterans who took part in the wars in Afghanistan or the so-called “Special Military Operation” are involved in such classes.

- At the end of the “lessons of courage” children are often forced to write letters of support for Russian soldiers for seizing Ukrainian lands.

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## MILITARIZATION

**Militarization of Childhood: a Targeted Policy of Re-education of Ukrainian Children in the TOT**



The policy of militarization of children by the Russian occupiers is systematic and has only intensified since the full-scale invasion. This is part of Russia’s strategy to destroy Ukrainians as a nation.

Since September 2023, schools in the TOT have been implementing a program of “cadet classes”. Such paramilitary classes are opened with the participation of the United Russia party, the Rosgvardia and the Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation.





The cadets undergo a physical and military training program that will enable them to serve in the Russian army when they grow up. Teaching “love of country” begins in the first grade. A whole system of extracurricular activities has been created for this purpose.

**“The Movement of the First”** unites most Russian youth movements, including the “Yunarmy”, “the Russian Schoolchildren’s Movement”, “the Big Break”, and others. Its mission is “comprehensive patriotic education of children.”

One of the first branches was opened in December 2022 in the TOT of Ukraine. The organization uses the same symbols as the Russian army in combat: “Z”, “V” and “the St. George’s ribbon”.



Lost childhood

*Donetsk schoolchildren join the “Yunarmy”*



**“Yunarmy”** is a militarized movement founded by a former Russian Defense Minister. “Yunarmy” branches appeared in the temporarily occupied territories in November 2022. “Yunarmy” members are provided with full military training, including firearms training, taught how to disassemble and assemble a Kalashnikov rifle, and introduced to Russian military personnel.

**Ukrainian Children are Being Militarized to Join the Russian Army and Make Them Fight Against Ukraine in the Future.**



## FORCED PASSPORTIZATION

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*Ukrainian children being handed Russian passports in occupied Henichesk, June, 2024.*

**Another tool for forcibly transferring children from one group to another is the imposition of Russian citizenship on them, which occurs through pressure on parents.** According to Russian law, a child's citizenship depends on the citizenship of the parents.

**For refusing to obtain Russian passports, parents are threatened with dismissal from their jobs, termination of social benefits for children, denial of medical services, and confiscation of property. Means of coercion also include threats to take children away from their parents.**

The occupiers issue passports to children from TOT in a special ceremony. Sometimes they are taken thousands of kilometers away to Moscow or St. Petersburg.

The contrived grandeur of this process is designed to give children the impression that they are becoming part of something significant, hiding their true intentions and manipulating their minds.



**The forced issuance of passports is an attempt to change the national identity of Ukrainian children and subjugate the population of the occupied territories.**



## OCCUPANTS EXECUTED MINOR UKRAINIAN TEENAGERS

In May 2023, minor residents of occupied Berdiansk born in 2006, Tyhran Ohanesian and Mykyta Khanhanov, were charged by the Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation with allegedly preparing a sabotage on the railway. They were charged with “violating” an article that provides for 10 to 20 years in prison.

Tyhran was brutally tortured and interrogated for five days. The teenager was required to confess to preparing a sabotage.

The European Parliament Adopted a Resolution on Tyhran Ohanesian and Mykyta Khanhanov and demanded that the occupiers release them from the occupation.

**Despite this, on June 24, 2023, the Russian occupiers killed Ukrainian teenagers in Berdiansk! An extrajudicial execution took place!**

Now the Russian side refuses to return the bodies of the dead boys to their parents or the Ukrainian side. The Russians are going to secretly bury the bodies of the boys.

**Russia’s impunity has led to the fact that the occupiers not only did not release the boys from the occupation, but also killed them, contrary to all norms! And now they do not allow them to be buried with dignity.**

**The international community must make every effort to ensure that the bodies of Ukrainian teenagers are returned!**





# WE WORK ON THE INTERNATIONAL ARENA TO RESTORE JUSTICE AND RIGHTS OF OUR CHILDREN

■ The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly recognized the actions of the Russian Federation as genocide of the Ukrainian people. The document calls on the 53 OSCE member states to make efforts to de-occupy Crimea and all occupied territories of Ukraine by supporting the Peace Formula and the Crimean Platform. The resolution also calls for the establishment of a Special Tribunal to bring Russia to justice for crimes committed in Ukraine.

■ 41 countries have already joined the International Coalition for the Return of Ukrainian Children. The work to return Ukrainian children, civilian hostages and prisoners of war from the Russian Federation continues every day! The Ombudsman of Ukraine Dmytro Lubinets is working for this purpose within the framework of the implementation of the 4th Point of the Peace Formula of the President of Ukraine.

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■ About 80 countries and international organizations joined the communiqué of the first Global Peace Summit. The third point declares a common vision that all prisoners of war should be released through a full exchange. All deported and illegally displaced Ukrainian children, as well as all other Ukrainian civilians who have been illegally detained, should be returned to Ukraine.





# UKRAINE IS WORKING ON THE RETURN OF CHILDREN WITHOUT STOPPING!

As of July 15, 2024, **Ukraine has returned 758** children.

## 10 young Ukrainians were returned from Russian occupation

In June 2024, we managed to return 10 Ukrainian children to their homeland! The children and their families lived in the TOT – in Donetsk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia Regions. However, they are now recovering from the horrors that the occupation “authorities” inflicted on them in the territory controlled by Ukraine. Those who returned visited the Child Rights Protection Center at the Ombudsman’s Office.



Lost childhood

## Seven children left the TOT: Ukraine provided assistance with all necessary needs

In April, children and their families left Zaporizhzhia and Kherson Regions. Families with teenage boys left the TOT so that their children would not be taken to the Russian army. The families were assisted by representatives of the Ombudsman’s Office, government agencies and charitable organizations.





## We Managed to Return 13 Ukrainian Children to Their Homeland!

Seven of them were returned from the TOT, and six more were returned as part of the implementation of the President's action plan Bring Kids Back UA.



Those who returned from the TOT and visited the Child Rights Protection Center at the Ombudsman's Office told about their journey of return. The story of a 15-year-old girl from Mariupol is shocking to the core. Her house was hit by a Russian tank, so she and her mother took refuge in a church until the girl was injured in the head by rocket fragments. After numerous attempts and actions to leave for the government-controlled territory, the family managed to do so.

Some of the children who have been returned today lost their parents, some of them wanted to return on their own, but the Russian Federation did not allow them to do so, and some dreamed of going to their relatives. And this dream has come true.

**Our Office, which worked on this together with other government agencies and with the mediation of the State of Qatar, brought the result – children in their native land. We are grateful to UNICEF for supporting children's rehabilitation programs!**



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Омбудсман України  
Ombudsman of Ukraine

**We call on all countries that share universal values to unite and act to return deported and forcibly displaced Ukrainian children!**

**Every child deserves a safe childhood in their native land.**

**Russia's aggression against Ukraine must be stopped to guarantee a peaceful future for our children.**

**Russia must be held accountable for every crime it has committed!**

### **How can international partners help Ukraine?**

- To join the International Coalition for the Return of Ukrainian Children and actively work within its framework.
- Increase sanctions pressure on the aggressor country and officials involved in the crimes.
- Support Ukraine in bringing the perpetrators to justice.
- Support the reintegration and rehabilitation of children.



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