



Co-Chairs' Summary – President of Ukraine and Prime Minister of Canada

24 September 2025 - 02:18

Restoring Childhood and Humanity: Advancing Peace in Ukraine Through the Return of Ukrainian Children

High-Level Meeting of the International Coalition for the Return of Ukrainian Children on the margins of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA 80)

23 September 2025, New York

The Prime Minister of Canada, Mark Carney, and the President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, co-chaired a leader-level meeting of the International Coalition for the Return of Ukrainian Children on the margins of the 80th session of the UN General Assembly. Leaders, Special Guests First Lady of Ukraine Olena Zelenska and Diana Fox Carney, Spouse of the Prime Minister of Canada, as well as senior representatives from Member States and international organizations gathered to strengthen collective efforts to secure the safe return of Ukrainian children who have been illegally deported or forcibly transferred by the Russian Federation.

Participants reiterated their unwavering commitment to the protection of children affected by Russia's illegal, unprovoked, and unjustifiable war of aggression against Ukraine, in line with international humanitarian law and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Participants recalled that the International Coalition for the Return of Ukrainian Children was officially launched in Kyiv in February 2024. Co-chaired by Canada and Ukraine, the Coalition aims to coordinate joint efforts, share information, align resources, and advocate internationally to bring Ukrainian children home and reunite them with their loved ones and communities.

Participants emphasized that the unlawful deportation and forced transfer of children constitutes a grave breach of international humanitarian law and a profound violation of human rights. They underlined that this practice is part of a broader pattern of

abuses by Russia in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine, including the erasure of Ukrainian identity, denial of Ukrainian-language education, indoctrination, including militarization of children, and separation from families.

Participants further noted that international accountability mechanisms are engaged: in March 2023, the International Criminal Court issued arrest warrants for President Vladimir Putin and Children's Rights Commissioner Maria Lvova-Belova for the war crime of unlawful deportation and transfer of children from occupied areas of Ukraine to the Russian Federation.

Participants also noted with concern that thousands of Ukrainian children remain in Russia and the occupied territories, separated from their loved ones and communities, while only around 1600 have been successfully returned to Ukraine to date. They highlighted Ukraine's presentation of an initial list of 339 children to the Russian Federation on 2 June 2025 as a concrete humanitarian step and a potential confidence-building measure and noted with regret the absence of any meaningful response from the Russian Federation to date.

Participants reaffirmed that the return of these children is both a humanitarian imperative and a central element to achieving a just and sustainable peace in Ukraine. Prime Minister Mark Carney and President Volodymyr Zelenskyy called for sustained international unity. They welcomed the work of the International Coalition for the Return of Ukrainian Children and the President of Ukraine's Bring Kids Back UA initiative, while stressing the urgency of intensified international engagement. President Zelenskyy announced that Ukraine would be tabling a UN Resolution calling on Russia for the return of Ukrainian children, and he thanked the Presidency of the European Commission for committing to host a Summit of the Coalition in order to keep the issue on the top of the international agenda.

During the meeting, participants:

- Called on Russia to immediately return Ukrainian children.
- Reiterated that the safe return, reintegration, and rehabilitation of illegally deported and forcibly transferred children should remain a shared international priority, with actions guided by the best interest of the child and full respect for international humanitarian and human rights law.
- Underscored that the return of children should be embedded within broader efforts to advance peace, reconciliation, and accountability in Ukraine.
- Recalled that international cooperation is essential, including through both advocacy campaigns and quiet diplomacy.

- Recognized ongoing and new initiatives under the International Coalition for the Return of Ukrainian Children, including:
 - The launch of a pilot tracing mechanism for Ukrainian children deported or forcibly transferred by the Russian Federation;
 - Practical support to facilitate the returns of Ukrainian children, including playing a mediating role;
 - Expanded investment in recovery, reintegration, and rehabilitation initiatives, under the patronage of the First Lady of Ukraine, Olena Zelenska, including housing and supported living for returning children and youth, foster family assistance, and psychosocial rehabilitation; and
 - The European Union and Andorra formally announced their decision to join the International Coalition for the Return of Ukrainian Children, further strengthening the collective commitment to this vital cause.

Participants welcomed the exchange of ideas and the announcements made during the meeting and emphasized the importance of continuing international attention and practical support. They encouraged interested states and organizations to consider joining or supporting the Coalition.

The Co-Chairs thanked participants for their engagement and solidarity and reaffirmed their determination to continue working together to support the safe return, reintegration and rehabilitation of Ukrainian children. Prime Minister Mark Carney and President Volodymyr Zelenskyy noted that they would continue to raise this issue with partners at the highest level, keeping the plight of Ukraine's children at the centre of international attention.

