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Co-Chairs' Statement for Pathways to Peace: Second International Conference on Returning Ukrainian Children, Detained Civilians, and Prisoners of War

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Statement

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The Honourable Anita Anand, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Denys Uliutin, Minister of Social Policy, Family, and Unity of Ukraine, and Eivind Vad Petersson, State Secretary for the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Norway, today issued the following statement:

“Canada, Ukraine, and Norway were honoured to convene the Ministerial *Pathways to Peace Conference* in Toronto on 28-29 September 2026. We welcomed Foreign Ministers and other representatives of governments, international organizations, civil society, and experts from across the international community, united by a common conviction: that every Ukrainian child unlawfully deported or forcibly transferred, every unlawfully detained civilian, and every prisoner of war must be returned home.

“The conference took place against the backdrop of Russia's ongoing war against Ukraine and its profound human consequences. Participants reaffirmed that respect for international law, including international

humanitarian law, is not optional. Civilians must be protected, families must not be separated, and those unlawfully deprived of their liberty must be returned. We remain deeply concerned that thousands of Ukrainians continue to be held, displaced, or otherwise prevented from reuniting with their families, often with little information available regarding their whereabouts or well-being. Participants recalled the conclusion of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine that the deportation and forcible transfer of Ukrainian children, as well as enforced disappearances, amount to crimes against humanity.

“Throughout the conference, participants heard directly from Ukrainians affected by Russia's war, grounding our discussions in the lived experiences of those who continue to bear its deepest consequences. Their testimony served as a powerful reminder that behind every statistic is a child, a parent, a family, and a future waiting to be restored.

“With respect to Ukrainian children, participants underscored the imperative of identifying, tracing, and verifying children who have been unlawfully deported or forcibly transferred by the Russian Federation and developing additional pathways to facilitate their safe return. They reaffirmed that all actions concerning children must be guided by their best interests and must safeguard their identity, nationality, family connections, and cultural heritage. Participants also expressed concern regarding efforts aimed at indoctrination, militarization, or assimilation and emphasized the importance of comprehensive support for returned children and their families, including access to education, health care, psychosocial services, and community-based reintegration. They underlined the importance of full UN engagement on the issue, based on the implementation of the UN General Assembly resolution “Return of Ukrainian Children”, adopted on 3 December 2025. They also commended the joint efforts undertaken by the Bring Kids Back UA initiative and the International Coalition for the Return of Ukrainian Children, including ongoing work to finalize Forward-Looking Agenda 2026-2027.

“Participants also addressed the plight of unlawfully detained civilians, noting the continuing challenges in establishing the full scale of detentions and obtaining reliable information about those affected. They called for strengthened efforts to improve information sharing, maintain family contact, expand humanitarian access, and advance practical efforts for the release and return of unlawfully detained civilians. Participants highlighted the valuable role that third countries, international organizations, and other trusted intermediaries can play in supporting these efforts and helping to bridge gaps where existing channels remain insufficient.

“On prisoners of war, participants reaffirmed the importance of full compliance with international humanitarian law, including regular unimpeded humanitarian access by mandated international organizations and the provision of reliable information concerning the identity, whereabouts, and condition of prisoners. Participants stressed that protection must cover the full captivity period, from capture to detention and return. Discussions highlighted the importance of continuing exchanges and return efforts, while recognizing the particular needs of women prisoners of war, wounded and seriously ill prisoners, and survivors of torture, ill-treatment, and conflict-related sexual violence.

“A clear message emerged throughout the conference: return marks not the end of a person's ordeal, but the beginning of recovery. Participants emphasized the importance of sustained medical, psychological, social, educational, and legal support to help returnees rebuild their lives and reconnect with their communities. They strongly emphasized that humanitarian action and accountability are mutually reinforcing and that both remain essential to achieving a just and lasting peace. Many noted the imperative of international efforts to hold to account those responsible for war crimes and other serious international crimes, including unlawful deportations, enforced disappearances, and the ill-treatment of prisoners of war and civilians.

“The conference reaffirmed the importance of broad international cooperation. Participants also underlined the key role of civil society and the importance of sustainable support for their work. Participants emphasized that progress will require sustained engagement across governments, international organizations, civil society, and trusted intermediaries, using every available channel to secure returns and uphold the rights and dignity of those affected.

“Canada, Ukraine, and Norway welcome the commitments reflected in the *Toronto Pledge Communiqué*. As co-chairs, we remain steadfast in our determination to support the safe return of Ukrainian children, unlawfully detained civilians, and prisoners of war; to strengthen assistance for their recovery and reintegration; and to uphold the principles of international law, accountability, and human dignity. We call on the international community to continue and intensify these efforts until every Ukrainian is able to return home.”

Related products

- [Canada, Ukraine and Norway to co-host international conference on returning Ukrainian children, detained civilians and prisoners of war](#)
- [Joint Communiqué – Pathways to Peace: Second International Conference on Returning Ukrainian Children, Detained Civilians, and Prisoners of War](#)

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