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Joint Communiqué – Pathways to Peace: Second International Conference on Returning Ukrainian Children, Detained Civilians, and Prisoners of War

From: [Global Affairs Canada](#)

Statement

September 29, 2026 - Toronto, Ontario - Global Affairs Canada

“We, the Foreign Ministers and representatives of participating states and international organizations, gathered in Toronto on September 28-29, 2026, for the Second International Conference on Returning Ukrainian Children, Detained Civilians, and Prisoners of War, co-chaired by Canada, Ukraine, and Norway.

“We reaffirm our support for Ukraine's sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders, extending to its territorial waters. We reiterate our commitment to the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, and to international law, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law. We underscore that compliance with international law is indispensable in achieving a comprehensive, just, and lasting peace. We remain deeply concerned by the devastating human consequences of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine.

“Building on the outcomes of the Ministerial Conference on the Human Dimension of Ukraine's 10-Point Peace Formula held in Montreal in October 2024, including the Joint Communiqué of the Montreal Pledge, we reaffirm our commitment to addressing the plight of unlawfully deported and forcibly transferred Ukrainian children, unlawfully detained civilians, and prisoners of war. Their return, rehabilitation, and reintegration remain a core priority.

“We welcome the efforts undertaken since the Montreal Conference by Ukraine, partner states, international organizations, civil society, and affected families to advance returns and support affected individuals and their families. We recognize that substantial challenges remain and enhanced international coordination, political engagement, and practical action are required. Progress remains uneven, with significant challenges in securing reliable information and humanitarian access, expanding pathways for release and return, and providing sustained rehabilitation and reintegration support.

“Since the Montreal Conference, some progress has been made, but the pace and scale of returns remain limited and uneven across the three groups, and significant challenges persist:

- Prisoner of war exchanges have continued;
- A number of unlawfully deported and forcibly transferred Ukrainian children have been returned as return pathways have expanded, including through intermediary states and civil society organizations;
- Some unlawfully detained civilians have been released, although progress on civilian returns remains considerably more limited and no predictable mechanism for their release and return has yet emerged;
- Ukraine's tracing and reintegration systems have strengthened, including through more structured tracing and verification of individual cases and greater coordination across return and reintegration efforts; and

- International coordination has deepened with the expansion of the International Coalition for the Return of Ukrainian Children to 51 members, and the adoption of the December 2025 UN General Assembly resolution on the return of Ukrainian children.

“Building on the Montreal Pledge, we endorse the following commitments, which constitute the Toronto Pledge:

The Toronto pledge

We remain committed to the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and to international law, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

1. Ukrainian Children

We remain gravely concerned by the unlawful deportation and forcible transfer of Ukrainian children by the Russian Federation in the context of its unprovoked and unjustifiable war of aggression against Ukraine. We also express concern about the militarization of children in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine by the Russian Federation. These actions have serious negative consequences for their identity, well-being, family unity, human rights and fundamental freedoms. We reiterate the need for their immediate, safe and unconditional return, in accordance with international humanitarian law. Their return and reintegration should be undertaken with due regard for the best interests of the child.

We welcome ongoing efforts under the Bring Kids Back UA initiative as well as leadership efforts by co-chairs Canada and Ukraine in the International Coalition for the Return of Ukrainian Children.

We recall the adoption of the December 3, 2025, United Nations General Assembly resolution on the return of Ukrainian children and underscore the importance of its effective implementation. We reiterate the resolution’s call on the Russian Federation to cease, without delay, any further practice of

forcible transfer, unlawful deportation, separation from families and legal guardians, change of personal status, including through citizenship, adoption or placement in foster families and indoctrination of Ukrainian children.

We underscore the need to translate sustained international engagement into tangible progress in identifying children, facilitating their return and supporting their rehabilitation and reintegration following return.

We commit to supporting efforts to identify, trace and locate Ukrainian children who have been unlawfully deported or forcibly transferred, and to verify information relating to individual cases; to sustain and expand practical pathways for their safe return, including through engagement with willing states, international organizations and other actors positioned to facilitate returns, and through sustained support for Ukrainian civil society organizations involved in return efforts; and to strengthen sustainable, state-led rehabilitation and reintegration support for returned children and their families.

We further commit to supporting Ukraine's readiness for larger-scale returns when conditions allow.

2. Unlawfully Detained Civilians

We deplore the continued unlawful detention of Ukrainian civilians by the Russian Federation, including persons detained since 2014 in temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine and individuals forcibly transferred to places of detention in the Russian Federation.

We note with alarm, persistent reports regarding arbitrary detention, violations of applicable legal and procedural safeguards, enforced disappearances, torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment, conflict-related sexual violence, forced confessions, inadequate access to medical care, restrictions on family contact and insufficient humanitarian access and monitoring.

We underscore the urgent need for timely and reliable information concerning the identity, whereabouts, legal status and condition of unlawfully detained civilians, as well as effective access and monitoring by relevant mandated international organizations. We also stress the particular need for more information concerning female detainees.

We emphasize that civilians deprived of liberty in connection with armed conflict are protected under international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

We call on the Russian Federation to provide reliable information on the whereabouts of unlawfully detained Ukrainian civilians, ensure their communication with their families, lawyers and relevant international actors, including internationally mandated organizations, and immediately release and return them to Ukraine, without preconditions.

We commit to supporting efforts to improve documentation and verification of individual cases; strengthen diplomatic engagement and practical pathways and mechanisms for the release and return of unlawfully detained civilians; and address legal, administrative and logistical barriers that impede their return.

We further commit to supporting sustainable recovery, rehabilitation and reintegration following release, and to strengthening Ukraine's readiness to support larger-scale returns.

3. Prisoners of War

We remain alarmed by documented reports of summary executions, deaths in detention, torture, inhumane treatment, conflict-related sexual violence, forced confessions, and other abuses affecting Ukrainian prisoners of war held by the Russian Federation, which may constitute serious violations of international humanitarian law. We also emphasize that it is unacceptable that the Russian Federation is prosecuting Ukrainian prisoners of war under

Russian domestic criminal law, including for conduct constituting lawful participation in hostilities. We call for their humane treatment and full respect for protections in accordance with the Geneva Conventions.

We underscore the need for regular and unimpeded humanitarian access by mandated international organizations and for timely and reliable information concerning prisoners' identity, status, whereabouts, treatment and conditions of detention, including notification of and contact with their families.

We call upon the Russian Federation to comply fully with the Third Geneva Convention, including by granting internationally mandated organizations immediate, regular and unimpeded access to all prisoners of war in all places of internment in accordance with Article 126, by providing full lists and notification to families, by ceasing the prosecution of prisoners of war for lawful participation in hostilities and releasing those already convicted on that basis, and by investigating summary executions, torture and deaths in custody

We commit to strengthening diplomatic efforts to improve humanitarian access and transparency; to sustaining and expanding practical pathways for the safe return of Ukrainian prisoners of war, including through prisoner exchanges and engagement with intermediary states, with the objective of the release of all prisoners of war on an all-for-all basis, with particular attention to increasing the return of women prisoners of war, seriously wounded and sick prisoners, and those held for prolonged periods; and to strengthening rehabilitation and reintegration support for military personnel returning from captivity and for their families.

4. International Cooperation

We recognize that meaningful progress will require sustained international cooperation among governments, international organizations, humanitarian actors, experts, and civil society.

We therefore commit to strengthening coordination, including through existing mechanisms, such as the International Coalition for the Return of Ukrainian Children, the Working Group on the Human Dimension in Kyiv, the mandates of Special Representatives of the United Nations Secretary-General, the United Nations Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine, the Council of Europe's Special Envoy of the Secretary General on the situation of children of Ukraine and the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly special envoy. We welcome the participation of interested partners in these efforts.

We further welcome the practical initiatives announced during this Conference and encourage continued contributions, consistent with national and institutional capacities and priorities, including financial, technical, diplomatic, operational, and political support.

We remain committed to working together with Ukraine and international partners and to engaging all relevant actors where this can contribute to tangible progress, to advance these objectives, uphold international law, support affected individuals and their families, and ensure that human dignity remains at the centre of all peace-related efforts.

"Finally, we express our appreciation to Canada, Ukraine, and Norway for co-chairing the Conference and bringing us together in pursuit of our shared objective in supporting Ukraine to advance international peace and security, uphold international law, and supporting affected individuals and their families."

Endorsed by: Albania, Andorra, Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, Costa Rica, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Council of Europe, Denmark, Estonia, European Union, Finland, France, Germany, Georgia, Greece, Honduras, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, International Commission on Missing Persons, Italy, Japan, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Moldova,

Monaco, Montenegro, the Netherlands, New Zealand, North Macedonia, Norway, OSCE Parliamentary Association, Panama, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Ukraine, United Kingdom.

Further states and international organisations wishing to support the Joint Communiqué can do so by writing to Événements Canada-Ukraine/Canada-Ukraine Events Evenements-Canada-Ukraine-Events@international.gc.ca

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Date modified: 2026-09-29