



Омбудсман України
Ombudsman of Ukraine

TO RETURN MEANS TO SAVE

Point 4 of the President of
Ukraine Peace Formula



DEPORTATION OF UKRAINIAN CHILDREN IS GENOCIDE!

Since 2014, the Russian Federation has been deporting and forcibly transferring **Ukrainian children**. The goal is to change their identity and thus raise the next generation of Russian soldiers.



Since the beginning of the full-scale invasion, according to the information platform “Children of War”, Ukraine **has verified about 20,000 cases of deportation and forcible transfer of children**. The actual number of such cases may reach hundreds of thousands!

We are out of time – children need to be returned now. Because they are growing up very quickly, and the Russian Federation is re-educating Ukrainians and imposing Russian narratives on them.

IF UKRAINE RETURNS AT LEAST ONE CHILD EVERY DAY, IT WILL TAKE 55 YEARS! WE NEED TO ACT TODAY!

To return means to save



In June 2023, the Child Rights Protection Center was opened at the initiative of President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy to restore the rights of children returned home by Ukraine and to protect the best interests of children.



A civilian returned from Russian captivity was finally reunited with her children, who were in the temporarily occupied territories





INSTEAD OF CHILDHOOD — A REAL CRIME OF GENOCIDE. HOW RUSSIA TREATS UKRAINIAN CHILDREN



14-year-old Vitaliy Mukharsky is a teenager who spent 10 days in one of the torture chambers in Kherson. The boy was captured by Russian soldiers simply for taking a photo of destroyed Russian equipment... Vitaliy was held in the torture chamber together with 13 other people. The room was cold and damp. There was only one bed serving as the furniture. The occupiers gave only 5 litres of water a day to be shared among 13 detainees.

Abusing children and starving them is all that the Russian Federation is capable of. That is why we must bring them home.

STORIES OF UKRAINIAN CHILDREN WHO RETURNED HOME

The stories of other returned children were heard by the First Ladies and Gentlemen of Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Guatemala, Lithuania, Serbia and Slovenia. They visited the Child Rights Protection Center. The meeting was also joined by **the UN Messenger of Peace and American actor Michael Douglas and his son.**



Families from the TOTs told the guests their stories about the horrors they had experienced under occupation, the Russian practice of forced issue of passports, propaganda at schools and the sentencing of relatives for decades for their pro-Ukrainian position.



We are working not only to return deported children home, but also to restore their rights. The Child Rights Protection Center was opened on the initiative of the President of Ukraine. It is a barrier-free space that operates according to the Barnahus model. Such spaces exist **in Kyiv, Lutsk, Dnipro and Rivne.**



UKRAINE WANTS INTERNATIONAL PARTNERS TO TAKE CONCRETE STEPS TO BRING HOME DEPORTED AND FORCIBLY TRANSFERRED CHILDREN

Demand that the Russian Federation:

1. Promptly return to Ukraine illegally deported and forcibly transferred Ukrainian children. Provide data on the location of children who were deported from the territory of Ukraine to the territory of the Russian Federation or forcibly transferred to the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine and ensure their safe return to the territory controlled by Ukraine.
2. End the illegal deportation and forcible transfer of Ukrainian children. Ensure the safe evacuation of families with children in the temporarily occupied territories who wish to leave these territories for the territory controlled by Ukraine. Ensure the safe evacuation of family-type children's homes, foster families and guardians together with their foster children and children under guardianship to the territory controlled by Ukraine.
3. Document unaccompanied asylum-seeking children; children in alternative care (including institutions and foster families); children separated from their families due to displacement, detention, death or other conflict-related incidents; children in need of family reunification or long-term placement; children in need of state assistance, especially those unaccompanied, residing in the Russian Federation and expeditiously transmit this information to the ICRC's Central Tracing Agency, in compliance with international humanitarian law.
4. Cease to change the names, identity, and citizenship of Ukrainian children.
5. Cease to move Ukrainian children and place them in foster care or adoption processes.
6. Prohibit the recruitment and involvement of children in armed formations, paramilitary formations and military education, as well as the use of children for active participation in hostilities, in compliance with the Geneva Conventions (IV).
7. Stop the imprisonment, persecution or other significant deprivation of physical liberty in violation of fundamental norms of international law of Ukrainian children in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine.
8. Provide information to Ukraine on all Ukrainian children who, since 2022, as a result of the armed aggression of the Russian Federation, are located on the territory of the Russian Federation, both accompanied and unaccompanied.

Work with WG4 members to:

1. Advocate the Russian Federation to provide ICRC, UN, intermediary states, international and/or humanitarian organisations that are trusted by the parties, unimpeded access to all places of residence of Ukrainian children on its territory and on the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine, including children residing in Russian homes and other forms of family-based care.
2. Support efforts in the retracing, return, and rehabilitation of children using a survivor-centred approach that prioritizes the best interests of the child.
3. Facilitate the creation of an international register of officials of the Russian Federation and the Republic of Belarus who have taken part in the deportation and forcible transfer of Ukrainian children, with a view to further imposing sanctions on them by Ukraine and partner countries and issuing arrest warrants by the International Criminal Court.



IN CAPTIVITY: RUSSIA UNLAWFULLY DETAINS UKRAINIAN CIVILIANS!

Currently, **more than 16,000 people are considered missing under special circumstances** and unlawfully deprived of their personal liberty as a result of Russia's armed aggression against Ukraine. **According to official figures, almost 1,800 civilians are held in Russian detention facilities.** The real numbers may be much higher!

Many unlawfully detained civilians are held **incommunicado, in unofficial places of detention, in appalling conditions:** without sufficient food, water, or medical care. They are being tortured and subjected to torture! **The situation with the abduction of Ukrainian civilians by Russia requires the world's response!**



RUSSIA UNLAWFULLY IMPRISONS AND CONVICTS CIVILIANS!

By its actions, **Russia is violating the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War**, the third article of which prohibits taking of civilian detainees. Civilians have no right to be detained, and if this happens, they must be released immediately.

Russia does not release civilians because **they can testify to the atrocities committed by the Russian Federation in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine.** For the same reason, the aggressor does not grant representatives of the ICRC and other international organisations access to civilians. They would become direct witnesses to the crimes of the Russian Federation and its failure to comply with the norms of international humanitarian law.

Russia also uses terror against civilians as a tool to influence Ukraine's position in the context of achieving military and political goals. First and foremost, to suppress Ukrainian resistance in the temporarily occupied territories.

We are fighting for unlawfully detained civilians – one of the most difficult categories. Not returning them means condemning them to death.



Stepan Podolchak was a Ukrainian priest who was tortured and shot by Russians on 15 February 2024 in the village of Kalanchak, located in the temporarily occupied territory of Kherson region. He had been abducted from his home the day before.

Viktoriiia Roshchyna was a Ukrainian civilian journalist who died in Russian captivity. Her death became known in 2024. Her body was later returned 'with signs of an autopsy performed before arrival in Ukraine' and without some organs. This was likely done to conceal the cause of death.



24-year-old Mariana Checheliuk was unlawfully detained by the occupiers as a police officer in 2022 in Mariupol.



The girl is not a combatant! Mariana was imprisoned for more than two years. During this time, she was held in a colony in Donetsk, in Olenivka, in a prison in Mariupol, and finally in Taganrog.

She was held in inadequate conditions. According to her mother, in captivity, Mariana experienced a lot of torture – she was starved, beaten, and abused. She was also kept in complete information isolation.

Due to the conditions of her captivity, her health deteriorated and she lost weight.



*Mariana
returned home
on May 31, 2024*

The Russians unlawfully detained the former Mayor of Kherson, Volodymyr Mykolaïenko, in April 2022. Volodymyr served as Mayor of Kherson from 2014 to 2020.

The 65-year-old man was unlawfully detained by the enemy for more than three years! He is a civilian who, under the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, should not have been detained.

Volodymyr Mykolaïenko was finally able to return home on 24 August 2025.





IN 2025, THE PROGRESS WAS MADE ON THE ISSUE OF RETURNING CIVILIANS

This is the result of extensive work, including the Istanbul agreements. However, **the number of civilians returned is very small!** Since the start of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, only **372 civilians** have been returned. Thousands more remain illegally detained by Russia.

- On 2 October, **20 civilians** returned to Ukraine. They had been unlawfully detained in the first months of the full-scale invasion. Many were arbitrarily detained simply from their own homes.
- On 24 August, **8 civilians** who had been unlawfully deprived of their liberty in the Russian Federation returned to their homeland. Among them are those whose return has been long fought for: journalists Dmytro Khilyuk and Mark Kaliush, former Mayor of Kherson Volodymyr Mykolaenko. Among those returned are a paramedic-hospital worker, a volunteer, as well as those who were unlawfully deprived of their liberty before the full-scale invasion of the Russian Federation.
- On 14 August, **51 civilians**, including men and women, who had been unlawfully detained or sentenced to long terms of imprisonment, were released. They are political prisoners, citizens of various categories, including medical professionals. Some Ukrainians had been in captivity since 2015-2016. There are also those who were detained by Russia after 2022 in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine. The oldest civilian returned is 74 years old.

In general, **all repatriated citizens have acute illnesses, diseases, and require rehabilitation and treatment.**

To return means to save



The world needs to know the truth and help Ukraine release unlawfully detained civilians.



UKRAINE WANTS ITS INTERNATIONAL PARTNERS TO TAKE CONCRETE STEPS TO RELEASE CIVILIANS UNLAWFULLY DETAINED BY RUSSIA

ALL PERSONS HELD

Demand that the Russian Federation:

1. End torture and ill-treatment, including during arrest and transportation.
2. Improve internment and detention conditions, including the provision of adequate food, water, medical care, primary and secondary legal aid.
3. Ensure prompt information-sharing on persons' status and whereabouts and provide international monitors regular access of delegates from the protecting power, international and humanitarian organisations, including the ICRC to all places of internment and detention and access to all persons (civilians and prisoners of war (POWs)) deprived of their liberty.
4. Facilitate communication channels between Ukrainian civilians and prisoners of war and their relatives and ensure the regular exchange of humanitarian parcels.
5. Provide access of accused persons to a fair and regular trial.
6. Provide systematic and timely transmission of accurate data on all persons protected by the Geneva Conventions (including POWs and civilians deprived of their liberty) through the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) Central Tracing Agency (CTA), with a view to preventing enforced disappearances. This should include information about the victim's status, location, alleged criminal charges, health situation and in the event of death, information about the causes of death and the conditions under which it occurred and exact location of the graves. This includes effective and independent operation of the National Information Bureau (NIB).
7. Cease the practice of treating those outside the categories mentioned in article 4 of GCIII as prisoners of war and immediately release from captivity all Ukrainian medical and religious staff captured during the occupation of the territory of Ukraine.
8. Ensure the investigation of crimes committed by officials of military units and the penitentiary system of the Russian Federation against prisoners of war and other persons held in places of detention.

CIVILIANS DETAINED BY THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION

Demand that the Russian Federation:

1. Release all civilians detained for acts or beliefs committed or expressed before occupation, in accordance with the Geneva Conventions.
2. Immediately end the practice of enforced disappearances, which are prohibited by International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.
3. Ensure prompt information on grounds of internment, periodic review, effective appeal procedures, access for lawyers and release once grounds for internment cease to exist.

Given the function of WG4 as a coordinator of the efforts of countries and international organisations – to cooperate with the Working Group participants to support Ukraine in the search for and return of missing persons in order to:

1. Directly or through states, international and/or humanitarian organisations that are considered credible by the parties, call on the Russian Federation to ensure that detainees and internees have access to international assistance and protection, and that family ties are restored and maintained.
2. Identify a Protecting Power to fulfil the role foreseen by Geneva Conventions.
3. Continue to raise international awareness of the issue and implement an effective stratcom and outreach campaign.



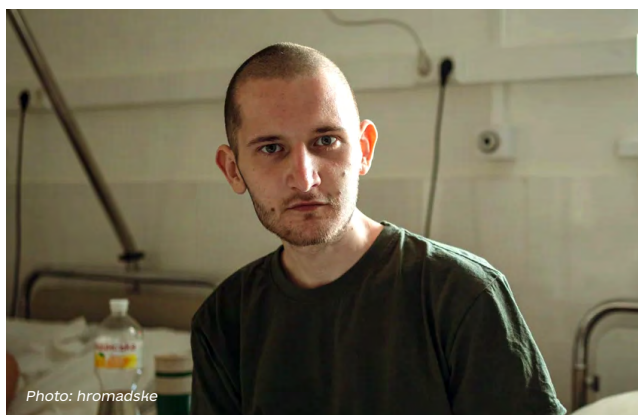
UKRAINIAN PRISONERS OF WAR ARE VICTIMS OF TORTURE!

Thousands of Ukrainian prisoners of war are held in Russian captivity. **Russia is violating international humanitarian law, in particular the Geneva Convention relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War.**

All Ukrainian **prisoners of war** are held in **appalling conditions**, subjected to **systematic torture, ill-treatment and sexual violence.**

Families are often deprived of any information about the whereabouts and health of their prisoners of war, and the UN and ICRC do not have unimpeded access to places of detention.

Lost his ability to speak while in captivity: the story of a 23-year-old Ukrainian.



Yurii Hulchuk is a Ukrainian soldier who was captured in April 2022. While in Russian captivity, he was beaten and tortured, **causing him to stop speaking**, and repeated use of electric shockers left him unable to walk.

On 14 September 2024, the Ukrainian was returned home. However, **he was unable to eat or speak on his own**, did not respond to anything, and spent the first days after his release in intensive care.

Fortunately, **Yurii eventually began to speak.** But his story shows how horrific it is to be held captive in Russia.

UKRAINE IS DOING EVERYTHING POSSIBLE TO BRING ITS CITIZENS HOME

In 2025, three stages of the Istanbul agreements were completed, within which servicemen and civilians returned to their homeland. Currently, **6,235 citizens are at home, including 372 civilians.**

Unfortunately, Russia has begun to manipulate the topic of the Istanbul agreements.

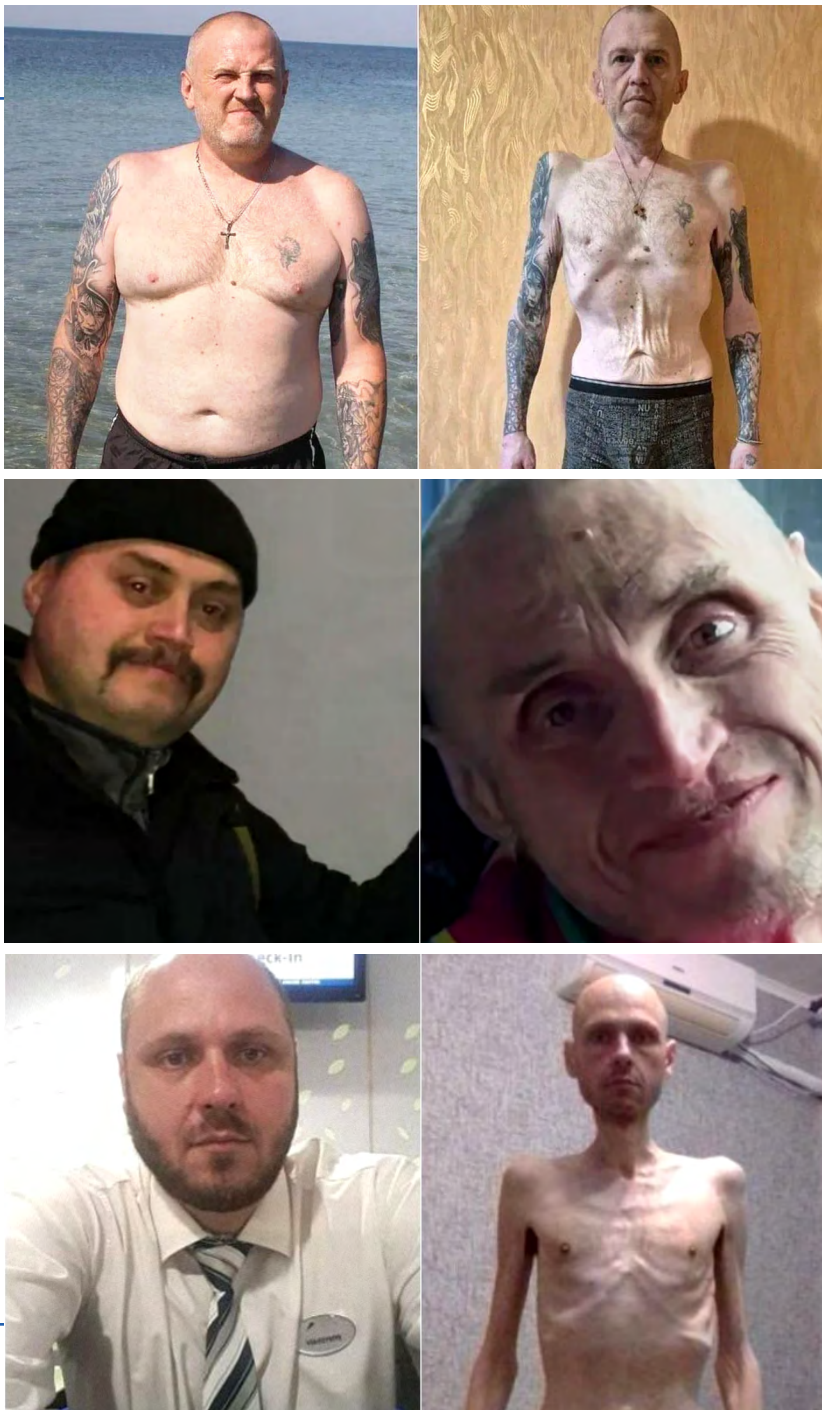


MORE THAN 95% OF UKRAINIAN PRISONERS OF WAR TORTURED IN RUSSIA — UN DATA



Due to the conditions of their detention, prisoners are dying, have health problems, and their illnesses are worsening. The greatest weight loss recorded for a soldier was 77 kilograms in 5 months.

- Prisoners are held in unsanitary conditions, in overcrowded cells, without sleep, isolated in darkness. There is information that some people were forced to stand in the cold in their underwear for a long time!
- There is a practice of using electric shockers and dog attacks. Some Ukrainians are deliberately held with infectious patients with hepatitis, tuberculosis.





Currently, completely different norms of international humanitarian law are in force:

NOT THE GENEVA CONVENTIONS, BUT THE MOSCOW CONVENTIONS ON THE TREATMENT OF PRISONERS OF WAR



moscowconvention.com



UKRAINE NEEDS ITS INTERNATIONAL PARTNERS TO TAKE CONCRETE STEPS TO RETURN UKRAINIAN PRISONERS OF WAR

Work with WG4 members to advocate that the Russian Federation, in accordance with the Geneva Conventions (III):

- 1.** Bring the conditions of detention of prisoners of war in line with the Geneva Conventions (III) by establishing specific POW camps away from conflict zones. Cease the practise of holding POWs in ordinary prisons.
- 2.** Repatriate seriously sick and seriously wounded POWs, regardless of their rank and quantity, whose condition allows for such transfer, to their homeland, or to organize hospitalization in neutral countries.
- 3.** Return all women POWs.
- 4.** Establish a mixed medical commission to examine wounded and sick POWs and take decisions about their repatriation.



WE ARE NOT STANDING STILL: STEPS TAKEN

The Ukraine's Peace Formula is a vision of how the international community should respond to the challenges that any country in the world may face. It contains 10 points.

In order to consolidate the efforts of states and international organisations, the Working Group on Point 4 of the Peace Formula was established.

Co-chairs: Ukraine, Canada and Norway.



To date, **9 meetings of the Working group on Point 4 of the Ukrainian Peace Formula have been held.** These meetings address the return of three categories of citizens: children, civilians and servicemen.

Various countries and international organisations participate in the meetings, including UNICEF, ICRC, UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission, UNHCR, OSCE and others.



At the Working group meetings, Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights, Mr. Dmytro Lubinets, calls for:

- 1.** Recognising Russia's deportation of Ukrainian children as a war crime and genocide.
- 2.** Taking concrete steps to stop Russia's abduction of Ukrainian children and ensure their swift return home.
- 3.** Demand that the Russian Federation release all detained civilians and return prisoners of war.
- 4.** Create humanitarian support programmes, in particular for returned children, civilians and prisoners of war.



**ONLY TOGETHER CAN
WE STOP THE AGGRESSOR!
HELP UKRAINE
BRING ITS
PEOPLE HOME!**



**Омбудсман України
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