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Technical assistance and capacity-building

Written statement* submitted by Human Rights Research League, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[3 June 2024]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



The Russian Federation’s War of Aggression against Ukraine and Abuses of Children’s Rights

Less than two-and-a-half years ago, it was almost inconceivable that a country, in the heart of Europe, would have to defend itself against a war of aggression, in a war of attrition, in the 21st century. And yet here we are, with the Russian Federation’s attack and full-scale war on Ukraine on 24 February 2022, escalating to a maximum a war that had started with the occupation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea in 2014.

These actions and the atrocities committed in the course of this aggression have rightfully been condemned by the international society of states, and also led to the International Criminal Court issuing a first arrest warrant against two individuals, the Russian Federation’s president Putin and Ms. Lvova-Belova 1, but more is needed and can be done in other areas to uphold Human Rights.

International Criminal Court Arrest Warrants

On 17 March 2023, the International Criminal Court (ICC) issued arrest warrants for Mr. Vladimir Putin and Ms. Maria Alekseyevna Lvova-Belova, Commissioner for Children’s Rights in the Office of the President of the Russian Federation, for their alleged responsibility for the war crime of unlawful deportation of population (children) and that of unlawful transfer of population (children) from occupied areas of Ukraine to the Russian Federation (under articles 8(2)(a)(vii) and 8(2)(b)(viii) of the Rome Statute) respectively. 2

While the Court as a point of departure attaches great weight to keeping warrants secret with a view to protect witnesses and victims, in the present situation, where the alleged violations are ongoing, the Court considered “that that the public awareness of the warrants may contribute to the prevention of the further commission of crimes”. 3

Abuses of Children’s Rights

There are approximately 20,000 Ukrainian children in the Russian Federation today 4. But, according to Ukraine’s former child ombudsman Mykola Kuleba and Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights Dmytro Lubinets, the real numbers are more frightening: between one and a one and a half million Ukrainian children have been influenced by the Russian Federation over the 10 years of war. 5

Ukrainian children, living in the occupied territories, as well as those taken to the Russian Federation, are being brainwashed every day, indoctrinated and “Russified”. Many of them have already received Russian citizenship because the Russians have made it impossible for people to live in the occupied territories without Russian passports.

Despite the fact that Ukrainians in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and other occupied territories are protected by international humanitarian law, the Russian Federation is practicing their deportation. According to reports, for this purpose, they actively involve former Ukrainian judges who have sided with the aggressor state.

During the occupation of the city of Kherson, D.B., 17, was taken to a camp in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea. No one asked if the boy wanted to go there. Russians came to his home: “We don’t care, we don’t want to hear anything.” D.B. witnessed that they were told that “Ukraine is all Russian land and will always belong to Russians, and the Ukrainian nation will become a slave and must be completely absorbed”. In the morning the Russian national anthem was constantly played for the children. Russians told their version of the history of Ukraine. If the children were seen with symbols of Ukraine on some stuff or clothes, they were generally burned to scare off others. In the camp’s medical center, the most disobedient children were locked up in an isolation ward. 6

Ukraine keeps a record of cases of recruitment of deported children into the Russian army. Such cases appear to be of a systematic nature. This is one of many serious violations of children's rights that the Russian Federation commits, in contravention of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which the Russian Federation is a State Party to. After the occupation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, young Ukrainians living in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea were subjected to Russian ideological influence, all of whom automatically received Russian citizenship and were drafted into the army at the age of 18.

With the beginning of the full-scale invasion, memorial plaques with the names of fallen soldiers began to be installed in the temporarily occupied Autonomous Republic of Crimea. Among them are Ukrainian children who were drafted and mobilized into the Russian army after the occupation. They died fighting against their own country, against their own people, and no one knows how many more such cases will occur.

Ukraine records the involvement of children in the armed conflict by involving them in espionage, so that children pass on information about the movements of Ukrainian troops and their facilities. In addition, according to reports, the Russian military involved teenage children in the construction of checkpoints. ⁷

Military and patriotic education of children in the occupied territory is also a huge problem. Ukrainian children are being forced to join the youth military organization “Yunarmiya” (Youth Army), which explicitly states that “this is not just a movement, but a real family. Here, in a circle of like-minded people, we grow, develop, honor traditions and create new ones.” ⁸

Having established and maintained effective control over occupied territories of Ukraine, the Russian Federation is trying to implement the “Crimean scenario” by banning the use of the Ukrainian language and destroying Ukrainian-language books, the immediate introduction of education in the Russian language and with a Russian ideological orientation, illegal deportations and forcible transfer, giving to Russian families for upbringing, militarization of children with the aim of eradicating their national identity and turning them into enemies of their own Motherland.

The militarization of children is a Russian policy aimed at forming the loyalty of minors to the use of force methods in the regulation of interstate relations, which involves in-depth military training, in particular, training with the use of weapons, additional lessons or extracurricular activities, participation in militaristic sports events, membership in military-patriotic organizations (e.g., Youth Army, Pennant, Movement of the First, etc.).

Ukrainians, especially children, who are under the power of the aggressor state, are not only ‘turned’ in Russian citizens, but are being turned hostile to Ukraine and the Western world, the starkest contrast to what the Convention on the Rights of the Child envisions in Article 29, where the State Parties inter alia agreed that the education of the child shall be directed at “the development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and for the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations”.

This, at minimum, we ask all State Parties to contribute to in any conceivable way.

¹ Cf. , International Criminal Court, ‘Situation in Ukraine: ICC judges issue arrest warrants against Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin and Maria Alekseyevna Lvova-Belova’, 17 March 2023, available at: <https://www.icc-cpi.int/news/situation-ukraine-icc-judges-issue-arrest-warrants-against-vladimir-vladimirovich-putin-and>.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Cf. Ukrainian National Information Bureau, available at: <https://childrenofwar.gov.ua/en/> . Cf. also European Parliament, Newsletter 11-14 March 2024, Strasbourg Plenary Session, p 17. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/pdfs/news/expert/2024/3/briefing/20240229BRI18358/20240229BRI18358_en.pdf.

5 Voice of America, 'Advocates Plead for Help Rescuing Ukrainian Children Abducted to Russia', 8 February 2024, available at: <https://www.voanews.com/a/advocates-plead-for-help-rescuing-ukrainian-kids-abducted-to-russia/7480156.html>.

6 Cf. Save Ukraine, Denys Berezhny: A Ukrainian Boy's Forced Journey from Kherson to Crimea', 24 January 2024, available at: <https://www.saveukraineua.org/news/denys-berezhny-a-ukrainian-boys-forced-journey-from-kherson-to-crimea/>.