

April 3, 2025

The Honorable Donald J. Trump
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

The Honorable Marco Rubio
Secretary of State
United States Department of State
Washington, DC 20520

Dear President Trump and Secretary Rubio,

We write to you as a group of faith leaders who are motivated by our Christian faith to care about the plight of vulnerable children. Women and children face unique threats in the midst of conflict, and since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Russian President Vladimir Putin has intentionally targeted the most vulnerable—children.

President Putin has ordered the systematic forced transfer of nearly twenty thousand Ukrainian children to Russia and Russian-controlled territories. These children, ranging in age from four months to 17 years old, have been subjected to political re-education, military training, and forced assimilation into Russian society. Many have been placed in Russian families, illegally adopted, and had their birth certificates altered to erase their Ukrainian identities. The Russian government has denied Ukrainian children access to their families, subjected them to physical abuse, and failed to provide them with adequate food and care.

The forced deportation of nearly twenty thousand Ukrainian children is not just a tragedy — it is a grave moral and legal atrocity. This is not an unfortunate consequence of war—it is a deliberate and systematic act of injustice.

As faith leaders, we believe that **every child is made in God's image** (Genesis 1:27). Scripture calls us to defend the “quartet of the vulnerable” (Zechariah 7:10): the poor, the widow, the orphan, and the foreigner. Christ himself commanded us to **love our neighbors as ourselves** (Matthew 22:39) and **seek justice for the oppressed** (Isaiah 1:17).

Russia has deliberately deported orphans, children with disabilities, and those from low-income families, **knowing they are least able to resist**. To this day, the Russian government refuses to provide a list of the children it has taken, in direct violation of international law, while actively working to conceal these war crimes. The majority of children abducted from Ukraine are still being held in Russia. Save Ukraine reports that 1,256 children have been returned — less than 6% of the 19,000+ children deported to Russia since 2022.

As the United States advances negotiations for a ceasefire and a potential peace agreement between Ukraine and Russia, one of Ukraine's key conditions is the safe return of these abducted children. **No peace deal should be finalized until Ukraine's children are returned home.**

We are grateful to you, President Trump, that during your [recent phone call](#) with President Zelenskyy on March 19, you asked about Ukraine’s missing children — including the ones who had been abducted — and that you promised to work closely with both parties to ensure those children were returned home.

The Geneva Convention explicitly protects children during wartime, and the deportation or forced transfer of a population is a violation of international law, potentially constituting crimes against humanity. Additionally, international law prohibits children from being traded as hostages, further emphasizing the critical need for the children to be returned prior to negotiations. The United States has a duty to uphold these legal and moral principles, not to turn a blind eye in the pursuit of diplomatic expediency.

We urge you, as leaders of the free world, to ensure that Ukraine’s children are returned home without precondition in advance of peace talks. Ukraine’s children must not be used as bargaining chips in geopolitical negotiations. Their safety, dignity, and right to be reunited with their families must be **non-negotiable.**

We urge you to continue to take decisive action to ensure that these children are safely returned home before any peace deal is finalized. Now is the time to lead with courage and moral clarity.

Sincerely,

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