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Delegation of Canada

**STATEMENT BY  
AMBASSADOR VÉRONIQUE PEPIN-HALLÉ, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE  
OF CANADA TO THE OSCE, AT THE 1535th MEETING OF THE  
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

25 September 2025

**The Russian Federation's ongoing aggression against Ukraine**

Madam Chairperson,

Russia is trying to exercise its power not through dialogue, but through war.

While world leaders were gathered in New York for the United Nations General Assembly, President Putin delivered his message through missile attacks and armed drones.

Only yesterday, the Ukrainian authorities reported on how at least seven civilians had been killed and more than forty injured across the country. These attacks are systematic and an everyday occurrence. Ukraine has not had a single day of peace for more than three years now, and in certain regions for more than a decade.

Russia has no legitimate claim on Ukraine whatsoever. Its aggression is illegal and based on nothing but the desire to reign over Ukraine by force.

Among the most appalling practices are the illegal deportation and forcible transfer of Ukrainian children, something that constitutes a grave violation of international humanitarian law and of human rights.

This practice fits within a broader pattern of abuses perpetrated by Russia in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine, in particular the suppression of Ukrainian identity, the refusal to offer education in the Ukrainian language, indoctrination (including the recruitment of child soldiers) and the separation of families.

Madam Chair,

Thousands of Ukrainian children remain in Russia and the occupied territories, separated from their loved ones and communities, while only around 1,600 have been successfully returned to Ukraine to date.

The return of these children is both a humanitarian imperative and a central element to achieving a just and sustainable peace in Ukraine.

The Prime Minister of Canada and the President of Ukraine co-chaired a leader-level meeting of the International Coalition for the Return of Ukrainian Children on the margins of the 80th session of the UN General Assembly. Leaders, the First Lady of Ukraine Olena Zelenska and Diana Fox Carney, Spouse of the Prime Minister of Canada, senior representatives from Member States and international organizations, all gathered to strengthen collective efforts to secure the safe return of Ukrainian children who have been illegally deported or forcibly transferred by the Russian Federation.

The International Coalition for the Return of Ukrainian Children aims to coordinate joint efforts, share information, align resources, and advocate internationally to bring Ukrainian children home and reunite them with their loved ones and communities.

It has been steadily working towards this goal.

Among recent developments, leaders highlighted ongoing and new initiatives under the Coalition, including:

- the launch of a pilot tracing mechanism for these children;
- practical support to facilitate returns, including mediation
- and expanded investment in recovery, reintegration, and rehabilitation initiatives

We welcome the European Union and Andorra's decision to join the Coalition, further strengthening the collective commitment to this vital cause.

Upcoming initiatives will include Ukraine tabling a UN Resolution calling on Russia to return Ukrainian children, and a Summit of the Coalition, to be hosted by the European Commission.

We are grateful to all our partners.

Madam Chair,

In New York, Prime Minister Mark Carney and President Volodymyr Zelenskyy called for sustained international unity and stressed the urgency of intensified global engagement.

It demands our continued attention. We remain undeterred in our determination, and we will not be distracted by Russia's attempts to distort facts or sow doubt.

Our priority is rooted in this one task: bringing these children home. And we call on all who have not yet joined us to do so, because no single country can face such a challenge alone.

These acts are part of a bigger threat, one where Russia also makes further attempts to destabilize the region not just in Ukraine, but by including through malign influence campaigns. Such as the one aimed at undermining the democratic reforms the Moldovan government has been undertaking. Since 2023, Canada has sanctioned individuals and entities who have actively promoted and disseminated Russian disinformation in Moldova to justify Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine.

These actions are unacceptable, and Canada fully supports the government of Moldova, as well as Ukraine, and its efforts to implement democratic reforms, counter malign Russian interference, and regain full sovereignty of their internationally recognized borders

Thank you, Madam Chair.