

Security Council Seventy-eighth year

$9404 {\rm th \ meeting}$

Thursday, 24 August 2023, 10 a.m. New York

President:	Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield	(United States of America)

Members:	AlbaniaBrazil.China.EcuadorFranceGabonGhanaJapanMalta.MozambiqueRussian Federation.SwitzerlandUnited Arab Emirates	Mr. Hoxha Mr. França Danese Mr. Zhang Jun Mr. Pérez Loose Mrs. Broadhurst Estival Ms. Koumby Missambo Mr. Boateng Mr. Ishikane Ms. Gatt Mr. Fernandes Mr. Nebenzia Mrs. Chanda Mr. Almazrouei
		Mr. Almazrouei Mr. Kariuki

Agenda

Maintenance of peace and security of Ukraine

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the translation of speeches delivered in other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council. Corrections* should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room AB-0601 (verbatimrecords@un.org). Corrected records will be reissued electronically on the Official Document System of the United Nations (http://documents.un.org).





Provisional

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Maintenance of peace and security of Ukraine

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Germany, Italy, Lithuania, Poland and Ukraine to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Ms. Rosemary DiCarlo, Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs; Ms. Kateryna Rashevska, legal expert at the Regional Center for Human Rights; and Mr. Mykola Kuleba, Chief Executive Officer of Save Ukraine.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite His Excellency Mr. Silvio Gonzato, Chargé d'Affaires ad interim of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I give the floor to Ms. DiCarlo.

Ms. DiCarlo: Today marks a year and a half since the Russian Federation launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine — 18 months of death, destruction and unimaginable suffering for the Ukrainian people. The numbers alone tell a horrific story: the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has confirmed at least 9,444 civilians killed, including 545 children. Nearly 17,000 others, among them 1,156 children, have been injured. The real figures are likely much higher. Some estimates put the total number of killed, civilians and military personnel of both sides, at half a million.

And there is no end in sight to this war, which was launched in violation of the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and international law. Indeed, since Russia's withdrawal from the Black Sea Grain Initiative, on 17 July, the fighting has only escalated. We are witnessing growing tensions and threats to the freedom of navigation in the Black Sea. Brutal and relentless Russian attacks have damaged grain export infrastructure in Ukraine's Black Sea and Danube ports, imperilling the export of foodstuffs desperately needed around the world.

On 27 July, Russian missiles struck port infrastructure in the Odesa region, reportedly killing a security guard and damaging a cargo terminal. On 28 July, Russian forces reportedly shelled a grain terminal in the Beryslav district, in the Kherson region. On 2 August, a drone attack hit the Danube port of Izmail, damaging about 40,000 tons of grain destined for countries in Africa, as well as China and Israel, according to Ukrainian officials. On 14 August, Russian drone and missile attacks reportedly injured at least three people in the port city of Odesa. The nearby port city of Mykolaiv was also targeted. On 16 August, Russian drones reportedly damaged grain silos and warehouses at the Danube River port of Reni. And just yesterday, as a result of another Russian drone attack in the Odesa region, 13 thousand tons of grain were destroyed. Those are only a few of the most recent incidents.

As we warned during the Security Council meetings on 21 and 26 July (see S/PV.9382 and S/PV.9386), attacks targeting grain facilities may have far-reaching global consequences. They threaten to reverse the progress made in bolstering food security over the past year. That could be catastrophic for the 345 million people already acutely food insecure around the world. The Secretary-General continues to stress the importance of food and fertilizer exports from Russia and Ukraine to global food security and to advocate for the resumption of the Black Sea Grain Initiative.

On 19 August, a Russian missile attack on the drama theatre in the heart of the city of Chernihiv took the lives of seven people, including a 6-year-old girl, and injured more than 100 others, among them at least 15 children. Many of the victims were passers-by enjoying a Saturday morning with their families, with some on their way to church to celebrate an Orthodox Christian holiday. In recent weeks, dozens of civilians have also been killed in attacks on Kherson, Odesa, Donetsk, Lviv, Kharkiv, Sumy, Zaporizhzhya and other regions of Ukraine. In some instances, sequential, or double-tap, strikes have killed and injured not only civilian residents, but first responders who rushed to help. We are also deeply disturbed by the destruction of a hotel used by the United Nations and other humanitarian staff in Zaporizhzhya on 10 August. Those heinous attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure are in flagrant violation of international humanitarian law. They are unacceptable and must be strongly condemned.

Attacks against Ukrainian culture and heritage have also escalated. Since the beginning of the war, UNESCO has verified damage to 284 cultural sites, including 120 religious sites. Following the attacks on 23 July that severely damaged the historic centre of Odesa, an area protected under the World Heritage Convention, UNESCO deployed an expert mission to conduct a damage assessment and to prepare for measures to stabilize and protect cultural assets from further deterioration.

Another recent United Nations assessment on the impact of the destruction of the Kakhovka dam concluded that the breach caused a far-reaching environmental disaster, the scale of which might not be clear for decades to come. Hundreds of square kilometres were inundated, and thousands of square kilometres of reservoir and wetlands were desiccated, severely impacting the livelihoods of already struggling Ukrainian farmers.

The impact of the war on women has been devastating. They represent the overwhelming majority of the 6.2 million people forced to move to other countries because of the violence. The United Nations is ensuring gender mainstreaming in its humanitarian response, including promoting women's empowerment and leadership, and prioritizing protection from gender-based violence. Despite staggering challenges, Ukrainian women have stood at the forefront of humanitarian responses. Women-led civil society organizations were among the first to respond to the full-scale invasion. To support those efforts, UN-Women has allocated, through its Peace and Humanitarian Fund, over \$14.6 million to finance over 120 civil society organizations that support women and girls inside Ukraine and those displaced in Moldova.

To date, the United Nations has verified 173 cases of conflict-related sexual violence against 112 men, 57 women and four girls. The Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine has said that such incidents of sexual violence may amount to war crimes.

The massive human rights violations have not spared children. Their schools and hospitals are destroyed, jeopardizing their right to education and health. To date, OHCHR has verified 824 and 403 attacks on educational and medical facilities, respectively. We welcome the signing, on 18 August, of a plan by the United Nations and the Government of Ukraine to prevent grave violations against children. However, we regret that the United Nations still does not have the necessary access to verify allegations of violations against children in the territory of Ukraine under Russian control, or in the Russian Federation itself, including children allegedly transferred to the Russian Federation.

We are also concerned about the possible impact on civilians of the shelling of Russian border communities and drone attacks deep inside Russia, including Moscow. Attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure, wherever they may occur, are indefensible and strictly prohibited under international law.

Regarding humanitarian assistance, the United Nations and its partners continue to deliver aid to those in need. Limited access to Russian-controlled areas of the Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhya regions of Ukraine hampers our aid operations. We continue to seek potential avenues to expand access to those areas. The Ukraine humanitarian response plan has now received over \$1.7 billion — 44 per cent — of the \$3.9 billion required through the end of 2023. While we extend our gratitude to the generosity of donors, continued contributions are needed to ensure timely delivery of assistance, including through Ukraine's harsh winter season.

Today's grim milestone of 18 months of war coincides with the thirty-second anniversary of Ukraine's independence. I would like to congratulate the Ukrainian people today and take this occasion to stress, once again, that the United Nations commitment to Ukraine's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity within it internationally recognized borders is unwavering. Similarly, and recognizing the growing calls around the world for an end to the war, I reiterate the United Nations commitment to support all meaningful efforts to achieve a just and sustainable peace in Ukraine, in line with the United Nations Charter, international law and relevant General Assembly resolutions.

The President: I thank Ms. DiCarlo for her briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Rashevska.

Ms. Rashevska: I would like to thank the United States Permanent Mission for inviting me to address the Security Council today on the issue of the unlawful deportation and forcible transfer of Ukrainian children. I am honoured to be included among such a distinguished audience. My goal and objective is the pursuit of a solid solution to the crisis affecting Ukrainian children. It is based on the best interests of the child, and I ask the Security Council for help.

According to the rapporteurs of the third Moscow Mechanism of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, before Russia's full-scale invasion, more than 1,000 children were displaced from Crimea to the Russian Federation for adoption. According to the Ukrainian National Information Bureau, since 18 February 2022, Russian agents have taken at least 19,546 children from Ukraine to 57 regions of the Russian Federation. Among those children, 3,855 are orphans and children deprived of parental care. The Russian authorities claim that that displacement is an evacuation. However, it is a violation of Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention and a war crime. Russia deliberately created the conditions for such a transfer of children, publicly intending to keep those children under Russian influence forever, and refuse to transfer a list of evacuated children to the Central Tracing Agency of the International Committee of the Red Cross. Those considerations formed the basis of the decision of the International Criminal Court's Pre-Trial Chamber II to issue arrest warrants against President Vladimir Putin and Commissioner Maria Lvova-Belova.

Unlawful deportation and forcible transfer are not the only serious violations suffered by Ukrainian children. I would like to draw the Council's attention to the imposition of Russian citizenship on Ukrainian children, because the right to preserve one's identity is a prerequisite for exercising all human rights for children.

Russian authorities claim that the imposition of Russian citizenship on Ukrainian children is strictly a humanitarian action. But legislative changes made by the Russian authorities to facilitate that as well as the treatment of Ukrainian children who have had Russian citizenship imposed on them do not back up that claim.

Following a detailed analysis of Russian legislation on citizenship, it is clear that, if high-ranking officials of the Russian Federation intended to act solely for humanitarian reasons, then, instead of amendments to legislation for the simplified imposition of Russian citizenship, laws would have been adopted to facilitate obtaining medical care and removing obstacles to education and social benefits. But that is not the case.

It is worth emphasizing that, despite the declarations, Ukrainian children are recognized exclusively as Russian citizens in relations with Russia. There is no dual citizenship agreement between Ukraine and the Russian Federation. Russian citizenship is needed only for the forced transfer. As Maria Lvova-Belova, commissioner for the Russian Federation on children's rights, there are already 380 such children who have been transferred to Russian Families. However, the process is ongoing. In that context, while agreeing that the known cases of transfer were indeed for guardianship, I want to emphasize that raising those children by Russian citizens, as well as political indoctrination, Russification and militarization in the education system, which the Ukrainian children are obliged to receive, is a violation of several articles at once of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and also include elements of discrimination and crimes against humanity. As a Venezuelan diplomat explained in the original Sixth Committee debates on the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, the forcible transfer of children to a group where they would be given an education different from their own, as well as new customs, a new religion and probably a new language, would in practice be tantamount to the destruction of their own group, whose future depended on that generation of children. Moreover, a school education is mandatory in most countries. Russia, as an occupying Power, must provide Ukrainian children with access to a Ukrainian education. Instead, they are forbidden to speak or learn the Ukrainian language, to attend Ukrainian schools even online and to preserve and manifest their Ukrainian identity. I want to emphasize that for six years Russia has not been implementing the International Court of Justice's order that it ensure the right to education in the Ukrainian and Crimean Tatar languages in Crimea. The decision's weak enforcement has resulted in that violation being repeated in the newly occupied territories.

But the so-called re-education does not take place in schools alone. Earlier this year, the Yale School of Public Health showed how recreation camps are also involved in the process. This year we have already recorded the transfer of at least 7,116 children to 46 camps in the Russian Federation, seven in occupied Crimea and four in Belarus. Some facilities are 9,000 kilometres from the children's original homes. Others are located not far from military facilities. Due to the lack of access to those areas, it is impossible to confirm or deny whether Ukrainian children have returned to their homes. However, we do know about the difficulties that legal representatives have been dealing with regarding the return of children who have displaced since 2022. They include additional checks at the border, long interrogations by representatives of Russian law enforcement, requirements for obtaining Russian citizenship and reissuing guardianship documents that accord with Russian legislation, and being forced to undress or take polygraph examinations.

A relative of 17-year-old Denys was deported from Russia without explanation and without Denys. Another 17-year-old, Bogdan, was detained at the border and once again transferred to a Russian foster family. I call on the Russian Federation to facilitate the return of Bogdan and Denys to Ukraine. So far only 386 children have been returned. I am addressing the Council today with a clear call to assist with the return of Ukrainian children. The obligation of immediate and unconditional repatriation is universally recognized. The relevant article of Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions was adopted by consensus. We need a General Assembly resolution that will define the obligations of every member of the international community regarding returning Ukrainian children. We should establish a transparent process between Ukraine and Russia through the appointment of a third-party guarantor and the conclusion of an internationally binding agreement. Leaving Ukrainian children in Russia means that their rights will continue to be violated.

Now is the Council's moment. It is time that members demonstrated their commitment to international law and to children's best interests by helping Ukrainian children to return to their normal lives — something they will never be able to do in Russia.

The President: I thank Ms. Rashevska for her briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Kuleba.

Mr. Kuleba (spoke in a language other than an official language of the Security Council, without providing interpretation):

The President: Excuse me, Mr. Kuleba, but we do not have interpretation.

Mr. Kuleba (spoke in a language other than an official language of the Security Council, without providing interpretation):

The President: Mr. Kuleba —

Mr. Kuleba: I am finishing.

(spoke in a language other than an official language of the Security Council, without providing interpretation)

(spoke in English)

Let us reunite families. Let us reunite nations. Let us all reunite around Ukrainian children.

The President: I thank Mr. Kuleba for his briefing.

We will circulate a translation in writing of his briefing. He spoke Ukrainian, and we look forward to seeing the translation of that.

I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of the United States of America.

I thank Under-Secretary-General DiCarlo for her briefing. I also thank Kateryna Rashevska and Mykola Kuleba for speaking out today.

On this day in 1991, Ukraine declared its independence from the Soviet Union. That same week, Ukraine notified the United Nations of its independence based on the right of a nation to self-determination in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations. But 32 years later, today Ukraine's very existence is under attack. For a year and a half, Russian forces have waged a full-scale war on the Ukrainian people. President Putin thought that his war of choice would be quick and easy, that the Ukrainian people would wave a white flag in surrender and that somehow his forces would be greeted as liberators. But he was in for a rude awakening. Ukrainians have courageously fought back to defend their country's sovereignty and their freedom, democracy and culture.

And Ukrainians are fighting valiantly to defend and return Ukrainian children who have been forcibly transferred or deported to Russia, Belarus and Russianoccupied territories. Children are literally being ripped from their homes in the year 2023, by a country sitting in this very Chamber, a permanent member of the Security Council. This is straight out of a dystopian novel, but this is not fiction. This is real life. While estimates vary — and we heard lots of numbers from our briefers — we know that since February 2022, Russia has forcibly transferred or deported thousands of Ukrainian children, including babies as young as four months old. And we know that Russia has forcibly transferred or deported Ukrainian children as far back as 2014.

This week, I spoke with three victims of those horrific abuses. One child told me he was at home in Mariupol living under occupation, when he heard a loud knock on the door. A gang of Russian soldiers dressed in all black stood in his doorway. He was told to immediately pack up his belongings. He was deported to Russia and locked in a dark basement and interrogated. Russian officials threatened to sentence him to 15 years in prison if he ever supported Ukraine, and he was told he would never go back to Ukraine.

Thankfully, that young man is now back in Ukraine, but his story is the exception. We do not even know the location of so many of the children who have been forcibly transferred. This week, I also spoke to a Ukrainian mother who was separated from her forcibly deported son for eight long months. With the help of non-governmental organization workers, she bravely travelled to Russia to free him, but only after she was polygraphed and interrogated by Russian authorities for hours and hours.

Russia's campaign of cruelty continues to this day. Russia and its proxies have detained children fleeing violence. They have forced children out of schools and orphanages and local proxies have tricked or coerced parents into sending their children to so-called summer camps, only to be cut off from communication and not have their children returned to them.

According to reports, children in those camps are subjected to propaganda, brainwashing and even given military training. Some are pressured to accept Russian citizenship, and others have reportedly been adopted by Russian families. Members will hear Russian officials say that their transfers of children are part of "humanitarian evacuations" but that is a gross perversion of reality and a futile attempt to justify the unjustifiable.

Let us be clear, those atrocities are being orchestrated by all levels of the Russian Government, up to the top. The International Criminal Court has issued arrest warrants for President Vladimir Putin and Maria Lvova-Belova, Russia's Presidential Commissioner for Children's Rights, for allegedly deporting and transferring children from occupied areas of Ukraine. I want members to stop and think about it. The International Criminal Court has alleged that Vladimir Putin is responsible for war crimes — I repeat, war crimes. We are also aware of reports that Belarusian leaders have supported moving Ukrainian children to camps in Belarus. According to the National Anti-Crisis Management group, at least 2,100 Ukrainian children were taken to Belarus from occupied territories between September 2022 and May of this year. We must hold all of those responsible to account.

Today the United States is imposing sanctions on two entities and 11 individuals, including individuals who have reportedly facilitated the forcible transfer and deportation of Ukraine's children to camps. In addition, we are taking steps to impose visa restrictions on three Russia-installed purported authorities for their involvement in human rights abuses of Ukrainian minors.

The United States will not stand by as Russia carries out war crimes and crimes against humanity or as it arbitrarily detains political activists, journalists and opposition leaders and wrongfully detains American citizens. That includes the wrongful detention of Paul Whelan and Evan Gershkovich, who languish in Russian prisons. Paul was simply in the wrong place at the wrong time, and Evan, a journalist, was just doing his job. Today I want to share a message that comes directly from Evan's family members. They have asked the international community "to join the United States in doing everything possible to bring [their] son home to his family". Let us heed their call.

I ask members for just a moment to imagine what they would do if this was their child or grandchild who was taken from them. Of course, members would stop at nothing to secure their freedom and to hold those responsible for those evils to account. Members would stop at nothing, and we must support the return of all forcibly transferred and detained children with the same doggedness and determination because those children are the world's children. We must fight on their behalf as long as it takes until all are free and justice is delivered. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. once wrote, "he who passively accepts evil is as much involved in it as he who helps to perpetrate it". We must not remain silent. We cannot remain neutral. This is a moment of moral reckoning, and history will judge us by how we respond. We must hold Russia to account. We must lift up organizations doing the good work of trying to return those children to their families. And we must call on Russia to end the brutal war of aggression, comply with its obligations under international law and immediately return all of Ukraine's children.

I resume my functions as President of the Council.

I shall now give the floor to those Council members who wish to make statements.

Mr. Hoxha (Albania): Let me thank Under-Secretary-General DiCarlo for her in-depth briefing. We are also grateful to Ms. Rashevska for her valuable information on developments in Ukraine and look forward to the text of Mr. Kuleba's remarks.

Today we join Ukrainians everywhere in celebrating their independence day, and in that way, their fight for freedom, their right to choose and the sanctity of sovereignty and independence, which continue to be under threat by its neighbour. Last week, in Chernihiv, Sofia, a six-year-old child, was preparing for her first day of school. Unfortunately, a Russian missile put an end to her dream and to her life. She was taken away, just as those hundreds of other children who will never see the inside of a classroom or play in a sandbox because of the shelling, missiles, drones and cruelty of the Russian military aggression. Cynics and apologists will always argue that this is war and anything, including mistakes, and even terrible things can happen. The same propaganda will cycle downwards, after every such deadly strike, in a perpetuum mobile, trying to justify the unjustifiable and excuse the inexcusable.

The protection of civilians is one of the most solemn commitments made by all. It is task number one for all parties in any conflict situation. But, unfortunately, the reality is different. Because civilians are not fighting and cannot defend themselves, they end up paying a high price. Harming civilians violates the Charter of the United Nations, contradicts international humanitarian law and betrays the solemn commitment of the Security Council to maintaining peace and security. When laws are not implemented, commitments are not respected and innocent people are hurt, we all have failed. There is, however, no doubt who is the culprit, who are the perpetrators and who is the aggressor in Ukraine.

Today, as Ukraine marks the thirty-second anniversary of its independence, the country is faced with a heart-wrenching panorama. More than 26,500 civilians have lost their lives — among them 1,700 children killed or injured. As stark as those figures are, they likely obscure an even grimmer reality.

This is the unbearable everyday life for one third of Ukraine's total population, whose lives have been shattered and who, since February 2022, have lost everything. This is the deplorable situation for those thousands whose houses have been deliberately destroyed by attacks with explosive weapons thrown in populated urban areas; whose cities have been mercilessly flattened by shelling from heavy artillery, multiple-launch rocket systems, missiles and air strikes; whose schools, hospitals, shelters, water systems, power plants and places of worship or culture have been deliberately damaged or destroyed; whose jobs have been lost; whose lands have been mined; and all those who are left only with the hope that the nightmare will soon end.

The assault on Ukraine's present is nothing short of an audacious bid to dismantle its future. Several credible reports have confirmed a well-prepared plan for the abduction and deportation of children from Ukraine to various parts of Russia. In his annual report on children and armed conflict (S/2023/363), the Secretary-General included Russia's military forces on the list of shame of parties to armed conflict that have committed grave violations against children. The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the expert mission established under the Moscow Mechanism of the Organization for Security and Cooperation and the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine established by the Human Rights Council have all confirmed attacks on civilians, torture, rape and forced transfers and deportations of children. It was on the basis of such hard evidence of the unlawful deportation of children that in March the International Criminal Court issued an arrest warrant for the Russian President and his Commissioner for Children's Rights. But while Russia continues to brainwash its domestic public opinion, it has failed to convince the world that its re-education camps and forced adoptions are the humanitarian actions they are made out to be. They are simply crimes in disguise that call for accountability in the open.

Russia seems to be making preparations for organizing local elections in some areas of eastern Ukraine. We have said it before and we reiterate it now — we will not recognize any elections or referendums organized within the internationally recognized borders of Ukraine, against the Ukrainian Constitution and the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Let me conclude by recalling a very simple, yet meaningful, fact. In the heat of an insurrection and internal power struggle two months ago, the Kremlin was quick to make arrangements and end hostilities with someone whom it called a criminal, and yet for 18 months it has refused to end its criminal war on Ukrainians, whom the Kremlin calls its brothers. That is why solidarity and help for Ukraine must continue until Russians themselves step up and refuse to be discarded as cannon fodder in an absurd and unwinnable war.

Mr. Fernandes (Mozambique): I would like to thank Ms. Rosemary DiCarlo, Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, for her insightful briefing, and Ms. Rashevska and Mr. Kuleba for their presentations. I would like to acknowledge the presence of the Permanent Representative of Ukraine at this meeting, and through him we also congratulate Ukraine on the thirty-second anniversary of its independence.

The echoes of pleas for peace, grounded in the principles of international humanitarian law, continue to reverberate across the international arena. Despite those appeals, it is deeply lamentable that we still find ourselves embroiled in this maelstrom of a conflict. Drawing on Africa's experience of conflict mediation and resolution, as embodied in its Silencing the Guns initiative, we have consistently underscored the indispensable nature of dialogue and diplomacy. Regrettably, however, those urgent appeals have not found fertile ground in the ongoing conflict.

As the effects of this war stretch far beyond the battleground, as evidenced by the unfortunate collapse of such collaborative initiatives as the Black Sea Grain Initiative, leading to reductions in the availability of resources to mitigate humanitarian emergencies in global hotspots, we are reminded of the global ramifications of this conflict. That disruption not only threatens individual nations but also erodes the framework of peaceful coexistence, destabilizes multilateral and collective security arrangements, affects non-proliferation efforts and makes the fulfilment of such multilateral commitments as the Sustainable Development Goals more difficult and the environment in which collective challenges can be tackled increasingly adversarial.

We are now more than ever in dire need of a paradigm shift that prioritizes dialogue in alignment with the ideals set out in the Charter of the United Nations and our shared values. Drawing inspiration from our own path of resilience and diplomacy, Mozambique remains steadfast in advocating for a political and negotiated resolution of the ongoing armed conflict. We firmly believe that this path, rooted in the spirit of mutual respect and understanding, is the sole route to a lasting and sustained peace.

Mr. França Danese (Brazil): I thank the United States delegation for scheduling this meeting. I also thank Under-Secretary-General Rosemary DiCarlo for her updates on the situation on the ground and Ms. Rashevska for her briefing. I also hope to read Mr. Kuleba's testimony, which we were unable to hear today.

Eighteen months after the beginning of the hostilities in Ukraine, we deeply regret the tens of thousands of civilian and military casualties that have occurred over the course of the conflict and offer our solidarity with the families of the deceased and with the wounded and displaced. Armed conflicts always leave deep psychological scars that last for decades. It is hard even to imagine the extent of the trauma inflicted on innocent people, especially children.

As a peaceful and lasting solution to the conflict in Ukraine continues to be elusive, it is essential to limit the impact of violence on the civilian population as much as possible. We reiterate our call on all the parties to respect and ensure respect for international humanitarian law and the fundamental principles of distinction between combatants and civilians. The current dynamics of the conflict are depriving millions of basic and dignified conditions for survival, a concern that will only deepen as winter approaches. It will be essential to intensify the call from the international community for a cessation of the hostilities and for negotiations that can bring the lasting solution we all hope for.

Brazil reiterates its appeal in favour of de-escalating hostilities and opening negotiations. A resumption of dialogue does not prejudge the results of a future peace agreement. It can rebuild confidence where confidence and trust have been shattered. It can provide the means to resolve urgent issues such as the situation of prisoners of war, humanitarian access, the security of nuclear facilities and the full resumption of transport of grain and fertilizers across the Black Sea, which the vast majority of countries, especially developing countries, have called for. Since the suspension of the Black Sea Grain Initiative, uncertainty about the food security of millions, including vulnerable people dependent on United Nations assistance programmes, has increased. We strongly encourage the parties to return to the negotiating table and to hold talks on resuming the agreement. While we see the reasons behind the suspension of the Grain Initiative, we believe that its merits justify renewed efforts to find a solution acceptable and favourable to all involved.

Brazil reaffirms its commitment to a peaceful resolution to the conflict under the terms of Article 33 of the Charter of the United Nations. We hope that reason will soon prevail and enable a political solution, taking into account the purposes and principles of the Charter and the legitimate security concerns of all parties. We welcome the recent facilitation efforts and reiterate our readiness to contribute to collective peace initiatives that could lead to a lasting solution to the war.

Mr. Zhang Jun (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China has elaborated its position on the question of Ukraine many times before in the Council. We have always stressed that the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries should be safeguarded, the purposes and principles of Charter of the United Nations observed, the legitimate security concerns of all parties taken into account, and all efforts conducive to a peaceful settlement to the crisis supported. We have therefore been making efforts to achieve peace on the basis of that position.

In view of the current situation, I would like to stress the following four points.

First, every effort must be made towards the cessation of hostilities. As President Xi Jinping said at the fifteenth summit of the leaders of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, the root causes of the Ukraine are complex, and the most pressing tasks now are to facilitate peace talks, promote de-escalation and an end to the conflict, and achieve peace. We believe that the international community should encourage the parties to exercise calm and restraint, meet each other halfway, seek consensus, strengthen the voice of reason for peace and negotiation and explore ways to implement various peace initiatives to create conditions conducive to peace talks. Adding fuel to the fire, continuing to supply weapons to the battlefield, escalating unilateral sanctions and taking any action that could cause the war to spiral out of control should be avoided.

The security of all States is indivisible. The Ukraine crisis has once again shown that the practices of the cold war mentality of provoking bloc confrontation and seeking absolute security do not work. Such an approach will not help to reach a final settlement of the crisis. Rather, it will bring endless instability to the region, ultimately hurting all States concerned.

Secondly, every effort must be made to manage the spillover effects of the conflict. The Ukraine crisis, compounded by other economic and security risks, has triggered crises and shocks in the global food, energy and financial sectors, making post-pandemic recovery, especially growth in developing countries, even more difficult. It remains an uphill task to realize the Sustainable Development Goals. Major developed countries should launch responsible economic and trade initiatives to ensure the secure and smooth operation of the global supply and industrial chains, cease the abusive use of unilateral sanctions and longarm jurisdiction, and avoid the politicization and weaponization of the economy. The Black Sea Grain Initiative should not be so easily abandoned. We expect all parties to strive for the early resumption of grain and fertilizer exports from Russia and Ukraine through dialogue and consultations. China stands ready to continue its support for the Secretary-General's efforts to that end.

Thirdly, no effort should be spared in ensuring the delivery of humanitarian assistance. The prolonged fighting has led to the destruction of much large-scale infrastructure, the displacement of millions of people and rising humanitarian needs. Under such circumstances, parties to the conflict must strictly abide by international humanitarian law, observe the principles of necessity, distinction and proportionality, refrain from attacking civilians and civilian infrastructure, and ensure that people's basic needs are provided for and the safety and security of life and property. I would like to reiterate that the irresponsible transfer and use of cluster munitions could easily give rise to humanitarian disasters. The relevant parties must be extremely cautious in that regard.

Fourthly, all efforts must be made to guard against risks to nuclear safety and security. Since the outbreak of the conflict, the safety and security of the Zaporizhzhya nuclear power plant has been a major concern. Lately, the sound of explosions and gunshots has been heard repeatedly in the vicinity of the power plant and its surrounding areas. We must always remain vigilant against and attentive to nuclear safety and security risks. There is no winner in a nuclear war.

On the nuclear issue, all parties must exercise maximum restraint and reason and abide by nuclear

safety conventions under international law. With their own future and the future of humankind in mind, all parties should strictly observe the bottom line of nuclear safety, steer clear of the red line of nuclear war and work together to manage crises and avoid manmade nuclear accidents. China supports the continued constructive role played by the International Atomic Energy Agency in ensuring the safety and security of nuclear facilities.

Mr. Boateng (Ghana): I begin by thanking Under-Secretary-General Rosemary DiCarlo for her briefing to the Council. I also thank the two civil society representatives for their perspectives and welcome the participation in this meeting of the representatives of Ukraine, Lithuania, Germany, Poland and Italy and the observer of the European Union.

Ghana remains steadfast in its support for the continuing efforts of the United Nations to mitigate the humanitarian impact of the war against Ukraine and hopes that those endeavours will have a positive effect on facilitating the cessation of military hostilities and the resolution of the conflict.

We continue to be deeply concerned by the presence of the Russian Federation's troops on the territory of Ukraine and believe that ending its war on Ukraine and embracing dialogue and diplomacy remains the Russian Federation's best option for resolving its stated security concerns. To do so would accord with the interests of many in the United Nations and demonstrate its capacity to resolve inter-State conflicts by pacific means.

We have all observed the tremendous human cost and the social and economic consequences that the needless war, which seems to have no end in sight, has caused over the past 18 months. The war has added another layer of complications to an already polarized international landscape, driving deep divisions among States and diverting critical global attention from the resolution of other crises. We risk incoherent, disjointed and ineffective responses to the enduring challenges of the global community if we do not accelerate efforts to de-escalate the growing geopolitical tensions and bridge the widening divisions.

The war has been damaging to our collective security. We encourage all actors not to be driven by short-term, parochial and self-serving interests, but rather to keep broader common interests in their focus and to act responsibly. We also encourage all countries to support the most promising peace initiatives that can assist the conflicting parties to cease hostilities and reach a peaceful settlement of the dispute in full respect for the Charter of the United Nations and international law.

As we consider all appropriate options to mitigate the impact of the war on the Ukrainian population, particularly on schoolchildren and teenagers, I would like to stress the continued need for the relevant United Nations agencies to provide mental health and psychological support against the backdrop of the harrowing post-traumatic stress disorders with which approximately one quarter of the Ukrainian population have been diagnosed. In that context, we commend UNESCO for its initiative to train school psychologists to support learners and teachers. We strongly advocate the scaling-up of similar programmes and initiatives to help the vulnerable sections of the Ukrainian population to deal with the emotional agony occasioned by the unjustified war.

We condemn the deliberate and indiscriminate attacks on civilian infrastructure, notably on health facilities, schools, residential areas and food systems, and call for all such attacks to cease. It is our fundamental belief that amid the ongoing military hostilities every effort must be made to protect and ensure the safety and security of all civilians, regardless of where they live. In that regard, we would like to remind the Council of our previous statements urging the warring parties to fully comply with the requirements of international refugee law, international human rights law, international humanitarian law and the tenets of the rules of war by exercising distinction, proportionality and precaution in the conduct of their military operations.

Against the backdrop of the prevailing global hardships, aggravated by the complex ramifications of the war and the resulting unprecedented disruptions to livelihoods, we urge for a resumption of the Black Sea Grain Initiative. We encourage the parties to cooperate with the efforts of the Secretary-General to comprehensively address all bottlenecks relating to the implementation of the Initiative and related agreements.

In conclusion, we stress that the purely military logic that has underpinned the war for the past 18 months cannot deliver a durable settlement or sustainable peace. In the larger interests of international peace and security, it is imperative that we assist the parties in urgently opening channels for diplomacy and credible dialogue. Finally, I wish the Ukrainian people a happy and purposeful Independence Day.

Mrs. Broadhurst Estival (France) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank Ms. DiCarlo, Ms. Rashevska and Mr. Kuleba for their briefings.

On this day celebrating Ukrainian independence, France pays tribute to the unshakeable courage of the Ukrainian people, who, 32 years after gaining independence, find themselves forced to continue fighting tirelessly to defend their sovereignty, territorial integrity and freedom in the face of Russia's unjustified and unlawful aggression. For 18 months now, Russia has been violating not only the fundamental principles of the Charter of the United Nations but also international humanitarian law and human rights. With its bombardments deliberately targeting civilian populations and infrastructure, Russia is inflicting untold suffering on Ukraine and its people.

The testimonies we heard today once again confirm the exorbitant cost of this aggression for civilians, especially children. Both the Secretary-General's annual report on children in armed conflict (S/2023/363) and that of the Human Rights Council's Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine (A/HRC/52/62) are unequivocal. Russia is responsible for the murder and maiming of children, their illegal transfer to Russia, sexual violence against them and attacks on schools and hospitals. The Secretary-General's inclusion of Russia on his annual list of perpetrators of those crimes affirms their gravity. France urges Russia to respect international law and put an immediate end to all those abuses.

We reiterate our firm condemnation of Russia's illegal deportations of Ukrainian children. Russia must return all deported children to Ukraine without delay. France would like to remind the Council that the International Criminal Court has issued two arrest warrants against the President of Russia and Russia's so-called Commissioner for Children's Rights. The Court, acting independently, found that there were reasonable grounds to believe that Russian authorities at the highest levels were responsible for deporting Ukrainian children, which constitutes a war crime. France will continue to give full support to the vital work of international justice. Those responsible for the crimes committed in Ukraine must be held to account. It is our duty to fulfil that demand for justice, which we owe to all the victims of those crimes. France also

reiterates its support to both the International Criminal Court and the Ukrainian courts. There can be no lasting peace without justice.

On 19 August, Russian strikes targeting a university and a theatre in Chernihiv killed seven civilians and wounded more than 150 people, including 15 children. Yesterday strikes targeted a school in the Sumy region, killing four civilians. Under international humanitarian law, Russia must stop targeting the Ukrainian population and civilian infrastructure. Russia alone decided to use force illegally and violate the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine. It alone has the power to put an end to this war and the resulting suffering. It is also Russia that is holding the world's population hostage by blocking Ukrainian grain exports, stealing grain from the occupied territories of Ukraine and destroying the country's agricultural infrastructure.

Together with its partners, France will continue to stand by Ukraine for as long as necessary and to provide the assistance Ukraine needs to enable it to exercise its right to self-defence. There can be only one outcome, and that is a peace in accordance with the Charter that respects Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders. France will continue to support Ukraine's efforts to establish a just and lasting peace.

Mr. Pérez Loose (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank you, Madam President, for convening this meeting on Ukraine. I also thank Under-Secretary-General Rosemary DiCarlo for her briefing and the civil-society representatives for their testimonies.

Today not only marks a year and a half since the invasion of Ukraine began but a year and a half since the diplomatic efforts of the international community and this very Security Council were torpedoed by the first bombings, which began as delegations in this Chamber echoed Secretary-General António Guterres' call on the Russian Federation to give peace a chance (see S/PV.8974). At each of the nearly 70 meetings the Council has held on Ukraine, delegations have reaffirmed the Secretary-General's call, reiterating to the Russian Federation that it must end its military aggression against its neighbour. Eighteen months ago we first heard denials of the intention and determination to invade Ukraine, followed by denials that the invasion was taking place. As I said in January, there was no greater evidence for Ecuador of the military aggression than the dramatic evacuation from Ukraine of hundreds of Ecuadorians, particularly students, who had to save themselves by leaving behind their lives in Ukraine (see S/PV.9243).

Millions of Ukrainians have had to flee, resulting in more than 6 million refugees in Europe and more than 5 million internally displaced persons. Nearly 18 million remain in need of humanitarian assistance. The impact on people's physical and mental health has been dramatic. How do we justify ourselves to the generation of Ukrainians who woke up one day under the siege of bombs, missiles and gunpowder to find their loved ones gone, some of them killed and others fled? How many more refugees and how many more displaced persons must there be? How many more people must die? How many more orphans must continue to bury their parents and how many more parents must continue to bury their children for Russia to end this war? How many more Security Council meetings will be required to end to the military aggression against Ukraine? In addition to its global impact on food security and the increase in nuclear tensions and military expenditure, in some cases the war in Ukraine continues to divert the attention of the international community from other crises — in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean — that we must also resolve and that preceded the war in Ukraine.

We do not know whether the current authorities of the Russian Federation have thought about the consequences for their country's position in the international community once the conflict ends, and when they do, it may be too late. What we do know is what history has taught us time and again - that nations that are unable to reconcile their past with their present pay a high price. There are countries represented here in the Chamber today that have been able to meet that challenge — nations that have learned that their greatness is not measured by their nuclear power, the territory they snatch from neighbours or the fear they instil but by their cosmopolitan culture, democratic institutions, tolerance, artistic creativity, technological advances and respect for the law, including, of course, respect for human rights. Could we ever have imagined that a private army of mercenaries would threaten the security of the Russian Federation? What is true is that much has changed, and the longer the conflict, the greater the pain for Ukrainians and the Russian people themselves.

In conclusion, we urge the Russian Federation to cease its attacks on civilian infrastructure, including

port facilities and those used for producing and distributing food. We once again urge the occupying troops to withdraw, without waiting another day, to the borders that were recognized internationally before the invasion, in order to enable a peaceful outcome, based on respect for international law and for the territorial integrity and political independence of Ukraine.

Ms. Koumby Missambo (Gabon) (*spoke in French*): I thank Under-Secretary-General DiCarlo for her briefing and Ms. Rashevska and Mr. Kuleba for their remarks.

After 18 months of deadly war in Ukraine, the fighting has intensified in recent weeks in the south of the country, with increasing numbers of drone, missile and other long-range-weapon attacks. Those indiscriminate attacks continue to target civilians and civilian infrastructure, as well as humanitarian personnel, who are often forced to halt their distribution of humanitarian aid vital to people in distress, as occurred recently in Kherson. We are concerned about the critical plight of millions of men, women and children, left to themselves without the principal mechanisms of international aid. Attacks and violations of other kinds against children are reprehensible and intolerable. Since the Kakhovka dam and its important reservoir were destroyed, people in areas close to it have found themselves in a particularly alarming humanitarian situation, as they have lost not only their homes and means of subsistence but their water supply as well. That situation is untenable and must end.

We once again call on the parties to strictly respect their obligations under international humanitarian law, in particular regarding the protection of people who are not involved in the fighting and of civilian infrastructure. The warring parties have the obligation to facilitate the movement of humanitarian workers and to enable unhindered access, without discrimination, to areas and people requiring humanitarian assistance. We also call on them to refrain from using mines, cluster munitions or other remotely controlled weapons and to do everything in their power to reduce their effects on civilians, especially women, children and the most vulnerable.

The Black Sea Grain Initiative, signed six months after the outbreak of the war, showed us that despite the ongoing fighting, a window of hope remained open for diplomacy. Today that hope appears to have vanished, and the surge of hope has been swept away by the sombre prospect of a war of attrition, which leaves room only for the logic of armaments on a massive scale. We urge the parties to find common ground through dialogue and consensus and to return to that important agreement.

My country welcomes the extraordinary international mobilization from which Ukraine continues to benefit via the United Nations, in particular the launch of an appropriate humanitarian response capable of dealing with emergencies, including the winter response plan, starting in October, developed by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, which will enable a planned humanitarian response to meet critical needs during that difficult time of year. We commend the specialized agencies of the United Nations and all the organizations working on the ground to address the multifaceted humanitarian needs, often in difficult conditions, and acknowledge their efforts to provide urgent assistance to the displaced or injured. Nonetheless, even the most well-thoughtout programmes for the reconstruction of Ukraine can never evaluate, much less put a figure on, the cost of the war for the victims — the children and adults who have lost their dignity, dreams and hopes along with their homes, and who may be affected by the scars of the war for years to come. In that regard, we welcome the UNESCO initiative to train 15,000 school psychologists to support children and teachers who are victims of the war. It is an important contribution to preventing or at least lessening the invisible injuries of war.

That is why the ultimate goal on which all our energies must focus is a return to peace. We will continue to urge the parties to de-escalate and engage in dialogue in order to put an end to the war, and to believe in the possibility of an outcome that is not a stalemate, in line with the mechanisms of the Charter of the United Nations. My country supports the quest for viable solutions that can enable a lasting settlement to the conflict and allow the parties to engage in negotiations for peace and peaceful coexistence.

Mr. Kariuki (United Kingdom): I thank Under-Secretary-General DiCarlo, Ms. Rashevska and Mr. Kuleba for their briefings.

Let me begin by wishing a happy Independence Day to all Ukrainians. In 1991 Ukraine declared independence from the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, with 92 per cent of the country voting in favour of independence in a national referendum. Ukraine's existence as a sovereign country was recognized by the United Nations, including the Russian Federation. If Russia's illegal invasion last year had succeeded, there would be one less independent Member State of the United Nations today. The Ukrainians' heroic resistance in the face of Russian aggression not only protects their freedom but defends the Charter of the United Nations and its basic principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity. If Russia won the war, it would give a green light to a new era of international aggression where big countries can rewrite borders by force. None of us wants that. We are deeply indebted to the Ukrainian people for their immense sacrifice, and we are proud to stand with them.

As we mark Ukraine's independence, we reflect on Russia's deliberate efforts to target Ukraine's future — its children. The United Nations has reported that Russia is committing grave violations against children in its war of aggression — the first time a permanent Council member has ever been listed for doing so. The Ukrainian authorities report that, in addition to killing children directly and destroying their homes, schools and hospitals, Russia has, to date, forcibly transferred or deported over 19,000 children since 2022. President Putin and his Presidential Commissioner for Children's Rights are the subject of arrest warrants issued by the International Criminal Court for their alleged role.

For Ukrainian families, those forced transfers and deportations have devastating and life-changing consequences that will be felt for generations. Russia uses fear of that tactic to suppress dissent among Ukrainians living under temporary Russian control. It is also a deliberate attempt to erase Ukrainian culture, identity and statehood. Russia has not attempted to preserve the identities of the children it has forcibly deported, as required by international humanitarian law. Rather, there is growing evidence that Russia has seriously violated that right, forcing children to assimilate with the culture of the State that is seeking to destroy their own country.

Russia also has a clear legal obligation under the Fourth Geneva Convention to facilitate communication and reunification between children and their relatives or legal guardian. Russia has failed to provide reliable information about the children it has transferred to its territory, particularly to those children placed with Russian foster families. As the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights reported, children themselves have often been forced to trace and find parents or family members. This is an unacceptable burden to place on children, especially those dealing with the trauma of Russia's illegal invasion. Just 386 children have so far been returned. We thank the representatives from Save Ukraine for their vital work on those returns. We call on Russia to respect Ukrainian independence, return Ukrainian children, withdraw its troops and end this war.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): To begin, I wish to briefly say something to one of our briefers in the language in which he deigned to address the Security Council.

(spoke in a language other than an official language of the Security Council, without providing interpretation)

(spoke in Russian)

I wish to draw attention to the fact that we have today borne witness to an egregious violation of the provisional rules of procedure of the Security Council by the United States presidency — specifically, rule 44, which states that speeches may be made in a language other than the languages of the United Nations, but in that case the speaker shall him or herself provide for interpretation into one of the official languages of the United Nations. That was not done. Ultimately, the Security Council members spent more than 15 minutes listening to a speech that nobody, apart from those who speak Ukrainian and Russian, understood, and yet, the briefer speaks English perfectly well, as was made clear at the very end of his statement. I have no doubt that he speaks Russian perfectly as well. This was therefore a political gesture made with egregious disregard for the rules of procedure of the Security Council, and the United States presidency was unable to stop it.

On 9 May 2010, a military parade was held in Kyiv in honour of the sixty-fifth anniversary of the Great Victory of the Soviet people in the Great Patriotic War. It was attended by 2,500 military personnel from Ukraine, Russia and Belarus. The celebrations took place throughout the city. Only four years later, on 9 May 2014 — just under three months after the anti-constitutional coup in Kyiv, during a similar parade on the streets of Mariupol — militants of the neo-Nazi Azov and Dnipro-1 battalions opened fire on vehicles and ambulances and openly killed those who took to the streets to honour the memory of their fathers and grandfathers. According to information from local law enforcement agencies, 99 people were killed, and 119 were wounded.

Let us also recall that, shortly before that holiday, on 2 May 2014, approximately 50 peaceful protesters who stood up in defence of the Russian language were burned alive in the trade union building in Odesa. What happened in those four years? How were Ukrainians able, overnight, to replace the heroes who liberated the country from fascism with fascist collaborators complicit in the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Jews, Poles, Russians and Ukrainians? How was an essentially Russian-speaking country, in fact, able to stoop so low as to persecute Russian speakers and bomb peaceful cities in Donbass, whose inhabitants stood up for their values? And why is it that there was no response to this from Western countries, which outwardly advance the values of tolerance?

The answers to those questions lie at the root of the tragedy that Ukraine is experiencing now, being governed by the criminal Kyiv regime that is serving exclusively the geopolitical interests of the United States and its allies, which are waging a hybrid war against Russia in Ukraine to the last Ukrainian. That regime is grabbing young Ukrainian men off the streets, shoving them into cars and, even without basic military training, sending them to take part in "human wave attacks" against Russian military fortifications and minefields, without any concern for the casualties beyond the pale of imagination. And our former Western partners are only encouraging Zelenskyy and his clique, providing them with weapons and demanding that the bloodbath continue. Recently, experts from the German newspaper Die Welt efficiently calculated that the Kyiv regime would need to mobilize another 3 million people in order to defeat Russia, and that is in spite of the fact that the population of Ukraine, according to United Nations data, declined from 48.2 million people in 2001 to 36.6 million at the beginning of 2022. Today there are no more than 29 million people living in the country. However, Ukraine's Western sponsors care not one bit about those people. As Polish President Duda said, Russia can now be defeated cheaply, given that "American soldiers are not dying".

When faced with those unpalatable facts, our Western colleagues usually respond that we would not find ourselves in this position had Russia not launched a special military operation against Ukraine. However, the tragedy of that country began long before that, when the West chose Ukraine as a pawn to fight against and weaken Russia. We would not find ourselves in this situation if the Kyiv regime had not launched a war in 2014 against its own Russian-speaking citizens in the east of the country. We were compelled to come to the defence of the women, children and elderly who were being destroyed by Kyiv after Ukraine and its Western sponsors refused once and for all to comply with the Minsk agreements, which were endorsed by the Security Council. Moreover, as we know very well today, for all those years, the document was used as a mere smokescreen for preparing Ukraine for war with Russia.

Until the last moment, our country leveraged diplomacy to address the situation. For many years, we called, including in this Chamber, for the implementation of the Minsk agreements. In late 2021, we went as far as to make unprecedented proposals for security guarantees with Western States. All of them were rejected, and Ukraine openly prepared for the forceful seizure of the Donetsk People's Republic and the Luhansk People's Republic. Russia could not allow that, nor could we tolerate the entrenchment on our borders of the Russophobic neo-Nazi regime, which posed a direct threat to Russia.

As we know, today's meeting was timed by the United States and its allies to coincide with Ukrainian independence day. On such days, it is customary to take stock and highlight successes and achievements. So what can today's Ukraine boast of? Let us try to list only what we can see on the surface. Needless to say, the main so-called achievement is the genuine totalitarian dictatorship that is gaining strength every day, where any dissent or opposition is prohibited, history is being rewritten and the glorification of Nazism and Hitler's henchmen has become part of State policy. We know that tens of thousands of Ukrainians have been arrested merely for browsing Russian websites on the Internet, listening to Russian music on their phones or reading Russian books. Everything linked to Russia was declared hostile in Ukraine long before the start of our special operation. We have borne and continue to bear witness to a multitude of political assassinations and cases of the intimidation and blackmail of political opponents. Are there any other countries in which such incidents happen openly? Are there any other countries where there is open religious persecution, the canonical church is banned, churches, parishes and monasteries are seized, holy sites desecrated and the clergy persecuted for their faith and beliefs?

To that must be added the rampant corruption that nothing has been done about since the country gained independence and that today has reached unprecedented proportions, thanks to the billions of dollars in Western aid that are dished out to the Kyiv regime and immediately stolen. Ukrainian media constantly publishes news about the issue but apparently it is only our former Western partners who fail to notice it, despite the fact that indignation about the situation is growing in Western countries while their authorities try to ignore it.

What other State, besides the notorious Islamic State, openly promotes terrorist methods as State policy? Are there many States that take pride in assaulting and attacking civilians, using them as unwitting suicide bombers, blackmailing them through fraudulent cyberschemes and making them commit crimes in their own country? Are there many States that attempt to falsify their own history by brainwashing their own citizens, indoctrinating them with lies about their own country and its role in global civilization and culture? We have previously shown here in this Chamber Ukrainian school textbooks asserting that the Jews, the French, the Portuguese and many other peoples are descended from ancient Ukrainians. What good can come of such historical fantasy and nonsense, with echoes of Nazi theories of a master race superior to its neighbours?

The saddest part of all is not even that Ukraine has sunk to such claims of so-called achievements, but that it has done so under the direct tutelage of the United States and its allies, which even now are selectively entirely blind and deaf as soon as what is at issue is the crimes of the Kyiv regime both at home and abroad. Moreover, Western capitals today are essentially its accomplices, not just because they are supplying the Zelenskyy regime with the weapons used to kill civilians and with surveillance intelligence, mercenaries and the technical specialists it needs, but above all because they are concealing the monstrous lies that the regime spreads about itself and about Russia. It lies about the true goals of our military operation and the reasons for it, about those who are truly to blame for the deaths of civilian thanks to the Ukraine's air defence activities, deployed in residential areas in violation of international humanitarian law. It lies about staged situations and provocations such as in Bucha, Kramatorsk and the Mariupol theatre. It lies about our alleged abductions of Ukrainian children — children

whom we have in fact saved. Finally, it lies about the criminals whom present-day Ukraine reveres as heroes.

We have heard enough of such lies in our Western colleagues' statements today, and of course we will hear more. It is no coincidence that the United States presidency has followed its usual pattern of bringing in a bunch of its Western allies to participate in today's meeting. It has long acted according to the well-known principle that the more horrible the lie, the easier it is to believe it. But it has forgotten one thing, which is that the more they lie and try to denigrate Russia and distort what we do and why we are doing it, the more those lies eat away at the foundations of their own societies, values and principles. The consequences of that situation are already becoming clear. We can see that more and more people all over the world are beginning to realize the truth about what is really happening, and they are horrified by its scale.

The truth is that this proxy war on Russia was programmed by the United States and its allies at least as long ago as 2014, and Washington, London and Brussels, which are using other people to fight it, have no interest whatever in ending it. After all, they are seeing a new military operations manual being written before their eyes and gaining experience in modern methods of warfare while risking nothing more than the weapons they have supplied to Kyiv. Otherwise they would have allowed Zelenskyy and his crew to conclude the peace agreement that was almost reached in March of last year with very favourable terms for Ukraine. But the collective West has no need of that scenario.

We therefore have nothing special about which to congratulate Ukraine on its Independence Day. An unenviable fate awaits it as a blind weapon wielded by the West, and the contours of that fate are becoming increasingly clear. The only positive in that regard may be that the example of Ukraine has shown many people what results from blind obedience to the West and a willingness to sacrifice one's own interests for the sake of its geopolitical agenda. May it be a lesson to others, and may the tragedy of Ukraine never again be repeated.

Mr. Ishikane (Japan): I thank Under-Secretary-General DiCarlo for her briefing. I also thank Ms. Rashevska for her detailed statement and look forward to receiving a written translation of Mr. Kuleba's remarks. We join everyone else around the world in congratulating all Ukrainians on the thirty-second anniversary of their independence. Ukraine has been exercising its right to self-defence against Russia's armed attack for a year and a half, a right that is enshrined in international law, including the Charter of the United Nations, and that is being exercised for the sake of Ukraine's independence, freedom, sovereignty and territorial integrity. My Russian colleague referred to Ukrainians' recruitment of mercenaries to defeat Russia, but I think it is rather being done to defend Ukraine.

I would like to take a moment here to reflect on what Russia's aggression against Ukraine has brought about. There are countless civilian casualties, including children, and their families are deeply saddened. As we heard from the briefers' detailed information today, families are being torn apart by the unlawful deportation and transfer of Ukrainians, including children. Countless critical objects of civilian infrastructure, including power plants and dams, have been destroyed. Europe's largest nuclear power plant has been illegally occupied, posing a risk of nuclear disaster. Many UNESCO World Heritage Sites have been damaged. Ukraine's grain exports have been hampered, grain prices have risen and vulnerable populations have lost access to food. The world is being held hostage. The damage is too great to list in full here.

The international community has achieved some results. We have reaffirmed our commitment to the international order based on the rule of law. We have strengthened our solidarity based on common principles. That solidarity exists not merely among so-called Western countries but far beyond. No matter how Russia tries to mislead the world, our voices have been united in stating that Russia's aggression against Ukraine is nothing but a flagrant violation of the Charter of the United Nations. Russia has all sorts of justifications, but everyone understands that they are meaningless in the face of the truth. As Ukrainians celebrate their independence today, they need the assurance of peace. A conference on peace for Ukraine was recently held in Saudi Arabia with the participation of more than 40 countries, including Japan, and we will continue to seek a just and lasting peace for Ukraine together.

We reiterate that Japan will continue to support Ukraine and that our commitment is unwavering. Russia should immediately withdraw all its troops and military equipment from Ukraine and should respect Ukraine's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders.

Ms. Gatt (Malta): I thank Under-Secretary-General Rosemary DiCarlo for her briefing. I also thank Ms. Rashevska and Mr. Kuleba for their remarks.

As Ukraine celebrates its Independence Day, we continue to reiterate that Ukraine has the right to determine its own future. Malta stands with the Ukrainian people in defending their freedom and independence.

Today's meeting illustrates once again the farreaching consequences of this senseless, illegal and unprovoked war. A month ago, a permanent member of the Security Council opted to politicize humanitarian needs by terminating the Black Sea Grain Initiative. That decision has had severe global consequences by exacerbating existing agricultural, energy and financial crises, disproportionately affecting the affecting world's most vulnerable populations. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, global food prices rose or the first time in months following the collapse of the landmark agreement to ship grain from Ukraine to the rest of the world.

We cannot stress enough that the weaponization of food is completely unacceptable and unconscionable. We regret that Russia disregarded a credible United Nations proposal, ending a lifeline for millions facing hunger and spiralling food costs. The threat of famine, with people slowly starving to death, is a red line for international peace and security. We believe it is crucial to restore the Black Sea Grain Initiative as a means to re-balance the global food market and contribute to Ukraine's export of grains to the countries that need it the most.

Threats regarding the potential targeting of civilian vessels navigating in the waters of the Black Sea are unacceptable. Last week, a Russian warship fired warning shots at a cargo ship in the south-western Black Sea. Those actions exemplified Russia's deliberate policy of endangering the freedom of navigation and safety of commercial shipping in the Black Sea. The provocative actions carried out by the Russian navy are a clear violation of the international law of the sea and a crime against civilian vessels of a third country in the waters of other States.

The recent attacks on the Kherson region, especially in Mykolayiv, Zaporizhzhya, Donbas and Kharkiv, by Russia are alarming. Missile and drone strikes have destroyed vital infrastructure, health facilities, religious and cultural sites and residential buildings, all resulting in the deplorable loss of life. Russia's brutal war on the people of Ukraine is also having a multi-layered impact on women, men and children and is affecting people's safety, physical and mental health and livelihoods and compromising their access to health care and education.

Women and girls continue to face extremely high risks of gender-based violence. There are widespread reports of grave human rights violations, including torture and conflict-related sexual violence. The people remaining close to the front lines, especially older persons and people with disabilities or specific needs, experience barriers to access humanitarian services. Malta strongly condemns those barbaric, indiscriminate and illegal acts of terror and urges Russia to immediately cease those attacks. Regardless of the context, international humanitarian law and international human rights law must be upheld.

Let us recall the facts: Ukraine did not want war, and neither did it provoke it. Russia is the aggressor and is committing war crimes in Ukraine. We remain firmly committed to ensuring that Russia is held fully accountable for all its crimes.

In conclusion, Malta reiterates in the strongest possible terms the need for Russia to end its aggression and to immediately and completely withdraw all its forces and military equipment from the entire territory of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders.

Mr. Almazrouei (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank Ms. Rosemary DiCarlo, Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, for her valuable briefing. I listened to the statements made by the civil society representatives. I also join my colleagues in congratulating Ukraine on its Independence Day.

Our meeting today comes a year and a half after the outbreak of the war in Ukraine and the subsequent deterioration of the humanitarian, security, economic and political situations. Despite the attention brought to this matter by the Security Council and the entire international community and the numerous calls to end the war, the hostilities continue in the absence of a just and lasting solution.

As is the case in every war, it is civilians who suffer the most from the fighting, which makes it incumbent upon us to address their needs, in particular those of children who are subjected to grave violations identified by the Security Council in dealing with their special status during armed conflict.

United Nations institutions have monitored the alarming increase in the number of children killed or injured in the recent intensification of the war. Those figures rose from 87 cases between February and April to 140 cases in the subsequent three months. The suffering of children is further compounded by the destruction and damage to hospitals, schools and other infrastructure that provide basic services. In addition, children are subject to aggression, sexual exploitation and human trafficking.

In that context, the United Arab Emirates expresses its extreme concern about the reports of the abduction and forcible transfer of children in Ukraine. Accordingly, we stress the need for the parties to the conflict to protect children and respect their rights in accordance with the specific framework stipulated in Protocol Additional I to the Geneva Conventions concerning the evacuation of children in exceptional circumstances. We also urge the parties to facilitate the reunification of those children with their families.

Given that the responsibility in this context lies primarily with States, we urge them to strengthen their responses to the suffering of children. That includes cooperation with the Central Tracing Agency of the International Committee of the Red Cross and the provision of information on children separated from their families or legal guardians.

The United Arab Emirates stresses its total commitment to protecting children in armed conflict and alleviating their suffering. Just this week, we announced an aid package for the education sector as the new academic year commences. Since the beginning of the war, our humanitarian programmes have also responded to the needs of civilians in Ukraine and refugees in neighbouring countries by providing medical and relief aid. In addition, we have extended our support to the Homes for Foster Families project of the Olena Zelenska Foundation, which aims to provide an integrated and embracing environment for war orphans.

In conclusion, we affirm that the continuation and escalation of the war make us trapped in a losing race in responding to the suffering of civilians, especially children. The United Arab Emirates therefore reiterates its call for a cessation of hostilities and a diplomatic solution in accordance with international law and the Charter of the United Nations.

Mrs. Chanda (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): I thank Under-Secretary-General Rosemary DiCarlo for her briefing, as well as the two civil society representatives for their testimonies.

On the occasion of its Independence Day, I would like to express Switzerland's support, solidarity and friendship with Ukraine and its people. This is supposed to be a festive day. And yet, it also marks a year and a half of Russia's military aggression. It has been a year and a half of calls on Russia to de-escalate, cease all combat operations and withdraw its troops from Ukraine's territory. And it has been a year and a half of calls for respect for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. I would like to reiterate that Switzerland does not recognize the integration of Ukraine's territory into the Russian Federation — that applies to Crimea and to the Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk and Zaporizhzhya regions.

In addition to the numerous images and testimonies, we also have figures illustrating the disastrous consequences of the war. I would like to highlight three of them.

According to figures from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, nearly 10,000 civilians have been killed in the past 18 months. We condemn the fact that waves of attacks continue to hit the country's cities and areas where civilians gather. In the past few days Russian strikes have again claimed the lives of civilians, including children. And children are particularly affected by the consequences of the war. Their lives are marked by constant instability and insecurity. Nearly two out of three children in Ukraine have been forced to leave their homes. The credible reports of deportations of children to Russia and forced transfers of children within the occupied territories are particularly worrisome. Added to that are the immense humanitarian needs. Some 17.6 million people, almost half of Ukraine's current population, require humanitarian assistance and protection. We are grateful to the United Nations, Ukrainian institutions and volunteers, the Red Cross Movement and other humanitarian actors for mobilizing aid for them. However, access to communities on the front lines and to areas under Russian military control remains particularly difficult.

On this commemorative day, I want to say once again that Russia's military aggression must stop. We welcome the diplomatic efforts being made to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in Ukraine, in accordance with the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, which must remain the guiding principle for our efforts. As long as the fighting continues, we must work to mitigate the consequences for the population, as required by international humanitarian law and human rights. I will mention just a few of the relevant obligations.

In view of the thousands of civilians killed or injured, civilians and civilian objects must be protected. The parties must respect international humanitarian law, in particular the principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution in the conduct of hostilities. Where children in distress are concerned, the Convention on the Rights of the Child must be respected, including through respect for the best interests of children and their right to remain with their parents. The same applies to the relevant rules of international humanitarian law, in particular the Fourth Geneva Convention and its first Additional Protocol. Deportation and illegal transfers are war crimes, and allegations of such acts must therefore be fully investigated. Switzerland takes note of the arrest warrants issued by the International Criminal Court in that regard and reiterates its support for the work of the Court as an independent and impartial judicial institution. Lastly, with regard to the humanitarian needs of millions in Ukraine, humanitarian workers must have rapid, unimpeded and sustainable access to civilians in need throughout the country. Switzerland will continue to advocate for full respect for international law and a stable and prosperous future for Ukraine.

The President: I would like to draw the attention of speakers to paragraph 22 of presidential note S/2017/507, which encourages all participants in Council meetings to deliver their statements in five minutes or less, in line with the Security Council's commitment to making more effective use of open meetings.

I now give the floor to the representative of Ukraine.

Mr. Kyslytsya (Ukraine): I recognize the representative of Putin's regime in the permanent seat of the Soviet Union.

We thank Under-Secretary-General DiCarlo for her briefing, which once again highlighted the devastating impact of the Russian aggression on global security, on the United Nations and on Ukraine above all. We are grateful to our civil-society briefers Ms. Kateryna Rashevska and Mr. Mykola Kuleba for their insightful briefings on crimes committed against children.

Today Ukraine marks the thirty-second anniversary since the restoration of its independence. As President Zelenskyy said in his address today, that is 32 years of uninterrupted independence, which will endure, which we will not allow to be torn apart and on which Ukrainians will not lose their grip. As stated in the Act of Declaration of Independence of Ukraine of 24 August 1991, that step was triggered by

"the mortal danger surrounding Ukraine in connection with the State coup d'état in the [Union of Soviet Socialist Republics] on 19 August 1991".

The proclamation of independence also continued "the thousand-year tradition of State development in Ukraine". It has always been a matter of national pride that our independence was restored peacefully, and Ukraine has eagerly taken a path of democratic development as a peace-loving nation, reliable partner and friendly neighbour. However, mortal danger is again hanging over my country, and it comes from the same place — the Kremlin. It denies us our right to live as a sovereign nation. It denies us the right to live as a nation, and finally, it denies us our right to live as human beings.

The only role that Russia assigns to Ukraine, a founding member of the United Nations, is that of a lawless colony where the local population either bows to forced Russification or faces deportation and repression. We have opted to fight to defend our independence and freedom and a future that we will choose ourselves. In that fight, we are opposing a country that occupied the territories of several other neighbours before attacking Ukraine. But let us not forget that the first case of Russia's occupation after 1991 took place right here, with its occupation of the permanent seat on the Council of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Russia's occupation of that permanent seat and of neighbouring territories constituted violations of the Charter of the United Nations. However, the reaction of the international community encouraged Russia to continue in that vein and served as carte blanche for further violating all of the basic principles of the Charter. We must put an end to that cycle of impunity. It is our moral and legal duty to state that the actions of the Moscow regime are not compatible with the status

of a permanent member or with its presence in the United Nations in general.

The first Nuremberg judgment referred to numerous Nazi crimes against children. In particular, it includes Himmler's words about Nazi forced-adoption practices, which sound terribly relevant today.

"What the nations can offer in the way of good blood of our type, we will take, if necessary by kidnapping their children and raising them here with us".

There are many similar statements made on Russian State television every single day. Since 2014, Russia has purposefully pursued a policy of mass abductions of Ukrainian children and their forceful indoctrination. We have seen that Russian policy in Crimea, Donetsk and Luhansk since 2014. We welcomed the address by the Secretary-General at the third Summit of the International Crimea Platform, held yesterday, an event that served as powerful proof that the de-occupation of Crimea and the ensuring of accountability for crimes committed since 2014 remain a focus for the international community.

Since February 2022, the Russian authorities have repeatedly stated that more than 700,000 children were relocated from Ukraine to Russia. Ukraine has strong grounds to believe that several hundred thousand Ukrainian children were forcibly and unlawfully taken by Russia, with many still being held against their will. Children are abducted under various pretexts and scenarios, which the Council heard about today from our distinguished briefers. After deportation to Russia or to the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine, our children are exposed to aggressive brainwashing aimed at changing their consciousness, erasing their Ukrainian identity and preparing obedient soldiers for the Russian army in the future. I just quoted Himmler, who said "we will take children, if necessary by kidnapping". That is what happens every day in Ukraine.

Russian crimes against children, like those of the Nazis during the Second World War, are one of the most horrible markers of this war. The genocidal nature and brutality of these crimes are horrifying. Russia's war has affected all of Ukraine's 7.5 million children. Almost two thirds of them have been internally or externally displaced. According to the United Nations, owing to the full-scale Russian invasion, 75 per cent of schoolchildren suffer from stress, and 26 per cent have post-traumatic stress disorder. The Council has already heard from the briefers the terrible statistics on child casualties, which grow every day. Russia's aggression is about Ukraine's future, and there is no future without children.

It is Ukraine's top priority to further strengthen children's protection, particularly in the context of Russia's aggression. It is one of the priorities set by President Zelenskyy's peace formula plan to ensure the release of all prisoners and deportees, including war prisoners and children deported to Russia. To that end, we have established constructive dialogue and cooperation with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and the local United Nations children and armed conflict team. The joint prevention plan between the Government of Ukraine and the United Nations country task force on monitoring and reporting to end and prevent grave violations against children in Ukraine was signed last Friday, 19 August. We also appreciate the Secretary-General's unprecedented decision to add the Russian armed forces and affiliated armed groups to the annex of his annual report on children and armed conflict (S/2023/363).

However, as I have already said in this Chamber, Russia's identification as one of the listed parties that have put in place measures during the reporting period aimed at improving the protection of children was made in advance and has yet to be substantiated with concrete actions from Russia. The Kremlin must halt its heinous crimes against children in Ukraine and facilitate the return of all Ukrainian children back to our country. Instead, we keep seeing the opposite: Moscow continues its daily shelling of the territory of Ukraine, resulting in the killing and maiming of children. I therefore repeat my call on the relevant United Nations agencies and officials, in particular UNICEF and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, to engage with the issue of the mass abduction of children from the occupied territories of Ukraine to the Russian Federation and Belarus and to properly monitor and report on this matter.

We are now approaching the Summit of the Future. There is no future without children. Where are children's rights in our discussions in preparation for the Summit? Where is the issue of children in many conflicts? What kind of future do we hope for if children are being killed and abducted? In four weeks, we will gather at the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Summit. How can we ensure sustainable development amid the daily loss of children's lives? Where are children's rights in our discussions in preparation for the SDG Summit? Today young Ukrainians born in an independent Ukraine are at the vanguard of our existential fight for the future and sustainable development. They are people who have lived in a free and democratic country and who share democratic and humanistic values. They are not ready to give up because they realize quite clearly what they are standing up for, unlike Russian soldiers, who come to kill Ukrainians for money and accept the role of cannon fodder and who Putin gladly sacrifices in furthering his neocolonial and imperialist practices. Every contract signed by a Russian soldier is a contract signed with the devil. If they do not drop their arms and withdraw, they will, like many have already, descend into hell, while their unclaimed bodies rot in Ukrainian soil.

I have already quoted from the Nuremberg verdict referring to crimes against children, and I now want to remind the Council that the first verdict of the International Criminal Court was also related to such crimes: the case of The Prosecutor v. Thomas Lubanga Dyilo. It makes us believe that every Russian criminal will eventually be brought to justice. Let me also remind the representatives of Putin's regime in this Chamber of what happened to the Nazi diplomats after the defeat of the criminal regime of another dictator — and of what awaits them. In addition to the volumes of materials from the Nuremberg Tribunal, there is a report about Third Reich diplomats and their involvement in the Holocaust and other Nazi crimes, released in Germany in 2010. They testify that it was almost impossible for high-ranking servants of the regime to keep themselves separate from the crimes that the Nazi regime committed. The representatives of Putin's regime should take time and read that report — maybe it will help them terminate their contract with the devil. All their lies and their complicity in the crime of aggression, war crimes and crimes against humanity are on record in this Chamber. One day, those records will be used as materials for another trial, in which some of them will join other representatives of Putin's criminal regime in the dock.

As my President said earlier today, we remember what the Ukrainian people went through, and we know what we are capable of. We are capable of winning, and we will win. Ukrainian children in Ukrainian squares and streets will celebrate Ukrainian independence in the same way. Our grandchildren will celebrate, and **The President**: I now give the floor to the representative of Lithuania.

Mr. Paulauskas (Lithuania): I thank you, Madam President, for the opportunity to make this statement to the Security Council on behalf of Estonia, Latvia and my own country, Lithuania. I also thank Under-Secretary-General Rosemary DiCarlo, Ms. Kateryna Rashevska and Mr. Mykola Kuleba for their insightful briefings.

As we congratulate Ukraine on its independence day today, we continue to witness Russia's ongoing aggression aimed at taking that independence away. Deliberate attacks targeting civilians and civilian infrastructure are a war crime. The destruction of civilian and critical infrastructure deprives people of access to water and food and heating, health and other essential services, destroying the livelihoods of entire families and in particular affecting children, women and the elderly. Yet another heinous attack on civilians in Chernihiv killed seven people, including a 6-year-old girl, Sophia Holynska, and wounded 144 people, among them people celebrating an Orthodox Christian holiday.

Children are particularly victims in this war. According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 541 people had been killed up to August, with 1,139 others injured. Many more were forced to flee their homes, have lost their families and friends and are unable to attend school or receive proper medical care. Since the beginning of Russia's aggression, millions of children and their caregivers have been exposed to hostilities along the front lines and through missile strikes in cities. At least 3,281 educational institutions have been impacted by fighting, with 262 destroyed and 3,019 damaged, 54 per cent of them in the eastern front-line areas. The psychological effects of the war trauma on children will have far-reaching consequences on the future. For those cruel acts, Russia was added to the list of parties committing grave violence against children by the Secretary-General.

The situation of Ukrainian children forcefully deported to Russia and Belarus, subjected to pro-Russia re-education and military training, turned into Russian citizens and illegally adopted deserves our immediate attention. We must ensure the children's repatriation and accountability for perpetrators. The International Criminal Court arrest warrants issued for Russian President Putin and Commissioner Lvova-Belova is the first step in the right direction, and we encourage continued international scrutiny to ensure full accountability and the repatriation of the children.

welcome the recent signing We of the Ukraine-United Nations joint preventive plan to prevent and stop grave violations of children's rights in Russia's armed aggression. I would also like to thank United Nations agencies for their assistance efforts. According to recent reports, there are over 17.6 million people in urgent need of humanitarian assistance; 4.1 million of those being children. Furthermore, according to the International Organization for Migration, there are an estimated 5.1 million internally displaced persons within Ukraine, with many Ukrainian refugees abroad. More than 4 million Ukrainians have sought shelter in the European Union, including over 100,000 in Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia. In Lithuania's schools alone there are over 8,000 pupils form Ukraine, to whom our Government provides all the necessary assistance for their schooling needs.

The financial needs for humanitarian assistance are truly significant. We must therefore all contribute to closing the existing financial gaps to allow United Nations and international assistance to reach all those in need.

Russia's war of aggression, enabled by Belarus, is a manifest violation of the Charter of the United Nations. Moreover, by abusing its veto power as a permanent member of the Security Council, Russia has rendered the Council paralysed to act. The deliberate targeting of civilians is a war crime. The international community has a responsibility to ensure full accountability for the perpetrators of atrocity crimes in order to bring about sustainable peace and give justice to the victims and prevent the recurrence of such crimes anywhere in the world in the future. That is why we need to support Ukraine in establishing a special international tribunal for the crime of aggression.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Germany.

Mr. Zahneisen (Germany): I thank you, Madam President, for giving us the opportunity to participate in this important meeting of the Security Council today.

Like other delegations, I would like to start by congratulating Ukraine on its Independence Day.

On 24 August 1991, Ukraine finally became a free, democratic and sovereign State. It is sad, however, that we have to congratulate Ukraine today at a time when Russia continues to relentlessly attack everything that Ukrainian independence stands for — security, freedom, peace, a prosperous future for all Ukrainians and the sovereign right of Ukrainians to shape their own destiny without external intimidation and interference.

Also like other delegations, we would like to thank Under-Secretary-General DiCarlo, Ms. Rashevska and Mr. Kuleba for their valuable insights.

The Council held its annual debate on children and armed conflict (see S/PV.9366) last month. The Secretary-General provided a bleak report on the topic (S/2023/363). One trend was particularly disturbing: the year 2022 was the first year since reporting started in which Government forces were the main perpetrators of grave violations of children's rights, such as killing, maiming and abducting children, deliberate attacks on civilian infrastructure important to children, such as schools and hospitals, and the blatant denial of humanitarian access to children in need. The most glaring and dramatic example of that development is Russia's aggression against the children of Ukraine.

Russian armed forces and their affiliates continue daily to commit grave violations of children's rights on the territory of Ukraine. Ambassador Hoxha and Ambassador Paulauskas already mentioned it, and I will repeat it: just last Saturday, seven people, including a 6-year-old girl, were killed, and 156 were wounded after a Russian missile attack of central square of the historic Ukrainian city of Chernihiv.

The United Nations has documented thousands of cases in which Ukrainian children have been forcibly transferred and deported to territories temporarily controlled by Russia, or directly to the Russian Federation, and Belarus. We regularly receive shocking reports of attempts by Russian authorities to erase the identity of Ukrainian children. Abducted children are being forced to speak Russian, forced to change their names and threatened with adoption by Russian families. For us, there can be no doubt — those crimes against Ukrainian children are war crimes, and they must be treated as such.

Let me make three brief points in that regard.

First, we firmly believe that it is paramount to ensure accountability. We owe it to the victims.

We must provide justice to the victims. And do that to deter future atrocities. The recent International Criminal Court arrest warrants are an important step in that regard.

Secondly, we reiterate the call of the Secretary-General to give child protection officers unimpeded access to abducted children in order to facilitate the children's speedy return to their families. Member States can — and we believe they should — consider increasing their support to international organizations, Ukrainian authorities and non-governmental organizations working to that end.

Thirdly and finally, as the war in Ukraine continues, we urge the Russian Federation to immediately cease all atrocities against Ukrainian children, to spare no effort to protect them from future violence and to respect international humanitarian law and international human rights law. We once again urge Russia to cease all hostilities, withdraw its troops from Ukraine's internationally recognized borders and end this senseless war.

Finally, during the high-level Security Council meeting on 17 July (see S/PV.9380), several Council Member States proposed the return of deported children as a first confidence-building measure. We believe that those proposals should be followed up — but they should be done anyway for the sake of Ukrainian children and as a matter of humanity.

The President: I now give the floor to Mr. Gonzato.

Mr. Gonzato: I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU) and its member States. The candidate countries North Macedonia, Montenegro, Albania, Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Bosnia and Herzegovina; the potential candidate country Georgia; as well as Andorra, Monaco and San Marino, align themselves with this statement.

We thank you, Madam President, for the opportunity to address the Security Council. We also thank the briefers for highlighting the obligation of States to protect civilians and the need to urgently address the deportation and forcible transfer of children.

Today we celebrate Ukraine's Independence Day. Throughout the European Union, Ukrainians have gathered together with EU citizens to mark the country's independence since 1991 — an independence that its neighbour Russia continues to attempt to destroy by force. That is why today we reiterate our resolute condemnation of Russia's war of aggression, which constitutes a manifest violation of the Charter of the United Nations and of international law.

Allow me to emphasise three points in my intervention: first, the need for a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in Ukraine; secondly, the need to hold Russia and its political and military leadership accountable; and thirdly, the importance of addressing the global consequences of Russia's aggression.

On the first point, the international community has repeatedly expressed its desire for a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in Ukraine in line with the Charter of the United Nations, the resolutions of the General Assembly and international law. We welcome all efforts to that effect, including the recent meeting of national security advisers in Jeddah at the initiative of Ukraine. The EU will support Ukraine for as long as it takes and will continue its work to ensure the widest possible international support for the key principles and objectives of Ukraine's peace formula. The upcoming high-level week of the General Assembly will constitute an important opportunity to further advance discussions with global partners. I underline that any initiative for sustainable peace in Ukraine must be based on full respect for its independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders.

On the second point, the EU remains firmly committed to ensuring that Russia be held fully accountable for its illegal war of aggression against Ukraine. The International Centre for the Prosecution of the Crime of Aggression against Ukraine has started its support operations in The Hague. The work to establish a tribunal for the prosecution of the crime of aggression against Ukraine continues. The EU welcomes the establishment of the Council of Europe's Register of Damage and calls for work to continue, in line with the relevant resolution of the General Assembly (resolution ES-11/5). Activities towards the establishment of a compensation mechanism in line with that resolution will also continue.

Russia's practice of forcibly transferring and deporting Ukrainian children is a violation of international humanitarian law, and the United Nations Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine concluded that it amounts to war crimes. The arrest warrants by the International Criminal Court (ICC) against the Russian President and the Commissioner of Children's Rights are a key development to holding the perpetrators accountable for their most serious crimes under international law. The EU will continue to support the ICC in pursuing its mandate in the investigation into the situation in Ukraine.

On the third point, we condemn Russia's unilateral decision to terminate the Black Sea Grain Initiative. The Initiative's suspension immediately created widespread uncertainty on global markets, increasing food prices, exacerbating the dire situation of foodimporting countries and hurting the poorest and most vulnerable the most. The Initiative enabled the export of almost 33 million tons of grain and foodstuffs from Ukraine to 45 different countries, which played an instrumental role in reducing global food prices by over 23 per cent since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Public data demonstrate that over half of the grain and two thirds of the wheat went to developing countries. The Initiative also ensured access to grain for the World Food Programme. Russia's claims that its own agricultural exports are being blocked are not borne out by publicly available trade data, which show that its exports are thriving.

Russia did not just pull out of the Black Sea Grain Initiative. Just hours after withdrawing, it started destroying Ukraine's grain storage facilities and port infrastructure, not only in the Black Sea itself but also on the Danube. The deliberate destruction of civilian infrastructure constitutes a violation of international humanitarian law.

We call on Russia to stop using food as a weapon, rejoin the Black Sea Grain Initiative and cease deliberate attacks on Ukrainian grain facilities and ports. The right to food is a human right, and hunger must never be used as a political tool. The EU will continue to support the tireless efforts of the United Nations and Türkiye towards the resumption of the Black Sea Grain Initiative. We remain open to exploring solutions with the United Nations that would contribute to the resumption of the grain deal. We will also continue to strengthen our EU-Ukraine solidarity lanes as alternative routes for Ukrainian agricultural exports. The EU increased its financial support to countries and people most in need, providing €18 billion to address food insecurity until 2024.

I conclude by reiterating the EU's unwavering support for Ukraine's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity, as well as its inherent right of self-defence against Russia's unprovoked, unjustified and illegal war of aggression. We demand that Russia immediately, completely and unconditionally withdraw all of its military forces, proxies and military equipment from the entire territory of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders.

Thanks to the tremendous courage and resilience of the Ukrainian people, we can look forward to celebrating many more Ukrainian Independence Days in the future.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Poland.

Mr. Szczerski (Poland): I would like to begin by expressing my gratitude to Under-Secretary-General Rosemary DiCarlo and to the other briefers for their very informative input.

We already heard from several of the speakers how timely today's meeting is. In line with that observation, let me point out three specific aspects justifying that point.

First and foremost, today's discussion is timely because it is being held precisely on the day that we celebrate the thirty-second anniversary of Ukraine's independence. Congratulations to the people and the Government of Ukraine. Poland is proud that we were the first country to recognize that fact, on 21 December 1991, the day after Ukrainians decided about it in a referendum.

The dramatic developments since the Russia's aggression against Ukraine in February 2022 have demonstrated that that independence needs to be defended in the most literal sense of the word, namely, on the battlefield. Ukrainians prove on a daily basis that they cherish their independence more than anything else, and that is why they accept the ultimate sacrifice to heroically protect it. At the same time, Russia keeps trying to undermine Ukraine's statehood and sovereignty by all means, including by the dissemination of disinformation and manipulation in the Chamber on many occasions, including today. Poland knows this experience very well. We regained our independence in 1918, only to be invaded by Soviet Russia within a mere two years. Repelling the Bolshevik invasion in 1920 became the very foundation of the then Polish State. We should all respect Ukraine's inalienable right to defend its sovereignty while faced with unjustified aggression.

While Poland reiterates its support for just and sustainable peace in Ukraine, we are convinced

that it needs to be based on the sovereign consent of the aggressed party. Therefore, we believe that the key principles and objectives set out in President Zelenskyy's peace formula should constitute a basis for ending the unlawful war of aggression waged by Russia against Ukraine. Poland welcomes and actively takes part in all developments concerning that initiative, which involves a growing number of interested parties, not only from Europe but also the Americas, Africa and Asia.

Secondly, today's discussion is very timely because only yesterday we commemorated the European Day of Remembrance for Victims of Stalinism and Nazism, often referred to as the Day of Remembrance for the victims of all totalitarian and authoritarian regimes. It is an especially bitter occasion for Poland and our region, as it is observed on the day in 1939 that Hitler and Stalin decided to define and impose the spheres of influence of Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia in Central and Eastern Europe by having their Foreign Ministers sign a secret treaty — the so-called Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact. That notorious agreement between the two totalitarian States paved the way for the joint aggression and occupation of Poland, the Baltic States, parts of Romania and today's Ukraine starting in September 1939. That act was a blatant violation of international law that resulted in the horrible experience of the Second World War. That is why today Poland is such a strong defender of the Charter of the United Nations and international law. We know that their breaches always bring violence and suffering. And that is also why we are actively engaged in all initiatives to hold Russia accountable for its offences in Ukraine. All perpetrators should be tried before appropriate courts and damage must be compensated for, which we view as a prerequisite for ensuring lasting peace in the future.

Poland is especially concerned about the fate of children in this armed conflict. That is why, along with Canada, we co-created in Kyiv a dedicated group of friends of children victims of this war.

Finally, today's discussion is timely and very much needed because of another event that took place yesterday. I am referring to the third summit of the Crimean Platform. Speaking to the participants at the summit, Polish President Andrzej Duda pointed out:

"Nobody should have any illusions that the occupation of Crimea is a regional problem. It is a global problem. Unless we solve it together, we

will de facto begin to agree to a new international security architecture and a new global order based on the law of force. Therefore, the de-occupation of Crimea and the restoration of Ukraine's full territorial integrity are necessary preconditions not just for the security of the Azov-Black Sea region, but also for the stability of the whole global security architecture".

Not only has occupied Crimea served as a springboard for Russian military attacks against Ukraine itself, but it has also become a source of global negative implications of the Russian aggression in the form of threats to food and maritime transport security in the Black Sea and beyond.

In conclusion, all three facts I referred to reinforce our appeal for just peace in Ukraine based on the United Nations Charter and a regional security architecture that respects the territorial integrity and sovereignty of all States.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Italy.

Mr. Greco (Italy): Italy aligns itself with the statement delivered by the observer of the European Union and would like to add some considerations in its national capacity.

I thank Under-Secretary-General DiCarlo for her insightful update, and the briefers for their worrisome reports on the deliberate disregard for the protection of civilians and the deportation of children by the Russian Federation.

The celebration of the Ukrainian Independence Day today marks 18 months since the beginning of Russia's full-scale, unprovoked, unjustifiable and illegal invasion of Ukraine. And today we stand together with the Ukrainian people, more united than ever, to reaffirm our unwavering commitment to our shared values based on the rules-based multilateral order as recognized in the Charter of the United Nations. We reaffirm our solidarity with the people of Ukraine, pay tribute to all those who sacrificed their lives for the independence of Ukraine and express our deepest sympathy and condolences to the families of the victims of the ongoing aggression.

On this day exactly 18 months ago, a permanent member of the Security Council unilaterally violated the basic principles and norms on which peaceful coexistence among States and this very Organization are founded. In that regard, I firmly recall the General Assembly's repeatedly resounding conclusions that the Russian Federation's aggression against Ukraine is a violation of the United Nations Charter that affects not only the people of Ukraine but also millions of people around the world, especially in the most vulnerable countries.

Russia's unjustified withdrawal from the Black Sea Grain Initiative is therefore unacceptable, as is the deliberate daily targeting by Russia of the export of Ukrainian grain. As it clearly emerged at the Food System Summit +2, held in Rome few weeks ago, global concerns about systemic food security spiked after the Russian decision. We call on Russia to swiftly reconsider the resumption of the Black Sea Grain Initiative.

Italy condemns, in the strongest possible way, Russia's continuous inhumane and brutal attacks targeting civilian infrastructure and cities across Ukraine. We recall that indiscriminate attacks and attacks on the civilian population or civilian objects constitute a war crime.

Italy also unequivocally condemns the forced deportation of Ukrainian children, as well as other grave violations against children committed by Russian forces in Ukraine. While joining the concerns expressed by the Secretary-General in his report on the children transferred to the Russian Federation from Ukraine, we underline that no amount of disinformation spread by the Russian Federation can deny the truth of the matter, or shield individuals from accountability for those crimes.

Italy fully supports the humanitarian actors who are working tirelessly to ensure that children in Ukraine are protected and that vital assistance is within their reach. Rapid, safe and unhindered access to humanitarian assistance for those in need in Ukraine must be guaranteed. As current Chair of the Mine Action Support Group, Italy is particularly proud of the broad engagement brought together in Kyiv with the United Nations to support the swift demining of the territory in order to prevent further humanitarian impact, especially on children, and to sustain Ukrainian agriculture.

There can be no peace without justice and no impunity for war crimes and other atrocities. Collectively, the United Nations will hold those responsible to account in accordance with international law, while also taking into consideration those who are facilitating Russia's illegal war.

With a view to a viable post-war peace settlement, Italy strongly supports President Zelenskyy's peace plan and welcomes the recent broad commitment displayed at the meeting of national security advisers from all regional constituencies held in Jeddah. Italy remains ready to support arrangements on sustained security and other commitments to help Ukraine defend itself, secure its free and democratic future and deter future Russian aggression, in line with its rights enshrined in the United Nations Charter.

Russia's war of aggression must end. Russia can end it immediately by ceasing its attacks against Ukraine and withdrawing its forces from the territory of Ukraine. Italy is committed to the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders. Support for Ukraine will be one of the key priorities of our Group of Seven presidency next year. And we are determined to continue doing so as long as necessary, with the aim of reaching a just, comprehensive and lasting peace.

Soon we will all together concentrate on the reconstruction of Ukraine, side by side, including by organizing the Ukraine Recovery Conference in Italy in 2025. We will lay the foundations for a prosperous, independent Ukraine within our common European family.

The meeting rose at 12.45 p.m.