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• (1105)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Ahmed Hussen (York South—Weston—Etobicoke, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order. Welcome to meeting number 15 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development.

[Translation]

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the Standing Orders. Members are attending in person in the room and remotely using the Zoom application.

[English]

Pursuant to Standing Order 106(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Tuesday, September 23, 2025, the committee is meeting to study Canada's response to Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine.

I would like to welcome our witnesses for the first hour.

From Save Ukraine, we have Mykola Kuleba, chief executive officer, joining us by video conference.

From the Yale School of Public Health humanitarian research lab, we have Caitlin Howarth, director of conflict analytics, appearing in person.

Up to five minutes will be given for opening remarks, after which we will proceed to rounds of questions from members of the committee.

I now invite you to make an opening statement. Welcome.

Mykola Kuleba (Chief Executive Officer, Save Ukraine): Thank you, Mr. Chairman and honourable members of the committee.

My name is Mykola Kuleba. I want to express my gratitude to the Canadian government for taking this issue seriously and for the support you have already provided us, including your visit to our Save Ukraine centre in Kyiv, Mr. Chairman, which gave many people a feeling of courage and solidarity.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak about one of the greatest child trafficking crimes in modern history: Russia's systematic abduction, indoctrination and militarization of Ukrainian children.

Before I begin, allow me to share a brief personal reflection. I've been in child protection for 26 years, but nothing could prepare any of us for a state-run machine designed to erase a generation. That is

why Save Ukraine is bringing Ukraine's children—stolen children—home and helping them heal.

As you know, Save Ukraine is the largest organization rescuing Ukrainian children from Russia and the occupation. To date, more than 1,000 children have been brought home after being separated from their families, trafficked and sent to military camps, with the threat of losing their identity. Everything that I want to describe in a moment was directly documented from children as they escaped from the occupied territories and after they received trauma counselling.

Russia has made a new Iron Curtain descend on the world, trapping more than a million Ukrainian children behind it. Inside this system, Moscow pursues two strategic goals.

The first is to militarize Ukrainian children, especially boys, and to train them in military camps to hate the west and fight on the Russian side against it and NATO countries. According to the children, occupied schools have been transformed into military training camps where combat is taught every single day. One boy recently described how Russian soldiers entered the classroom to conduct psychological tests: How do you feel about killing? Are you ready? Do you enjoy hitting? When one boy refused to answer, he was told that they would take him first and that he would serve on a submarine. This is unfair. Children should be studying and playing, not imagining what it means to take someone's life.

Across Russia, Belarus and the occupied regions, boys as young as eight are sent to so-called patriotic camps and cadet academies. There they assemble rifles, throw grenades, manage drones, dig trenches, practise storming buildings and march under the Russian flag. They are taught that NATO is the enemy and that war with its member states has to happen. One boy told us after his rescue that they were told their job was to prepare to fight against Ukraine first and then the west.

As for the second strategy, now I will talk about the girls. Russia's clear intent is to push Ukrainian girls into becoming mothers of soldiers. It's a demographic weapon meant to replace Russia's battlefield losses and to serve its long-term imperial strategy. Look at the materials in front of you: Let us pause for a moment so that you can absorb what is being told to children.

Girls and women in the occupied territories are forced to give birth as early as possible so that their children can be absorbed into the Russian system. It's designed to control girls' bodies and turn motherhood into a tool of war. Mothers are forced to take Russian citizenship. Refusing often brings inhumane and illegal consequences.

One 19-year-old mother told us that during labour, she was denied a C-section until she agreed to take Russian citizenship. After giving birth, she was forced to register her baby with a Russian birth certificate, under the threat that she would not be allowed to leave the hospital with her newborn. The aim was to trap them both inside Russia illegally and to block evacuation to any third country.

Through the documented stories of the children we rescued, we clearly see that this is not an isolated incident. This is a deliberate policy. The scale of this crime is staggering.

More than 19,000 children are officially confirmed as abducted. U.S. intelligence estimates the real number may in fact exceed 260,000. Over one million Ukrainian children remain trapped under Russian control with no legal path home. This is the largest state-run child trafficking and re-education program in Europe since the Second World War. It expands every month.

Today, no official international mechanism exists that is capable of rescuing these children. The underground railroad, which Canada provided safety for, is now operated by Save Ukraine and, unfortunately, remains the only way to extract kids. Our rescue missions have brought back over 1,000 children out of the approximately 1,800 who have found their way home so far.

These boys and girls were held in camps, Russian orphanages and foster families deep inside Russia or trapped behind occupation lines. Save Ukraine not only rescues them but provides comprehensive medical care, trauma-informed rehabilitation, education and reintegration into their families or foster communities.

Canada is the global leader on this issue, among 44 countries united in the Bring Kids Back initiative. Canada helped us track over 4,000 devices belonging to forcibly displaced children, compile 800 full profiles and directly facilitate pathways to rescue 200 of them.

I want to be absolutely clear. This is not only a Ukrainian issue. This is a global security issue.

Today, Russia spends more than \$1.5 billion on propaganda worldwide. According to the Russian State Duma's approved budget, \$92 million is allocated for patriotic upbringing. Nearly \$13 million goes to Yunarmiya, the largest military youth organization preparing children for the Russian army, and \$212 million goes to its Soviet pioneers.

• (1110)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Kuleba, I have to ask you to please conclude because we're over the time for the opening statement.

Mykola Kuleba: Thank you so much.

The Chair: Thank you very much to Mykola Kuleba, chief executive officer of Save Ukraine.

I was actually in Ukraine last year in my previous role. I saw first-hand the work of Save Ukraine and your team and some of the children you had rescued. Thank you for that.

I now invite Caitlin Howarth to make her opening statement.

Welcome.

Caitlin Howarth (Director of Conflict Analytics, Yale School of Public Health Humanitarian Research Lab): Mr. Chair, honourable members of the committee and, of course, my esteemed colleague from Ukraine, thank you so much for the opportunity to appear today.

My name is Caitlin Howarth, and I'm the director of conflict analytics at the Yale humanitarian research lab, a dedicated team that has become a pioneer in using open-source investigations and satellite imagery to monitor and document war crimes and grave violations of human rights.

We are proud to have supported domestic and international accountability efforts in both Ukraine and Sudan. Findings from our investigations are preserved to evidentiary standards and are produced with rigorous data-responsibility protocols.

I'm here to attest that, over the last three years, the Yale HRL has uncovered a large-scale, state-organized program of forced transfer, coerced adoption, militarization and ideological re-education of Ukraine's children. These programs are funded, facilitated and publicly endorsed by the Russian government, including at the highest level by President Vladimir Putin.

In our investigation published in December 2024, we identified 314 Ukrainian children taken to Russia and illegally listed for adoption on Russian government websites, where they were presented as though they were Russian orphans. At least 67 of those children have been naturalized as Russian citizens. At least 208 of them have been placed for adoption or guardianship.

The children were taken to at least 21 regions in Russia. In five of them, they were listed on adoption databases. We further assess—which I can tell you for the first time here—that Ukraine's children have been listed for adoption in at least 10 other regions in Russia that were not in our previous reporting. Unfortunately, the interruptions to our funding have constrained our ability to follow these critical leads.

In our investigation published in September 2025, we documented 210 facilities involved in the re-education and militarization of Ukraine's children. These facilities span 56 regions of Russia and occupied Ukraine, along with 13 facilities in Belarus. They include cadet schools, military bases, medical facilities, religious institutions, universities, hotels, family centres, and camps or sanatoria. Half of these facilities are directly run by the Russian government, and children are subjected to pro-Russia re-education in 61.9% of these facilities. Military training took place in at least 39 of them, and we believe that number is quite low.

Russia's alleged plans will not end with the children already within its grasp. Satellite imagery indicates that the continued construction of new facilities designed to receive additional groups of Ukraine's children is ongoing. If Russia is not stopped, more Ukrainian children are at risk of being taken and forced into this pipeline of indoctrination all the way to the front line in Russia's war to eradicate Ukraine's identity and sovereignty.

This program is not ad hoc. These actions are not incidental. What the Yale HRL finds is a systematic program of identity erasure and illegal transfer, acts that fall squarely within the definitions of war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Ukraine's efforts to rescue its children have been extraordinary. Ukraine has managed to bring back over 1,600 children to their families through complex diplomatic, intelligence, judicial and humanitarian operations. Through the Bring Kids Back UA initiative, which is a consortium of Ukrainian government and civil society partners, including Save Ukraine, the Yale humanitarian research lab and the continued support of many members in the room here today, it is indisputable that there can be no sustainable peace before all Ukraine's children are brought home.

Essential to this effort are the data needed for negotiations—the incontrovertible evidence of who these children are, where they have been taken from and who is responsible for their abduction. Russia is rapidly restricting access to this information. It's removing adoption notices and erasing digital traces that are critical for identifying where these children are. Ukraine needs investigative partners who can expertly navigate the shrinking information space without exposing sources or compromising sensitive, ongoing operations. Funds for these initiatives that support child identification and return efforts are essential.

The HRL has been able to provide the most comprehensive and verifiable child profiles to Ukrainian authorities, including names, birthdates, places of origin, where they were taken from and who is responsible. This is critical during negotiations to return children, as Russia frequently obfuscates and attempts to construct a veneer of plausible deniability. Our work removes that option.

We are now undertaking a major study to identify the total number of Ukrainian children abducted since the start of the full-scale invasion in February 2022, a figure that Russia has sought to deliberately manipulate and obscure. This work is essential for accountability, for sanctions enforcement and for peace negotiations in which the status of these children is the core condition.

• (1115)

Like many, we were hit by the global funding crisis for human rights and humanitarian organizations, and without support, we will cease these Ukraine operations within a matter of weeks. We fear what will happen when our lights go out, and we will no longer be able to provide the support, to the highest evidentiary standard, to the Government of Ukraine as one of its most effective and trusted non-governmental partners. We seek the support of our friends in Canada to call for our continued funding so that we can continue this essential mission.

Mr. Chair and honourable members, Russia is using Ukraine's children as part of its full-scale assault on Ukraine's territorial integrity, identity and freedom. These children are not just the future of Ukraine; they are at the forefront of Ukraine's path to victory and its enduring peace. There can be no just or sustainable peace in Ukraine until every child taken by Russia is identified, located and returned home.

Thank you so much.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll now go to the members, who will ask questions of the witnesses, and we'll start with MP Kramp-Neuman.

You have six minutes.

Shelby Kramp-Neuman (Hastings—Lennox and Addington—Tyendinaga, CPC): Thank you.

First of all, thank you, both of you, very much for your testimony today.

I have a number of questions for both of you, but perhaps I'll ask you, Mykola Kuleba, if you would like to continue your remarks. I think you were in the midst of a few statements right at the end. If you'd like to finish those, you're welcome to use this time—some of it.

Mykola Kuleba: Thank you so much. I really appreciate it.

My call to you is to please not stop. I ask you for this.

This is Russia's imperial strategy. This is visible in every single one of the rescued kids. If the world does not stop this now, thousands of these boys will become soldiers trained to fight the west, and thousands of girls will be forced into early pregnancies to supply the next wave of troops.

I ask for your help to continue bringing these children home. Bringing them home is not only an act of mercy but also a fight against a long-term hybrid threat aimed at every NATO country and investment in global security.

Thank you so much for your leadership, your courage and your humanity.

• (1120)

Shelby Kramp-Neuman: Thank you.

Mr. Kuleba, I'd like to ask you a question.

How is the organization Save Ukraine adapting its strategies as frontline conditions continue to change?

Mykola Kuleba: We started our rescue missions when the full-scale invasion happened, but we had experience from the first invasion, when I founded Save Ukraine.

After the liberation of the territories of several regions, we found that many of these dozens of thousands of these kids—had been kidnapped. We found the mothers, a lot of them, and they testified that their kids were taken to camps and to academies. We tried to find them. Our first step was to search for the children, and we found them in many Russian facilities.

More than three years ago, we started our rescue missions from occupied territories and inside Russia. It was possible at that time to bring back five or up to 10 children. We started, but then Russia banned any rescue. Even if you're a mother of a kid and you go inside Russia and tell them at the border that you want to take your kid back home to Ukraine, you will be immediately deported and banned from coming to Russia for the next 20 years.

That's why, when we're searching for these kids, we are building communication. We have an investigation group inside Ukraine, and we have mediators who build in communication and trust, and they ensure that children who've been kidnapped can come back home safely.

We cannot tell them a lot, but we have their friends and their relatives who can connect and tell them, “No, it's not Nazis in Ukraine who will kill you. It's not NATO soldiers who will kill you. You can come back and live safely in Ukraine.” Through this, we can ensure that children come back, and through our underground railroad, we are rescuing them.

I cannot give you details because many things are confidential, but we have children from Russian foster families, Russian institutions, Russian military academies and even the Russian army.

Shelby Kramp-Neuman: Thank you for that.

Caitlin, if I could pass the torch to you. First of all, thank you for all of your work. I heard a presentation from one of your counterparts, I believe, when I was at the PACE assembly several months ago, at the end of the summer, and he also spoke at great length on the concern for continued funding.

More specifically, I'm going to share that last week, the ambassador mentioned that one of the more difficult elements of kidnapping is what he termed brainwashing and attempting the Russification of children. What does this mean practically for the abducted children? What challenges is that presenting to these children if and when they're returned home?

Second, how are we measuring how many are gone and when they're coming home? Is there some sort of registry for these children?

Caitlin Howarth: To answer your second question first, unfortunately, no, there is not currently a registry for these children—not one that is centralized, not one that all humanitarian partners are able to contribute to and draw from in a consistent way and, importantly, not one that international law enforcement is able to contribute to and draw from.

This is essential. We need a resource that our global law enforcement will be able to access, because when children are essentially able to escape this system and move on, they may not be moving on entirely within Russia, but they also may not necessarily go back to Ukraine. If they are ever brought, coercively or not, to another country, where they end up and what happens to them need to be accessible. Their identity needs to be accessible to them. Given the extent of Russia's measures to comprehensively erase their identities and the ability of adoptive families to completely change their names, to change the origin of their birth entirely, it's crucial that this information be established and that this registry be created.

To answer your first question on the level of indoctrination and how insidious that is, I want to acknowledge that this is an area where my colleague Mykola has done such outstanding work, as has the team of psychologists and social workers that he works with.

With regard to the damage that is done, particularly to the children at the younger ages who have been swept into the system—we're talking about 1.6 million Ukrainian children who are under Russian occupation—the impact, the level of the impression that can be made is very strong, particularly when an opportunity is created when the child is traumatized.

That is the first thing that Russia creates here. It creates the opportunity for a trauma bond with the perpetrator of the crime. It then works to expand that by filling the space with the propaganda, with the indoctrination, saying, “Now you have a new home, a new mother, and that mother is Mother Russia.” This is what is so dangerous.

• (1125)

The Chair: Thank you.

Next, we have MP Anita Vandenberg.

You have six minutes.

Anita Vandenberg (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Thank you very much, both of you, for such incredibly compelling testimony.

I note that we heard similar testimony in the subcommittee on international human rights. I believe, Mr. Kuleba, that you also testified at that committee. We heard from some of the children and their parents, and it was absolutely heartbreaking. You used the word “insidious”; I do not think there is a strong enough word for weaponizing children against their own families and heritage.

I'd like to start with Mr. Kuleba.

We also heard that this isn't completely new. This is something that started even in 2014 in the illegally occupied regions. Those children, who now, of course, are even older, are actually being forced or coerced into being in the Russian military, fighting their own people.

Is there a precedent whereby we can see what the progression is? If so, what can we do in terms of trying to prevent more of this from happening?

I'll start with Mr. Kuleba, and then I'll go to you, Ms. Howarth.

Mykola Kuleba: Thank you.

You're right. The number of children who are conscripted is growing.

I will just give you one example. Before my trip, I talked with a soldier. He told me there was a battle, and many Russian soldiers were killed. They collected their documents and bodies. One document was for a 15-year-old boy in Russian military uniform. They're using child soldiers.

With huge indoctrination and brainwashing, they instill hatred toward NATO. In Ukrainian prisons for Russian-captured soldiers, every sixth Russian soldier who is captured is now from occupied territories. Many of them are young adults. If you ask them, "Who are you fighting?", they will answer, "NATO." They are 100% sure they are fighting against NATO soldiers.

When we're questioning our kids who've been rescued, they're telling us that it's not a school in occupied territories; it's a military school. They say, "Every day, Russian soldiers come in and train us." Can you imagine that? That's hundreds of thousands of children, and it's not only in occupied territories; in Russia, you can read Russian history books, and you will find that Canada, the west and the United States are the enemy.

It's as it was in the Soviet Union. I grew up in the Soviet Union. I read these books in the Soviet Union, but it's a new era. It's a huge indoctrination of children, and they are preparing these kids for the next stage of war with the west. I can imagine that there are millions of Russian children and Ukrainians, after reindoctrination, who manage drones, who produce drones, who handle weapons.

One 15-year-old girl, an orphan who had been forcibly sent to a Russian military camp, showed me how to make a booby trap. Kids are creating booby traps, handling weapons and managing drones. Soon they will grow up, and they could flow to western countries, having this hatred towards the west, managing drones and new technologies. Believe me, it will happen.

That's why we should act now to stop Russia, by deprogramming these kids. What we're doing first in our rehabilitation centre is deprogramming them, because many of them do not know that Ukraine exists. That's because they learned, in this new Russian school, that Ukraine does not exist anymore. I can tell you tons of stories about this.

• (1130)

Anita Vandenberg: Thank you.

It's every parent's and every person's worst nightmare.

I would also like to give it to Ms. Howarth to answer.

Caitlin Howarth: To me this is a twofold challenge. In addition to monitoring everything that's going on with the children, we are also looking at other levels of atrocities that are going on in the war.

The level of criminality is profound. Not only are children being taken hostage, indoctrinated, taught to fight against Ukraine and taught to fear at a superhuman level, but they are also being taught to inform on their own families, to give up information on neighbours, to tell Russian occupation authorities if a friend of theirs is joining a Ukrainian school at night online, which can have dramatic and life-altering consequences, because that child will be taken from their parents, and their parents may not necessarily be seen again if they're thrown in jail or face other consequences.

As for the cruelty here, "insidious" really isn't a good enough word for it, but this is also why we have the laws of armed conflict and the Geneva Conventions. The line stops at our children. They are not to be weaponized in war. That's why we are calling for the global community to say, "This is too much. We have to pull back."

Anita Vandenberg: Do I have time left, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: We are over the time. Thank you.

We will next go to MP Ziad Aboultaif. You have five minutes.

Oh, I'm sorry. It's Alexis. I'm sorry about that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, you have the floor for six minutes.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): I want to thank the witnesses for being here. We've met before, so it's good to see you again.

Mr. Kuleba, what are the most important barriers in terms of finding and returning Ukrainian children who have been deported to Russia?

[*English*]

Mykola Kuleba: We have a lot of barriers because, first of all, a Ukrainian relative of any kid will not be able to go to Russia. It's very hard. You cannot tell them that you want to take your kid back to the Ukrainian side. Even if you're going from the occupied territories, you have dozens of checkpoints, and Russian special services and Russian soldiers will always interrogate you.

We had one grandmother who tried to reach her granddaughter. After 14 hours of interrogation, she died the next day, and the child disappeared. We couldn't find that 13-year-old girl for two years.

Many children, after coming to the Russian system, disappear. It's very important for us to rescue these kids soon after we know something about them. This is because we have many kids who've been rescued from forcible conscription. We have a lot of kids who received draft notices for the Russian army at 16 or 17 years old, and we have kids who've been taken to Russian military camps or Russian military academies. We have kids whose parents were arrested, killed or disappeared. Not only do these kids have huge trauma, but these kids have also been entrapped in Russia, and they have no hope. That's why it's so important to find them.

You can find, in new Russian legislation, that everybody must be registered in the Russian system, not only to receive Russian citizenship but also to use the official Russian Internet. Through the official Internet, Russian special services control all your movements. They control all your photos and every call in your phone. That's why we are using technical tools, and we educate the ones who stay there on how to avoid this, how to safely communicate.

I can tell you many stories of how we're doing this, but maybe those would be better told privately.

• (1135)

[*Translation*]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: What type of international support, particularly from Canada, could help you overcome these significant barriers or, at least, speed up the process for returning these children?

[*English*]

Mykola Kuleba: As I mentioned before, we are so grateful for Canada's support because Canada, among 44 countries, was the first and only one that supported Save Ukraine's underground railroad to find and rescue—physically rescue—abducted children and children who've been militarized from Russia and occupied territories. We have this experience, and it has helped us to rescue 200 kids from that. More than 1,000 kids have been rescued by us, but it's a great opportunity.

In addition to Canada, we are working with the German government, which is helping us provide rehabilitation to these children; with the Dutch government, which provides us with support for rehabilitation and with day care for children with disabilities; and with the Belgian government, which provides support for a special program for children who experience sexual abuse, because out of those rescued kids, every age of girl has experienced sexual abuse. We really need more programs on the ground—trauma-healing programs—to bring them home and to restore their childhoods, to restore their lives, because it's trauma for all their lives.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Ms. Howarth, I believe that your lab has looked into over 210 institutions regarding the forced transfer of children. What is the most conclusive evidence regarding the involvement of Russian state actors in these crimes against humanity?

[*English*]

Caitlin Howarth: There is profound evidence at every level that Russia is not only involved but the primary architect of this entire system.

Some of the best evidence comes out of the Russian government's own mouth. We have the numerous statements, the articles of fact and the laws that they have passed to attempt to construct a legal fiction that all of this is not only in line with Russia's own domestic law but also part of a broader humanitarian objective on behalf of Ukraine's children. None of this is actually consistent with the international humanitarian and human rights laws to which Russia is bound through its own accession to the Geneva Convention.

The other things that we have documented include the use of the presidential personnel management fund, which is directly involved in the management and ownership of many of the assets of these facilities. It's also directly involved in the transportation of children to these facilities. We documented the transport of certain children to one of the camps quite profoundly in one of our earlier reports, but we've also found that the same presidential fleet has been used quite extensively, including the same plane.

We're continuing to track the assets. We're looking and continuing to dig into the money, and the more we see, the more we find that the Russian state is in absolutely every nook and cranny.

• (1140)

The Chair: Thank you. Thank you very much.

Mr. Aboultaif, you have five minutes.

Ziad Aboultaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC): Thanks, Chair, and thanks to the witnesses for appearing before committee this morning.

One of the objectives of the Russian war on Ukraine is the Ukrainian population, and in this case, it's specifically the children. We're not talking about just 10,000 or 20,000. We're talking about children since the 2014 occupation and after the invasion.

Canada sits as the co-chair of the international coalition for the return of Ukrainian children, and there is some kind of negotiation or discussion regarding a peace plan. We know that this is going on. I know that Mr. Kuleba touched on confidentiality when it comes to some of what's going on behind the scenes, but it will be, I think, beneficial for this committee to learn where the return of the children fits within the peace discussion that is going on.

I'll start with you, Ms. Howard, and then I would love for Mr. Kuleba to weigh in on the same question.

Caitlin Howarth: This is the question when it comes to the peace negotiations. The children are fundamentally the tip of the spear when it comes to establishing the human dimension of the war.

When it comes to the 28-point plan that was put forward in recent days, there's much to be said about the lack of humanity in this plan, which treats Ukraine's land as if it were completely devoid of human beings. We know that these are very real decisions that would impact the lives of well over a million children, to say nothing of their families. We know that this will impact Ukraine's future in a massive way.

The reality is that if Ukraine's children did not matter, Russia would not be so adamant about trying to take this issue off the table. They are constantly working to muddy the waters, to inject more disinformation into our facts and our figures and to try to disappear information. If this didn't matter, if accountability on this issue were not an issue for Mr. Putin, then frankly, we wouldn't be seeing this be so effective, but it is. Ukraine's children will take us out of this war.

Mykola Kuleba: You mentioned the impact of this war. As a children's ombudsman, I monitored situations with children for seven years after the first invasion. We lost, over 11 years, almost half the total population of children. We lost them. Now they live all over the globe, and more than a million children are being held hostage because of the occupation of territories. Now we have, for one child born, three people dying. It's a demographic crisis in Ukraine.

My thoughts about what should be included in peace negotiations are that a program should be implemented to identify children and families living in the temporary occupied territories and displaced to Russia, with the aim of reunification and repatriation.

Ukrainian officials should be provided with complete information identifying all Ukrainian children, citizens of Ukraine who were under 18 years of age from before 2020 to February 2022. Access should be provided to an independent hotline and to services on repatriation, humanitarian assistance and other types of assistance. If necessary, children would be given the opportunity to restore their citizenship and receive appropriate compensation for violated rights.

• (1145)

Ziad Aboultaif: Thank you.

Mr. Kuleba, you also mentioned that people like you cannot enter Russian territory to even ask or investigate, but the international coalition must have had an opportunity to do that.

Would you be able to brief us on the activities around that, and if there's any hope that this will get anywhere in understanding the destiny of these children and what's going on?

Mykola Kuleba: I don't want to be pessimistic, but I participated in the Minsk negotiations as a children's ombudsman, and we negotiated with Russia about children. The outcomes were zero. Nothing happened.

I don't believe that Russia will bring any kids, because every child can testify about war crimes—every child. That's why it's not in Putin's interest to give any kids back. It's because there are huge crimes—crimes against humanity and war crimes. That's why Russia is turning them into Russian children, into Russian soldiers, and the intention for their identity is clear. It's clear.

That's why only your pressure, only the pressure of countries like Canada and your allies, can support us, first of all, to receive appropriate information about all of them, and then to help them to reunify with their families and bring them back.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We next go to MP Bill Blair.

You have five minutes.

Hon. Bill Blair (Scarborough Southwest, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you to both the witnesses for your very compelling testimony and your expertise, which I think can be very helpful to us.

One thing I have somewhat struggled with as I've read the materials and listened to your testimony is getting a more precise understanding of the scope of the problem, recognizing that, as we define the number of children, perhaps there are different ways of defining different groups of children.

I'm going to turn to you, Ms. Howarth.

For example, we are aware that in June, Ukraine provided a list of 339 children unlawfully deported to Russia and sought their immediate and unconditional return. We've heard a wide range of numbers here, so perhaps you could assist us in better understanding how we determine the precise nature of the challenges we currently face.

Caitlin Howarth: This is the question. It is such a challenging one, and it is one that our team is undertaking right now in working to update our grasp of where these children are, how many there are and exactly which cohort they fall into.

There are roughly four that we track. There are those who have been sent to the camps and sanatoria. There are those who have been taken from the front line itself, captured in the course of battle. There are those who were taken from orphanages and institutions. Those make up the vast majority of the 315 that we documented in our previous report.

There are also those we believe have been taken through the filtration process, through which entire families were essentially given one option: They were told they had to get away from the front line and told to go east or go nowhere, so they went east.

Those children who may have been separated from their families through filtration are the ones we believe may make up such a huge number, ultimately, of the children taken into this system. We believe that Russia's own figure of 700,000 Ukrainian children in Russia is largely made up of those who have come through filtration at some point, families that have relocated.

Our biggest concern here is ultimately with the lack of transparency. It's the lack of any kind of process, any kind of insight into Russia itself, because they allow absolutely no international access. There is no way for families to provide any outreach to say that they're there, they're safe and they're in fact together, and to do this in a way that the international community can clearly point to and say that we're confident that this is free of coercion and that people are in fact safe and are living in a manner that they wish and have the freedom to move onward to another country, should they so choose.

Hon. Bill Blair: Thank you very much.

I have another question.

The context for this discussion is rapidly changing, as we are all aware. For example, in the 28-point peace proposal that the United States initially offered, which I know is now under considerable discussion, provision 24 talks about a humanitarian committee being established to resolve outstanding issues, which include the return and exchange of all remaining prisoners and bodies for all bases. It says specifically that civilian detainees and hostages will be returned, including children, and that a family reunification program will be implemented.

This is made much more complicated by the fact that certain territories that are now occupied by Russia that may be, through this peace process, ceded to Russia. Therefore, the status of children who were taken from those areas, depending on how the eventual process resolves, could also be changed fairly significantly.

I'm wondering how we thread this needle. What role would you see, first of all, for the important data and information to inform this discussion?

• (1150)

Caitlin Howarth: One thing we are looking for is to make sure that, as rapidly as possible, we are able to concretely state the number of people we believe Russia has fully ingested and the number of Ukrainian children we believe it has built a dedicated capacity to indoctrinate.

As we've said, it's not just a question of programs that Russia has set up for their own children; it's also the degree to which they have set up dedicated paths for the militarization, the indoctrination and, essentially, the ingestion of Ukraine's children to purposely separate them from their families. That's the scope that we're trying to get our arms around right now.

We initially estimated it at 35,000, but we believe that this number is low and soft, especially given the size and the capacity of the facilities that we're seeing being built and, frankly, their purpose, which is deeply concerning.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Next we go to MP Brunelle-Duceppe for two and a half minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you Mr. Chair.

Mr. Kuleba, we're also here to discuss tough issues, which can be hard to hear. You've already talked about this, but could you give us

more details on the types of psychological and physical trauma you observed among the children who were returned?

[*English*]

Mykola Kuleba: Thank you so much.

All the kids who have been brought back have huge trauma. First of all, many of them have lost their loved ones, parents or relatives. Some of them faced huge crimes when their friends were killed before their eyes or they were threatened by Russian soldiers at their schools. It's a huge trauma, especially for younger kids.

I can tell you one story about a six-year-old girl who saw Russian soldiers torture her parents before her eyes. She stopped speaking. When we rescued her, she couldn't speak. It was several months before our trauma therapy work enabled her to start speaking again.

For 100% of the kids who have been rescued, after our rehabilitation, the number one thing for them is safety. Everybody is talking about safety, because they were not safe in the occupied territories. We have kids who were sitting isolated in their homes for more than three years because their parents were really afraid that they'd be kidnapped.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you Mr. Kuleba.

Ms. Howarth, earlier you talked about the Geneva Conventions. Canada is a signatory to these conventions and has obligations in this respect.

To your knowledge, has the Government of Canada used the studies from your lab to guide its strategy on the issue of Ukrainian children?

[*English*]

Caitlin Howarth: Yes, to the best of our knowledge. The work we do is closely coordinated with the Office of the President. We make sure that everything we document is immediately transmitted to the Office of the Prosecutor General and shared with the Ministry of Justice, as well as with other accountability mechanisms. That's the full back end of our files, not just what is publicly reported.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: In your opinion, after the government has looked at your work, what should the government's obligations be regarding this situation?

• (1155)

[*English*]

The Chair: Give a quick response, please.

Caitlin Howarth: We know that some of these cases will go on for quite some time. There's ongoing support that Canada can provide for the accountability mechanisms.

As an American, I will be a little subtle here and just say that I think Canada is a friend of international justice and accountability and can do much in this arena to ensure that they are moved forward with the speed and thoroughness that the Ukrainian people deserve.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

MP Kronis, you have five minutes.

Tamara Kronis (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, CPC): Thank you so much, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank both witnesses off the top. You've both provided such informed and thoughtful testimony about such a sensitive and painful topic for so many of the people who are watching at home or are of Ukrainian descent in Canada.

One of the lenses through which I'm looking at this is from my position on the human rights subcommittee of this committee, which I think both of you have appeared at before on other occasions. When I was preparing for this meeting this morning, I reviewed the three press releases that I could find that were issued by the human rights subcommittee.

Ms. Howarth, a December 1, 2023, press release from the human rights subcommittee specifically calls for the creation of the centralized registry that we were speaking about earlier and that you referenced in your comments. As of that date, 386 children had been rescued, according to the briefing we had.

Almost two years later, in 2025, it appears that an additional 1,200 or so children have been rescued, but the registry doesn't exist yet. Could you elaborate on the barriers to the creation of that registry?

Caitlin Howarth: There are many of them.

Honestly, I think a lot of this is also based on the technical details of establishing a registry that works across so many different areas of law enforcement.

We've been pleased to work with Europol on sharing our back-end data. We believe that the Europol common system, working as an information clearing house for international law enforcement, is an excellent one, as it's already essentially an established mechanism with a set of tools and protocols and guidance that various law enforcement agencies can abide by and have agreed to.

That said, what is needed here is the guidance of those who understand how to set up global missing persons case files for track and trace for years to come, because that is exactly what we're looking for.

We've learned much, and there's actually quite a great deal that Canada can do in co-operation with our global partners in the south, including Argentina, Guatemala and Chile. They have seen generations of their children also disappeared under challenging regimes, but they have also had success with trace and DNA work over many generations.

There's much that we can do there.

Tamara Kronis: I believe there are many Ukrainian Canadians who are watching this committee's testimony from home. While we're waiting for that registry or that centralized set of tools, if those people in Canada have information, where can they send it?

Caitlin Howarth: That's a really great question.

Right now, we know that Ukraine's government has its own centralized database. I'm confident that Mykola also has people who

are happy to take tips, particularly for children they know are looking to get out of this situation right now. All of that is highly sensitive.

In the work that's being done by those two teams, I can't say enough about how important it is that people get that information into their hands right now.

Tamara Kronis: Thanks for referencing that.

As many Canadians know, Canada now has the largest Ukrainian diaspora outside Russia, and many families here have a connection to children who are missing or have been abducted. Canada co-chairs one of the international committees for the return of Ukrainian children. Here in Canada, we have a very deep connection to the conflict.

You spoke of funding reductions. We know that the Americans have cut USAID and other funding, but we've also had announcements in the last few weeks from the Liberal government. Prime Minister Carney is indicating a plan to cut \$2.7 billion of funding from foreign aid.

Is that going to affect your work and the work of your peer organizations? Is it going to hurt the effort to bring kids back?

• (1200)

Caitlin Howarth: It's hard for me to speak to the specific impact those cuts will have.

That said, right now we're at a really challenging point across the entire aid sector. We're seeing contractions across the board as the world prepares more broadly for conflict than it does for peace and sustainability. It is crucial to keep in mind that efforts like ours and efforts like those at Save Ukraine are fundamentally stabilization efforts.

If you work with a team like that at Yale humanitarian research lab, you're not just working on accountability for the sake of an eventual court case; you're working on, and investing in, a very real change in the tone and the tenor of the present. That can create a more stable future, as well as, frankly, a more stable next five minutes.

That's something that I think policy-makers would do well to keep in mind when they're looking to figure out not only how to avoid conflict but also how to potentially change the weather in the 10-day forecast.

Tamara Kronis: Thank you.

I think I'm out of time.

The Chair: Yes.

Next, we have Rob Oliphant to conclude this round.

Hon. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.): I have a couple of minutes.

Thank you to both witnesses for coming.

To those Canadians of Ukrainian background who are watching at home, let me reassure them that Canada's commitment to Ukraine militarily, from a defence perspective and from a perspective of international law, as well as the accountability that must continue and the humanitarian assistance on the abduction of children, will be foremost in the Canadian government's mind. That is an ongoing commitment we will continue to make.

I have two questions.

Canada continues to co-chair, with Ukraine, the coalition on the return of abducted children. I believe that about 40 to 45 countries have now signed this.

What does signing mean, and what can we expect our partners to actually do? How can Canada call for more than a signature—for activity? Do you have suggestions, either of you, for that?

Caitlin Howarth: That's an excellent question.

I think there's much Canada is already doing in its leadership role, not only as a convenor but also in marking the critical nature of its governmental relationship with this massive Ukrainian Canadian diaspora.

In this manner, I think that Canada actually illustrates a couple of things that are really important. One thing that I'm very mindful of these days, as an American, is how we treat the stranger, how we welcome them into our community and the mark that it makes, the difference it makes, even for the accountability work that actors like ICRUC are trying to do. It's also for the broader stabilization impact that can happen around the world.

That is a leadership message that can be shared and exemplified across that broader coalition: It's to think about what can happen and how other signatories can do more. They could perhaps think more about the kind of environment they want to offer at home and how they can perhaps be a little more Canadian in their approach.

I hope that provides some guidance.

Hon. Robert Oliphant: Thank you.

You're always welcome as an American.

Mr. Kuleba, do you want to add anything to that?

Mykola Kuleba: Yes, thank you.

As I mentioned, the Canadian government provided support, and we were able to find kids, rescue 200 of them and provide a trauma-healing program. There's a great chance that, in the future, we will rescue more kids if the Canadian government provides more support for us.

We are so grateful to the Ukrainian diaspora in Canada and the Canada-Ukraine Foundation, the Ukrainian diaspora organization, the Ukrainian Canadian Congress and all of these organizations that are providing support and trying to find any possible way to inform us, to donate and to help with the trauma-healing programs. That's why Canada is leading. I'm asking you to stay in the same position and do more, because through this, we can rescue more Ukrainian children and bring them home.

Thank you.

• (1205)

The Chair: Thank you to both witnesses for your appearance before the committee.

We will briefly suspend the meeting to prepare for the next panel of witnesses.

• (1205)

(Pause)

• (1210)

The Chair: Colleagues, I'd like to call the meeting to order.

I'd like to welcome the witnesses for the second hour. Representing the Ukrainian Canadian Congress are Ihor Michalchyshyn, chief executive officer and executive director, and Orest Zakydalsky, senior policy adviser. Welcome.

You have five minutes for an opening statement, Ihor.

Ihor Michalchyshyn (Chief Executive Officer and Executive Director, Ukrainian Canadian Congress): Thank you, Chair and distinguished members of this committee.

I'll be reading our statement, and Orest will help me with the questions and answers.

Almost 1,400 days ago, on February 24, 2022, Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine. For more than three years, Russia has been committing genocide, attempting to annihilate the Ukrainian state and destroy its people. The Ukrainian people have, for three years, courageously defended their own freedom and the freedom and peace of Europe.

We believe, and we know that you do too, that it is in Canada's national interest to ensure a strong, free, democratic Ukraine. Ukraine's victory is in Canada's interest and in the interest of the free world.

We are grateful for the economic, humanitarian and military support that Canada and our allies have provided, but so far, Ukraine has received only enough to survive, not to win. This must change, as the only path towards peace in Europe is Russian defeat. Whether or not a peace plan is adopted this week or next year, Russia will not abide by its terms. Therefore, a military defeat of Russia is the only option.

Russia has violated every single agreement and treaty it has entered into. In 1994, when Ukraine was pressured to give up its nuclear arsenal, Russia, the U.S. and the U.K. pledged to protect Ukrainian sovereignty. None of the signatories to the Budapest memorandum have lived up to its terms, and there was a failure to respond to the Russian invasion of Crimea and the Donbass.

The full-scale invasion of 2022 shocked the world. Even when the three-day special operation failed abysmally, there was reluctance to let Ukraine finish the job. Ukrainians do not ask for our boots on the ground; they ask for weapons to do the job themselves.

Now, since January 2025, the calculus has changed dramatically. The entire world is recalibrating as a result of our capricious neighbour to the south. Canada has been forced to fortify its economy and its defence sector. The recently passed budget reflects increased spending on defence, in line with our NATO commitments, and Canada can now prioritize joint ventures with Ukraine's world-class defence sector.

We should invest in partnerships to provide a win-win. We should invest in things that are good for Canada that can also be good for Ukraine. For example, the proposed production of Gripen fighter aircraft in Canada would create thousands of jobs and help produce the aircraft destined for Ukraine.

We therefore encourage Canada to focus on three policy pillars.

First, strengthen defence ties to increase the delivery of military assistance to Ukraine and increase joint production.

Second, strengthen commercial ties to increase support for Canadian private sector investment in Ukraine, including a domestic energy production increase to replace Russian energy.

Third, defend shared values to make Russia pay for its aggression by working with allies to seize the \$300 billion in frozen Russian assets and make them available to Ukraine.

We need to increase sanctions on Russia in the energy sector, which continues to fund their war machine; support the prosecution of war crimes and crimes against humanity; and endorse the Special Tribunal for the Crime of Aggression Against Ukraine established by the Council of Europe.

In taking these steps, the Canadian government will have the strong support of the public. Recent polling showed that 77% of Canadians support stronger sanctions on Russia, 70% support seizing Russian assets and 65% support increased military aid and training.

We stress the urgency in moving as quickly as possible to increase support to Ukraine and increase pressure on Russia. Just this week, people have been killed. There were 35 in Ternopil, and yesterday, there were four in Kharkiv and two in Dnipro. Overnight, seven were killed in Kyiv.

These Russian attacks on Ukrainian civilians occur every night. Unable to defeat Ukraine on the battlefield, Russia is terrorizing the Ukrainian civilian population to make towns and cities unlivable. Russia's depraved attacks include targeting innocent people, including children, in their homes. These are war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Finally, I'll say a short word about the so-called U.S. peace plan that was leaked, most likely by Russia, to the press last Thursday. Should the 28 points of this plan have been accepted, it would have amounted to a Ukrainian capitulation. The UCC agrees with the position of Canada and our allies, who united and underlined this point: "We are clear on the principle that borders must not be changed by force. We are also concerned by the proposed limitations on Ukraine's armed forces, which would leave Ukraine vulnerable to future attack."

It's our position, as the Ukrainian Canadian Congress, that Canada and our allies must increase pressure on Russia to force it to stop its invasion of Ukraine. We believe that putting pressure on Ukraine, as the U.S. administration has been doing, only emboldens Russia and makes peace less likely.

Appeasement will not lead to peace. Occupation is not peace. It appears that in the days since this so-called plan was published, negotiations have begun between the U.S. and Ukraine. As many of the components of the peace plan are within the purview of the EU and NATO, it is critical that they are also at the table.

We welcome your questions. Thank you.

• (1215)

The Chair: Thank you very much for your remarks.

We now open the floor to questions from colleagues, beginning with MP Ziad Aboultaif.

You have six minutes.

Ziad Aboultaif: Thanks for appearing before the committee, and welcome again.

The Ukrainian diaspora in Canada is very important and influential; it has been very active since the invasion, even since 2014 and the first invasion of Crimea.

What role is the community playing to help get those children released or at least to help address this issue properly for the Canadian public? It is very important to educate the Canadian public about what's going on. We're not talking about 5,000 or 10,000 children; we're probably talking about millions of children taken since 2014 in the occupation of Crimea and the new territories that have been taken by Russia.

The role of the community is important. I think it will be important in this study for the committee to be briefed on the role of the community. Thank you.

Ihor Michalchyshyn: Thank you, and we were pleased to see the witnesses you had preceding us.

I think the community has taken two important roles. The first is to publicize and promote and inform Canadians, all Canadians, of this issue, whether it's in the media or in our local communities, by working with other ethnocultural communities and Canadians at large to make sure that people understand. There are a number of films, and there are a number of public speakers.

The second thing is more direct support, as was mentioned by Mr. Kuleba. The Canada-Ukraine Foundation and other organizations are funded not only by our community members but also by Canadians at large, and they are supporting the direct efforts of these organizations and engaging in fundraising and efforts to make sure that they can increase their capacity.

Ziad Aboultaif: One of the biggest challenges related to the children is what Russia is doing to change the mindset, the belief, about parenthood. These kids will be told that this is their new mom, this is their dad, this is their new nationality, as we all know, and I'd like to re-emphasize the point that one of Russia's objectives in the war is the Ukrainian population.

We need to see how we're going to work around this. It's a big challenge. We know that Putin is a dictator, and that's what he's been doing. The biggest victims are Ukraine and the Ukrainian people, as we know and we speak about.

The role of the community is important in gathering information and knowing what we know and trying to report the names and numbers of these children. How do you describe the role of the community here?

I think one of the gaps that we see is in the numbers: Someone is talking about 1,800 and someone else is talking about 20,000, but we're talking about way more than that, and it takes lots of time and effort to be accurate on the data. Then at least we know what to fight for and what to negotiate for.

Again, how does the role of the community help to handle this whole challenge? I think that's something we'd like to know.

• (1220)

Orest Zakydalsky (Senior Policy Adviser, Ukrainian Canadian Congress): Well, as you say, it's an enormously difficult problem, partly because getting accurate data is difficult. I'm sure the representative of the Yale humanitarian lab spoke with you about that.

In terms of what we encourage here in our community, we encourage anyone who has any information that they can share to reach out to the RCMP, which has a program that collects evidence not only on Russian war crimes specifically against children, but also on Russian war crimes in general and crimes against humanity. People here who fled Ukraine certainly should be reaching out to the RCMP with any information they have.

Mr. Kuleba's organization, as Ihor mentioned, is supported by the Canada-Ukraine Foundation to do a lot of its work, but yes, this is an incredibly difficult issue to address, because these kids are abducted either into Russia or into the occupied territories, and it's very difficult to get accurate information and get these children out, as you heard earlier today.

We are thankful to Canada for leading this coalition, together with Ukraine. Certainly the resources of the government are greater than those of the community, and we're grateful to see the government take a lead on it.

Ziad Aboultaif: As Canada is the co-chair of the international coalition for the return of Ukrainian children, do you have any recommendation or advice for the Government of Canada on how to be more effective in this almost impossible mission?

Ihor Michalchyshyn: We were invited to the conference in Montreal last year. Certainly, it would be growing the international partnership to engage with more multinational partners who can engage with Russia and assist.

Of course, we would never be against devoting more resources, whether it's staff time, funding systems or funding NGOs, and ensuring that everything that Mr. Kuleba and his team are doing is fully funded. There should be no lack of resources in their work.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll go to MP James Maloney next.

You have six minutes.

James Maloney (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Thank you very much, Chair.

I want to thank both of you gentlemen, not only for being here today but for all the work you do, which I'm very familiar with. Without the two of you and your entire organization, the Canadian government would be much less capable of doing what it's able to do, so I just want to say thank you.

We're talking about children today, and I want to touch on that at the beginning.

We're talking about the removal of children from Ukraine. I had the chance to go to Kyiv last September, and while I was there, I was invited by some of my counterparts to visit the children's hospital in Okhmatdyt.

The removal of Ukrainian children is one thing, but the intentional attack on a children's hospital was not an act of war: It was an act of evil. I was aware of it, and I had read about and seen it on the news, but I wasn't fully prepared to see what I did that day.

This isn't a question; it's just a reminder to people who are watching today about the horrors and atrocities that are actually going on there. The only thing I can compare it to is walking up University Avenue, turning a corner and seeing the Hospital for Sick Children completely annihilated by bombs. It was a day I'll never forget.

I was going to talk to you about the peace plan, but given your opening remarks, I think I might stay away from that, because you don't have much faith in the outcome of that plan. I would suggest that your comments about Russia's intentions are accurate, given that one of the terms, I believe, was to reduce the size of Ukraine's military, so I will turn to the issue about seizing Russian assets.

This is an important issue. I've been involved in discussions with you in the past about this, and the Canadian government has taken steps so far. What specific step could Canada be taking now, in your opinion, to move this forward?

I'll use an example. I pass the Pearson airport at least twice a week, and I see that Russian aircraft on the tarmac. The Canadian government has started legal proceedings to move to the next stage of seizing that asset so that it can be converted to the benefit of Ukraine. I'd like your insight on that.

• (1225)

Orest Zakydalsky: From what we know, relatively small numbers of Russian assets are frozen in Canada, but what Canada can do is move to seize those, as both an example to the rest of the world and as legal test cases.

The effort to seize the assets held in Europe has never been attempted before—to my knowledge, anyway—on the scale that I think is coming. Over \$300 billion in assets is held in Euroclear and other European institutions.

As for the assets Canada has, for example, the government announced that they were going to go after Roman Abramovich's assets that are frozen in Canada. That seems to me to be a good place to start as a test case, and then that can be used by other jurisdictions to seize the assets that are in their jurisdictions. The plane is another example.

This is, in some sense, uncharted territory for Canada and our partners. In our view, the quicker we start doing it, the quicker we can see where we perhaps need legislative or legal changes on how to approach the seizure of what is really....

The vast majority of those assets are held in Euroclear in Belgium. I think Canada, as an example and a kind of test case for it, is a good place to start, largely because we know the political will is here to do it, which is not necessarily true of all of our European partners.

James Maloney: On the Euroclear piece, is there any time sensitivity to what needs to be done with respect to the assets involving Euroclear?

Orest Zakydalsky: The time sensitivity is that Ukraine needs support and needs it quickly.

The other issue is that a lot of these assets are frozen because of European sanctions that require unanimity to be rolled over and continued every six months. So far, the governments in Europe that are not friendly to Ukraine, such as Hungary and Slovakia, have gone along with continuing to seize those assets, but that's not a guarantee that they will do so in the future.

I think the urgency is related to both Ukraine's needs and any sort of political situation in Europe. Getting consensus among 27 countries is always going to be a problem.

James Maloney: Yes, there's obviously urgency on the part of Ukraine, but the other part was about the unanimous approach that's needed. Are you aware of any situation in which that unanimous approval might stop at any time in the near future?

Orest Zakydalsky: There's nothing specific, except the general political direction of a few of the European governments, and there's also the need to convince the Belgian government.

A lot of the resistance to the European Commission in doing this is coming from Belgium, where Euroclear is located, and as far as I can tell, they are worried about any liability that may come to the Belgian government itself.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We now go to MP Brunelle-Duceppe.

You have six minutes.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you Mr. Chair.

I want to thank the witnesses for being here.

Mr. Michalchyshyn, I don't want to spend too much time on this but I want to touch on some recent events that you discussed in your presentation.

The newspaper Le Journal de Montréal published an article on how Donald Trump says that he is very close to an agreement with Ukraine. I would like to know the position of the Ukrainian Canadian Congress regarding this news and how you feel about it. Then we'll move on to other topics.

• (1230)

[*English*]

Ihor Michalchyshyn: As we mentioned, there are day-by-day, hour-by-hour changes and negotiations in the various peace plans that are being discussed.

What we believe as a principle is that Ukraine must be at the table. There can be nothing about Ukraine without Ukraine. We believe that Canada and our partners have an important role to play in adhering to that principle to put pressure on the American administration as well.

We are concerned about where things have begun, but we are hopeful that with the intervention of the Ukrainian government and with the intervention of allies, the peace process will end up in a favourable condition for what Ukraine wants. We cannot accept the 28 points that were in the opening statement: loss of territory, loss of sovereignty, loss of control over the military. Those are not acceptable peace plans for any of us here.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Recently, the ambassador appeared before the committee as part of this study. He told us about agreements that have already been established, particularly between Ukraine and Denmark, regarding the production of drones in exchange for Ukrainian technology. The ambassador told us that Ukraine is looking for other similar partnerships.

To what extent can Canada play an important role in this type of agreement, where it would acquire new technological knowledge in exchange for production capacity? Is this feasible in your view? If you agree, do you think this is a pressing matter?

[*English*]

Ihor Michalchyshyn: It does, absolutely. We all, I think, are increasingly understanding that Ukraine is at the forefront of adapting battlefield technology in real time, whether it's AI-powered, mechanical, drone warfare or otherwise.

The Ukrainian capacity for innovation is something that we can adapt. I was at the Canadian security show this year, and the tech of the Ukrainian delegation was far ahead of where our domestic manufacturers are. Once peace comes for Ukraine, they will be able to show this technology to the world, especially to their allies.

There are examples to show how funding production in Ukraine is a better, more efficient, faster way to get them the things they need, rather than producing and shipping them and being stuck in processes. We believe that's a powerful example, but we also think that joint production between Canada and Ukraine—to take that technology in partnership and to embrace it here—is a good economic measure for us.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Earlier, we talked about the seizure of funds but not so much about sanctions. Do you think there have been sufficient sanctions implemented against Russian individuals? Do you want to see more? Do you think the current sanctions are working? If so, do you think this is an opportunity to implement more sanctions?

[*English*]

Orest Zakydalsky: Our consistent position has been that Canada and our partners need to significantly increase pressure on Russia. Our best way to do that is to increase economic sanctions in order to stop revenue flows to Russia.

There are areas in Canada that don't do a lot of business with Russia, but we have some exemptions on certain goods that we believe should be cancelled. I think the easiest way to do these things is to just stop trading with Russia entirely. Our consistent position has been that we want to see a full trade embargo with Russia. If Canada did that, we believe it would be an example for countries that still do a significant amount of business with Russia, most importantly in Europe.

Our request of the government is for a full trade embargo and for much stronger economic sanctions on Russia.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: If you ever feel that certain officials or individuals have flown under the radar in terms of sanctions, I humbly ask that you provide us with the names in a brief sent to the

committee if possible. You don't need to say the names of the individuals here but I would appreciate it if you could provide them in writing to the committee.

I want to quickly go back to the issue of children who have been kidnapped and deported to Russia. I know that the Government of Canada is working on this, but is it doing enough? Are there other opportunities for the government to help even more in this area, such as by providing psychological support to children who are returned? Could this be a great opportunity for the government to increase its efforts?

• (1235)

[*English*]

Ihor Michalchyshyn: I don't think there's any sense of somebody doing too much in this sphere.

As a community, we are supporting the organizations. We urge the government to support those organizations that do the direct work, the difficult work. We look forward to opportunities to work with parliamentarians to promote the issue to the Canadian public.

There's no limit. No amount of funding or support would be too much in this sphere, unfortunately, until every child is returned. There are no names we can give you today, but there are a lot of organizations working in this sphere, and you've just met some of them. They have capacity, interest in Ukraine, experience and a successful track record. We should continue to support them fully.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Thank you to both our witnesses for joining us today and for your testimony. We really appreciate it.

We will briefly suspend the meeting so that the folks here can be ready to proceed to an in camera session.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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