

JOINT COMMUNIQUÉ ON THE HUMAN DIMENSION

October 31, 2024
Montreal, Canada

We are committed to promoting international peace and security as well as upholding international law.

This Ministerial Conference brought together representatives from different parts of the world, including Foreign Ministers, other high-level national representatives, experts from various International Organizations, and representatives from civil society to advance the common vision articulated by the Joint Communiqué on a Peace Framework issued at the Summit on Peace in Ukraine in Switzerland, June 15-16, 2024, and share their experiences.

This Conference helped to identify key elements of a roadmap (the Montreal Pledge), guided by international human rights law and international humanitarian law, to seek the return of prisoners of war and unlawfully detained civilians and unlawfully deported or forcibly transferred children. It was organized with a view to develop practical and concrete solutions to support all stages of the return of unlawfully detained or deported persons, including access to such persons and the assessment of conditions of detention, mechanisms for returns, and effective reintegration and rehabilitation support.

We are united in defining a common set of principles that guide efforts going forward. We reaffirm our unwavering support to Ukraine's victory, based on respect for Ukraine's sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders, extending to its territorial waters, as well as for Ukraine's inherent right of self-defence. In this regard, we condemn any country that helps Russia amplify its war of aggression, which deteriorates the humanitarian situation and prolongs the suffering of civilians.

We reaffirm our commitment to the return of all prisoners of war, unlawfully detained civilians and unlawfully deported or forcibly transferred children.

We acknowledge the critical role of the human dimension, as expressed in the Joint Communiqué on a Peace Framework, in achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting peace.

In light of Russia's ongoing war of aggression against Ukraine and the grave human consequences resulting from it, we reaffirm our collective commitment to uphold international law, in particular international humanitarian law, and human rights. We underscore the urgent need for the protection of civilians, including those

who have been unlawfully detained, prisoners of war, and groups in vulnerable situations, including women and children.

While reinforcing a collective commitment to uphold international humanitarian law, particularly the Geneva Conventions, we emphasize the role of international and non-governmental organizations with neutral, impartial and independent mandates as effective intermediaries, as well as the valuable role of states engaging in diplomacy and providing assistance and supportive services to unlawfully detained Ukrainian citizens.

Following grave concerns over the treatment of Ukrainian prisoners of war and unlawfully detained civilians, highlighted *inter alia* by the United Nations Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine, the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Organizations for Security and Cooperation in Europe, we reaffirm our call on all Parties to ensure that prisoners of war and civilian internees are treated in full compliance with international humanitarian law. However, all detainees and unlawfully detained civilians must also be treated in compliance with international human rights law. We call on Russia to end the torture and ill-treatment of detainees.

We further call on Russia to ensure adequate conditions of detention including the provision of basic needs such as food, water, clothing, and medical care. We also call for providing timely and accurate information on detainees' whereabouts and legal status, and for granting international humanitarian organizations, like the International Committee of the Red Cross, access to such persons. Furthermore, we call for the cessation of the practice of holding individuals incommunicado and all persecutions on political grounds, while upholding the right to a fair trial for all detainees and for ceasing the unjust treatment of those not classified as prisoners of war under the Geneva Conventions.

We also demand the immediate release of civilians unlawfully detained by Russia due to their activities or beliefs expressed before the occupation or held without charges in places of detention, and call for the end of enforced disappearances.

We express grave concerns over the unlawful forcible transfer of Ukrainian children by Russia within the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine, as well as their unlawful deportation to Russia with credible allegations of support from Belarus and demand their immediate and unconditional return. We also call for full transparency regarding the location and status of these children; immediate disclosure of the whereabouts of Ukrainian children, including orphans deprived of parental care in Russia and their safe return to their families, legal guardians and communities; and an end to the unlawful adoption or any changes to the personal status of Ukrainian children.

We express our support for family reunification efforts and international cooperation to determine the best interests of each individual child and ensure the safe return and rehabilitation of all affected children within the framework of the «Bring Kids Back UA» initiative and International Coalition for the Return of Ukrainian Children.

We remain fully supportive of international efforts to hold to account those responsible for war crimes and other serious international crimes, including unlawful deportations, enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings and the ill-treatment of prisoners of war and civilians. We support efforts to cooperate with the International Criminal Court and other relevant bodies to prosecute individuals responsible for war crimes and other crimes of international concern in the context of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine.

To achieve the above-mentioned goals, we agree to cooperate on the following principles at the core of the Montreal Pledge, which aim to facilitate the return of prisoners of war, unlawfully detained civilians and unlawfully deported or forcibly transferred children.

The Montreal Pledge:

1. We commit to enhancing cooperation between Ukraine, partner states, and international organizations to consolidate efforts in addressing the grave issues mentioned above; to advocating for the enforcement of the Geneva Conventions and holding high-level discussions with trusted mediating states to provide assistance and supportive services to Ukrainians in Russia; to continuing to raise international awareness of these issues and implementing strategic communication campaigns to maintain global attention.

2. We support ongoing efforts to identify, in compliment to existing mechanisms under the Geneva Conventions, mediating states trusted by the parties to negotiate for the safe return of prisoners of war, Ukrainian civilians, including unlawfully deported and forcibly transferred children, and, and establish mechanisms for third-party countries trusted by the parties to provide assistance and supportive services to Ukrainian citizens in Russia.

3. We commit to supporting Ukraine in the reintegration of returning civilians and prisoners of war, ensuring that: special care and attention are given to the rehabilitation of children, with services provided in line with best international practices and the child's best interests; and that programs are developed to provide psychological and social support for all returnees.

4. Together, we also commit to raising international awareness of ill-treatment by Russia of Ukrainian prisoners of war, and the unlawful detention and ill-treatment by Russia of Ukrainian civilians, as well as the unlawful deportation and forcible transfer of Ukrainian children. We commit to implementing coordinated strategic communication campaigns to keep the global community engaged on these issues, as well cooperation in holding accountable, all those responsible for international crimes committed in and against Ukraine.

Finally, we appreciate Canada's leadership and hospitality and its initiative to co-host the Ministerial Conference on the Human Dimension, together with Norway and Ukraine, and thank them for bringing us together in the common goal of international peace and security.