

**Commission on Security & Cooperation in Europe:
U.S. Helsinki Commission**

“Rescuing Ukrainian Children and Women from Russia’s Aggression”

Committee Members Present:

**Representative Joe Wilson (R-SC), Chairman;
Representative Steve Cohen (D-TN), Ranking Member;
Representative Christopher Smith (R-NJ);
Representative Emanuel Cleaver (D-MO);
Representative Sheila Jackson Lee (D-TX);
Representative Victoria Spartz (R-IN);
Senator Richard Blumenthal (D-CT);
Representative Marc Veasey (D-TX)**

Witnesses:

**Beth Van Schaack, U.S. Ambassador at Large for Global Criminal Justice;
Cindy Dyer, U.S. Ambassador at Large to Monitor and Combat Trafficking
in Persons;
Andriy Kostin, Prosecutor General of Ukraine;
Mykola Kuleba, Director, Save Ukraine and Former Presidential
Commissioner for Human Rights;
James S. Gordon, M.D., The Center for Mind-Body Medicine;
Sebastian Stachowski, CEO of Lion Environmental, Former Volunteer
Coordinator for the Polish Red Cross Subcarpathian Region;
Ambassador Oksana Markarova, Ambassador of Ukraine to the United States**

**The Hearing Was Held From 10:08 a.m. To 12:57 p.m., Room 2200 Rayburn
House Office Building, Washington, D.C., Representative Joe Wilson (R-SC),
Chairman, Commission for Security and Cooperation in Europe, presiding**

Date: Wednesday, July 26, 2023

WILSON: (Sounds gavel.) Ladies and gentlemen, good morning. I am Joe Wilson. I'm very grateful to be serving as the chairman of the Helsinki Commission, the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe. And I'm just grateful for this hearing today. And, as always, it's bipartisan and it's just so inspiring that we work together, particularly on issues that are so crucial to the – every issue relative to promoting peace through strength, to avoiding conflict and war in the world.

With that, we have a hearing today on rescuing Ukrainian children and women from Putin's aggression. And with that, I'm going to make an opening statement and then we'll proceed to our witnesses. And then I'm very grateful that we have with us Congressman Marc Veasey from the Republic of Texas, and Congressman Chris Smith from the territory of New Jersey. So, we – so we're very fortunate. With this war – Putin criminal's illegal and murderous invasion of Ukraine has prompted the critical need for international action to both save Ukraine's children and to put in place measures for the future that will protect children as well as vulnerable refugees from wartime atrocities and from other threats, such as human trafficking.

In addition to the immediate dangers, the effects of the war on children will have lasting negative consequences that have been exacerbated, if not to be addressed. Many Ukrainian children have witnessed unimaginable violence or been forced to be in hiding for weeks at a time. The children of Ukraine, even those far from the frontlines, are fearful of a future shadowed by Russian attacks and denial of their language and national identity, and fear that Putin could kill them and everyone they love.

This constant stress takes a heavy toll on the youngest victims of war. Putin has been kidnapping Ukrainian children to Russia, or Russian occupied areas of Ukraine, and forcibly Russifying them in a strategy to erase their identity. This is a war crime and amounts to genocide under the 1948 Genocide Convention. Additionally, Ukrainian women and children who have fled the war are vulnerable to human trafficking. Sadly, there continues to be credible reports of traffickers targeting Ukrainian refugees, including online. Nevertheless, international responses, particularly along the border areas, have not been sufficient. And in fact, I have been to the Polish-Ukrainian border, and it was – it concerns me, the level of effort that is being made to identify unaccompanied children, in particular, but women too.

Experts have reported a lack of enforcement and border guards trained to identify and investigate human trafficking at major border crossings, as well as a lack of an effective vetting mechanism to ensure those working with vulnerable refugees are legitimate. Alarming, since February 2022, more than 500 children are confirmed to have been killed. That is at least one child per day since the beginning of the war murdered by war criminal Putin. In May, I traveled to Bucha and Ukraine, where I met Lilia Kolesnikova, a grandmother whose beloved son Oleksandr Ivanov was senselessly and just incredibly murdered in February '22 by Russian forces when their car came under fire as they were just trying to drive home.

Sadly, to begin this hearing we're playing a video of her story, a very courageous lady.

(A video presentation begins.)

LILIA KOLESNIKOVA: (Through interpreter.) Two weeks in the middle of January, my husband fell ill. We were in the stroke center and down in rehabilitation when the war started. On the 24th of February, we were in the rehabilitation center. The doctor came in the morning and said that we were being sent home because the war had started. The wounded would be taken to the center. I never thought that we would be driving on the road and just get shot, and that's it. I was not armed. I was not a threat to anyone in any way. We were driving home in a small car. And my grandson was coming to help me take care of grandpa because he was bedridden and could not walk.

We passed Irpin. There was the car on the other side of the road that had been shot. My grandson was sitting next to me and just looking at his phone. I was driving the car. At that moment, there were shots, smoke, and his phone fell out of his hands. When I turned around to look at him, I think I lost consciousness myself, because at some point I don't remember anything. When I regained consciousness and looked at him, he was trapped. I saw he was bleeding and his head was hanging down. When I saw that, I screamed – just screamed – and I couldn't do anything. I couldn't move.

I adjusted his head to make him more comfortable in the seat, and tried to get out of the car, but it couldn't. My right arm was hanging loose. I started the car with my left hand and drove on. We had just started moving and they started shooting at us again. These shots and explosions from the front, left, and right. Inside the car there was smoke. My child was sitting there and shuddered from every shot, like that. I thought that I was ready to die there with him, but for some reason God decided to leave me in this world. This year, he would have turned 20. He was 18 at the time of the attack.

He was so smart I cannot tell you. He graduated from high school with a gold medal. He enrolled in the university on his own and received a state scholarship. He even had the choice to study dentistry, but he decided to become a neurosurgeon to cure his mother. That was his childhood dream, to cure his mother. My daughter has muscular dystrophy. There is no cure for this illness. He wanted to create the cure. He could have become a great scientist. He could have cured many people in his life. My message is that we do not need such liberators.

He was shot dead for fun. I don't know why. It's very bad to curse, but I want them to cry as much as I cry, as my daughter cries, as we all cry here. I would like to wish them that they would know how it feels. My granddaughter turns six on Wednesday. This is how our children play now, when there is no air raid alert, she asked me: Grandma, may I build a bomb shelter to play? Our children have such games now. She's six years old. She is building a bomb shelter and playing. How is this possible? They have caused so much pain and suffering, and they didn't stop.

How many people were flooded when the Kakhovka Dam was blown up? Mariupol, we are not the only ones. So many young men, so many children died. What for? I don't understand what Putin wants. Does he not have enough territories, money, power? I don't understand what he wants. He must be punished, both him and his henchmen who are involved in these crimes.

(Music: “Summertime.”)

(Video presentation ends.)

WILSON: What an incredible lady. And I had the privilege and opportunity of meeting with her in Bucha at the beautiful Orthodox church there. And, for Ms. Kolesnikova, I really am so grateful that she’s making such a difference on behalf of Oleksandr, but on behalf of children really around the world.

And with that in mind, there will be bipartisan legislation. I’ll be working with Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee of Texas for a bill named in honor of Oleksandr. And it will be aimed at rescuing and protecting the children of Ukraine and their parents. Some of the provisions include: stepping up sanctions against all individuals responsible for the forced transfer and Russification of Ukrainian children and for human trafficking of Ukrainian children and refugees; supporting the establishment of a database registry of missing children, including voluntary provision of DNA to aid future family reunification; establishing a special representative for Ukrainian children and women within the U.S. State Department; increasing the U.S. support for programs to treat Ukrainian children for trauma that they have experienced due to war; strengthening programs to prevent and counter human trafficking of Ukrainian refugees, including through the establishment of an international mechanism to vet volunteers and other nongovernmental frontline responders working with refugees; supporting countries receiving refugees and providing secure areas for refugees with controlled access so that only appropriately vetted and credentialed individuals are provided access to them; and supporting the development and implementation of the national referral mechanisms, specific to children, that take a trauma-informed and age-appropriate approach to identification assistance to child victims of human trafficking.

We are really grateful today to have two extraordinary panels. First, we have with us Ambassador at Large for Global Criminal Justice Beth Van Schaack. She advises the secretary of state and other department leadership on issues related to the prevention and response to atrocity crimes, including war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide. She previously was the Leah Kaplan visiting professor in human rights at Stanford Law School, where she taught international criminal law, human rights, human trafficking, and a policy lab on legal and policy tools for preventing atrocities.

Additionally, we will virtually then hear from Ambassador at Large to Monitor and Traffic – Combat Trafficking in Persons Cindy Dyer, who leads the State Department’s Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons. Ambassador Dyer is a human rights activist and lawyer with three decades of experience working at the local, national, and international levels to prevent and respond to human trafficking, sexual assault, and domestic violence. And then following that, we – I’m very grateful that we have a second panel of extraordinary, courageous, valourous Ukrainians. And with this, we begin with Ambassador Van Schaack.

VAN SCHAACK: Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman, Co-chairman Cardin, Ranking Member, distinguished members of this Commission. Thank you so much for the opportunity to

appear before you today. It's an honor and a privilege to address you as the sixth U.S. Ambassador at Large for Global Criminal Justice. Thank you also for sharing that really heartbreaking, but also inspiring, video.

There's no question that Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine has had a devastating impact on Ukraine's children. Thousands of children have been forcibly displaced, hundreds of schools have been targeted and destroyed, innumerable precious life paths have been indelibly disrupted. Children have witnessed horrific events that will stay with them forever. Just last month, the U.N. secretary-general issued his annual report on children in armed conflict. The report verified that in 2022 Russian Armed Forces and affiliated groups were responsible for the murder and maiming of hundreds of Ukrainian children, rape and sexual violence against girls, hundreds of attacks on schools and hospitals, the abduction of children, the military use of schools and hospitals, and the denial of humanitarian access.

The U.S. government has been equally mindful of the impact of this terrible war of aggression on Ukraine's children. In February, Vice President Kamala Harris announced at the Munich Security Conference that Russian forces have pursued a widespread and systematic attack against Ukrainian civilians amounting to crimes against humanity, including gruesome acts of murder, torture, rape, and abduction. This determination followed extensive analysis by my office and the department of information indicating that Russia's forces and Russian political officials have committed the deportation of hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian civilians, including many unaccompanied children. And the figure shown in the film, 19,000, seems to be the operating number.

When it comes to the abduction and deportation of thousands of children, in particular President Joe Biden noted that Russia was stealing Ukrainian children in an attempt to steal Ukraine's future. A report issued by the U.S.-funded Conflict Observatory details Russia's vast network of sites and highly organized processes to relocate thousands of Ukraine's children's to areas under Russian government control, both within Ukraine and within Russia, and to subject them to political re-education and Russification. We know from all of this research that officials at all levels of the Russian government are involved, from President Putin himself on down through very local level officials who are facilitating these movements. And we know that this network of children's facilities now stretches from Russian-occupied Crimea to Russia's far east.

Following applications by the Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, the ICC has now issued two arrest warrants for President Vladimir Putin himself and for Maria Lvova-Belova, who's his children's rights commissioner. The arrest warrants charge war crimes committed against Ukrainian children. As mentioned, this was a grave breach of the Geneva Conventions. My office and the rest of the administration is working hard to address these crimes against Ukraine's children. We are funding now in Ukraine, the Atrocity Crimes Advisory Group. This is an organization that is funded by the UK, the United States, and the European Union to provide coordinated support to Ukrainians' Office of the Prosecutor General in all of their accountability efforts in Ukrainian courts.

The ACA brings together multinational and multidisciplinary experts, war crimes prosecutors, forensic specialists, investigators, and others drawn from the world's international

war crimes tribunals and national war crimes units. These experts are aiding in the collection and preservation of evidence, the investigation of international crimes, crime scene and forensic analysis, due process protections, and the imperative of conducting trauma-informed and victim-centered investigations to ensure that the rights, wellbeing, and dignity of survivors are at the forefront of all of their efforts. The prosecution of crimes against children is a very high priority of the Office of the Prosecutor General and, by extension, of the Atrocity Crimes Advisory Group. We have funded eight international experts who have worked on crimes involving children.

We are providing specialized training to be able to address the unique needs and vulnerabilities of children as victims and witnesses. And we're providing substantial assistance and expertise as the Office of the Prosecutor General creates and stands up a comprehensive victim and witness support capability. In addition, other elements of the department are working with our partners and with members of civil society to reverse and to prevent Russian government's forcible deportation of Ukrainian children to Russia, to Belarus, and to parts of Russian-occupied Ukraine. And we are deploying sanctions against individuals who can be identified who are part of this vast system of abducting children.

But we know, of course, that we all must do more. This new legislation, I look forward to seeing the text of this. We're also very grateful to have worked with members of Congress on advancing a legislative proposal to enact a crimes against humanity statute within the United States federal penal code. This would enable the prosecution of a whole range of crimes, including crimes committed against children. We hope to see continued progress on this initiative which would give U.S. prosecutors an important new tool to ensure that perpetrators do not find safe haven here in the United States or escape accountability for crimes against humanity.

Members of this Commission, we understand that there is significant work ahead of us in responding to Russia's unprovoked war of aggression within Ukraine. And this will require a long and durable commitment of all of us, including members of Congress and the administration. We are committed to this work. We thank the Commission for shedding a light on this important issue, and to highlighting this horrific element of Russia's war of aggression, and the work that we're trying to do to address it. I thank you, and I look forward to the conversation. Thank you.

WILSON: Thank you very much, Ambassador.

And as we proceed, I'm really grateful. The clearest example of bipartisanship, we now will move for an opening statement by our ranking member, Steve Cohen.

COHEN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the witnesses coming forward and appreciate your holding this very important hearing on this issue that's so close to so many people in Congress. There is bipartisan agreement on much of what the American support has been for Ukraine, and it will hopefully continue. And this is an issue that has extreme support, is children. I want to thank our witnesses and thank you for your efforts on behalf of the most vulnerable victims of Russia's genocidal war, the displaced children and women of Ukraine.

Russia's kidnapped, as you said, over – up to 20,000 children from Ukraine. The bottom line is this is all a genocide. It's a crime against humanity, but it's also a genocide. And Mr. Wilson and I both together have a bill to have this declared a genocide, and it has some resistance, I think, from the State Department. And why, I'm not sure, because it's pretty clear that that's what it is. And if there are certain ramifications from it, so be it. Putin has made it clear that he wants these children – he's not going to have as many children in Russia because he's sending most of the men that might be fathers off to be killed and setting them up as fodder. So to replace them, instead of being fathers, they're being foddors. And they're sending them off to – importing these children to replenish the Russian stock, and to take them away from Ukraine. It's something out of an Orwellian novel. It's hard to conjure up that it's happening, but it indeed it is.

So, I appreciate what you're doing on having this – naming it acts against humanity, which it is. And whatever we can do in the international courts is important, because this needs – there needs to be justice for what's happening. To separate children from their parents is atrocious. And Putin doesn't care. And the whole idea that he claims that Ukraine doesn't exist, I think there's arguments Ukraine had existence before – certainly before Putin did, but before Russia came around. There was – a lot of argument to that.

Anyway, regardless of that, I appreciate your testimony. The chairman and I will work together on the legislation concerning genocide, and anything other acts that we can do to help. Thank you. I yield back the balance of my time.

WILSON: And indeed, Ranking Member Cohen is a good historian. I actually – many people need to know that Kyiv is 600 years older than Moscow. And so it should be recognized that actually both exist, right? And so, for war criminal Putin to deny the existence of Ukraine, it's just inconceivable. But he does.

And people who understand history know that Ukraine exists and the Russian Federation exists. And one of the experts on that is Congressman Chris Smith. And I'm really grateful he has been a leader in Congress for many years, before people even heard about it, concerning human trafficking. Congressman Chris Smith of New Jersey.

SMITH: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. And I thank you and the ranking member for your leadership on this very important issue. Your testimony was outstanding. I'm looking forward to Ambassador Dyer's testimony in a moment. I'll be very brief.

You know, the cruelty that's been unleashed by Vladimir Putin on the people of Ukraine is unspeakable. It is – constitutes, in a myriad of areas, crimes against humanity. And in the case of the abduction of children, this is a genocide. You know, you look at the Genocide Convention, the five articles that are embedded in Article Two, or the five points. Every one of them in large measure, especially the forcibly transferring children of the group to another group, are all violated. This is a genocide happening in real time before us, and we need to do more. Congress, executive branch, the NATO countries, the world – everyone who cares about freedom and cares about children need to be speaking out.

I hope that – and maybe during the questions, we’ll get to some of the sanctions that you mentioned. How many people have been sanctioned, who are they? You know, I was the House sponsor, the Magnitsky Act – the Global Magnitsky Act. It works, but it has to be aggressively implemented. I remember meeting in – I was head of the of the Commission for a long time. And we had a bilateral with the Russians at the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly in Berlin. Several of the people on the Russian delegation were sanctioned by the Magnitsky Act. And we had a very – Steve Cohen remembers it well, because he spoke out very forcibly as well.

Here are the people sitting right in front of us who committed atrocities. And they ought to be at The Hague for crimes against humanity and a whole host of others. The ICC, thankfully, has indicted two, including Putin. There needs to be many more indictments. And I want to thank the Ukrainian government and the ambassador, who is sitting right behind you, but also your chief prosecutor, who is doing an outstanding job, will speak shortly, in making sure the international community does not lag in demanding accountability. And we all need to do more. These atrocities against children need to be punished, and they need to be punished now. So I thank you so much. And I thank you, Chair, for your leadership.

WILSON: Well, indeed, you can tell the person who’s made such a difference identifying human trafficking over the years and making a difference.

And we also have been joined by Congressman Emanuel Cleaver from Missouri, and a longtime friend.

But again, another champion against human trafficking and we will, though, now resume with our virtual presentation by Ambassador at Large Cindy Dyer.

DYER: I apologize if you just called on me, Mr. Chairman. I was just texting in the chat that I cannot hear what Mr. Wilson is saying. (Laughs.) So apologies for the delay in my response.

Chairman Wilson, Co-chairman Cardin, and distinguished members of the Commission, thank you for your steadfast leadership on advancing Security and Cooperation in Europe, a mission just as vital today as it was more than 47 years ago when the Commission was established. And for the opportunity for me to speak to you about Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine and the attendant concerns we all share about the risks of human trafficking for those affected by the war.

I wish I could deliver encouraging news about the situation, but as you know Russia’s war continues to rage on and inflict horrors on the Ukrainian people, with over 6 million refugees having fled Ukraine and another 5.3 million internally displaced. Many of whom are highly vulnerable to trafficking. We are alarmed about Ukrainians, including thousands of children, who have been forcibly deported to Russia and Russian-occupied territories, where there are few if any protections.

The United Nations estimates as many as 90 percent of those who have fled the country are women and children, and that more than half of Ukraine's children have been displaced. These refugee and displaced populations are especially vulnerable to trafficking. Members of ethnic or religious minority communities, third country nationals, persons with disabilities, LGBTQI+ persons, the Roma community, and others facing discrimination are also at particularly high risk for trafficking and exploitation, as they are amid any conflict.

Despite these vulnerabilities and the presence of many warning signs of human trafficking, governments and organizations have identified relatively few confirmed cases of human trafficking among refugees from Ukraine to date. We know, however, that during conflict gender-based violence and forms of human trafficking increase, and there is often underreporting. We lack full visibility into what is happening in Russia-occupied territories, but credible reports of trafficking are greatly concerning.

We noted some reported examples of abuses including trafficking, in the 2023 Trafficking in Persons Report, the TIP Report. And we are gravely concerned about forced deportations of Ukrainians, including of Ukrainian children, to occupied territories or Russia. The 2023 TIP report highlighted reports of Russia's officials forcing, deceiving, or coercing foreign national adults to fight in its war of aggression against Ukraine, and noted the Russian government's operation of a sprawling filtration operation and detention center that includes the use of forced labor.

According to multiple media reports, these filtration camps in Russia-occupied areas of Ukraine housed thousands of Ukrainian civilians, including children, who were deprived of their documents and forced to take Russian Federation passports. The TIP report also highlighted media reports of Russia's forces using children as human shields and conscripting children for service in Russia's armed forces. We remain vigilant and urge our partners to do so as well. We have engaged government officials in Ukraine and throughout Europe, before and following Russia's full-scale invasion last year, to take robust prevention and protection measures to head off a human trafficking crisis in the midst of the humanitarian crisis caused by Russia's war. This engagement has continued robustly more than one year after the full-scale invasion.

The Commission and members of Congress have played an important role in keeping this issue on the radar through hearings like this one, visits to Ukraine and frontline countries, and your advocacy for vigilance in responding to trafficking risks in and around Ukraine. Of course, our partners and allies in Europe and elsewhere have also made important contributions to anti-trafficking efforts. One key prevention effort was the European Union's swift activation of the temporary protection directive to provide Ukrainians and some third country nationals fleeing the war in Ukraine immediate protection, including legal residency, access to the labor, market, and housing, medical assistance, and access to education for children.

As the 2023 TIP report details in its narratives for Poland, Romania, Germany, and others, governments are stepping up their anti-trafficking efforts as refugees from Ukraine seek shelter in their countries. It has been nearly a year and a half since Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Millions of Ukrainian civilians continue to suffer, and many, especially women and children, face the very real risk of trafficking. But U.S. leadership, in partnership

with the government of Ukraine and concerted efforts by other governments, international organizations, civil society groups, and ordinary people from around the world, has been instrumental in ensuring that this threat – in taking it head on.

Fortunately, we have not yet seen a surge in trafficking that many experts predicted. The longer Russia's war continues, the more trafficking cases are likely to emerge. And as time moves on, we are likely to learn more about trafficking that may have already occurred. Our steadfast perseverance and proactive partnership are required to support Ukraine and its people in the months and years ahead. Thank you so much for accommodating my virtual participation. I look forward to your questions.

WILSON: To Ambassador Dyer, I appreciate that you brought up about the issue of the provisions of human trafficking that were not in place to address the issues as millions of people fled – particularly women and children – fled Ukraine. And I hope that every effort is being made to upgrade and address the issues so that – so that the women and children are being better welcomed and provided for. But what can be done for persons who've already crossed the border to try to identify and try to rescue them from the victimization of human trafficking?

DYER: Thank you, sir. I think that you're exactly correct. Our EU allies have definitely done a lot in the months that have followed the initiation of that full-scale invasion. Initially, they certainly open to their hearts and homes, and I think that the establishment of the temporary protection directive is probably the most important and critical thing that has occurred because it allows those women and children to have legal status in the countries – most of the countries that they're traveling to. It allows them to work legally. It allows them to access services such as medical care and education. So that is significantly reducing those individuals' vulnerability to trafficking.

Now certainly we remain concerned, because even with the legal opportunity to work, they may not be able to work. And so we need to be very, very vigilant. We have been impressed with some of the nascent efforts – and I was excited to hear you mentioning a furthering of these – about the requiring registration of volunteers. Obviously, that was not in place in the beginning, but I think that this is something that our allies are working on now, seeking to really increase the registration and vetting of these volunteers.

We also have been supportive of countries who have removed many of their border guards and police from other parts of the country to areas close to the border, or to areas where those transit stations and welcome centers are locating. And we are also wanting to see – we are glad to see some of this, but we certainly want to see more, monitoring of online platforms. We know that traffickers go where the vulnerable are. So they will go physically to where vulnerable people are, such as homeless shelters, job fairs. That's where vulnerable people go, so that is where traffickers go.

But also vulnerable people go online. They look for things online, such as housing and jobs. And so we encourage our allies to really monitor where – the online searches as well, because that is where traffickers go. That's where vulnerable people go and that's where

traffickers go. So we're hopeful that we can improve these coordinations in the coming months. Thank you so much.

WILSON: Thank you very much. And indeed, it's going to be bipartisan with Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee. The legislation is proceeding. And as persons at the State Department look at this legislation, we'd be happy to have any gaps filled or any improvement.

And additionally now, I'm just so grateful, Ambassador Van Schaack. Another issue. As part of the Commission's recent delegation visit with Congressman Cohen and myself, and Congresswoman Victoria Spartz, what an honor we had with Ambassador Michael Carpenter, who's here, the U.S. Ambassador to the OSCE in Vienna – what an honor we had – and also Dr. Steven Schrage, to meet with Volodymyr Zelensky in Kyiv.

But on the way there we did drop by in Germany to visit the site of the historic Nazi war crimes, Courtroom 600 in Nuremberg. What a reminder of what civilized world can do to bring justice where the Nazi war criminals were tried, later executed. And the precedent was also set with the four allied countries, U.S., U.K., France, and Soviet Union, with the U.S., of being able to try war criminals in absentia. With that in mind, as Putin continues to shield many involved in current war crimes of justice, what are the lessons we can learn from Nuremberg and in-absentia trials? And what historic actions against the Nazis that we now need to be providing against the Putinist?

VAN SCHAACK: Thank you very much. I've been to Courtroom 600 several times. And actually, I think may have testified before this Committee once from that courtroom. Is that right, like a year ago? Anyway, I testified before some committee from the – I was there for an event. And I believe very much in the power of place. And I understand you may be considering a field visit again, and I think that would be a wonderful idea. It's an incredible place. I have often said that this is a new Nuremberg moment, from the sense of the international community is united around the imperative of justice.

And the United States is pursuing multiple lines of effort, different pathways to justice. Cases in Ukrainian national courts. That is going to be the front line of justice. And I know you'll be hearing from the prosecutor general soon about his efforts there. And we're trying to support him through this Atrocity Crimes Advisory Group. Cases that might happen in European courts under principles of extraterritorial jurisdiction, when perpetrators travel, which we know they will do. Cases before the International Criminal Court, as mentioned. President Biden said that those indictments were justified, and I've heard that echoed here on the panel as well.

And then, I hope also cases in our own court at some point. In-absentia trials are possible in the Ukrainian system, and I know that some of those cases are moving forward even though they don't have the presence of the accused. But they do have the presence of some accused, and those cases are moving forward as well. What's important now is to document abuses, prepare cases, coordinate our prosecutors and investigators so that when we have jurisdiction over particular perpetrators we can move quickly and press charges against those individuals wherever jurisdiction exists.

WILSON: Well, I just want to thank you for recognizing, indeed, the Commission wants to work with you. And we have a phenomenal individual, Janice Helwig, who is going to be coordinating. But and it's just – it is just heartbreaking to see the parallels of Nazism and Putinism. And it began early, when Putin claimed that they had – he had the right to reestablish the international boundaries to where peoples spoke Russian. Many of us who appreciate history, sadly, that sounded like the Sudetenland of Hitler to proceed into Czechoslovakia, at that time. Over and over again, it's just so sad. And I'm just so hopeful one day for freedom and liberty for the people of Russia, to overcome, as other countries have.

With this, we will conclude the panel. And I want to thank you. And then we have a very distinguished second panel.

COHEN: Can I have a question?

WILSON: Oh, excuse me. Pardon me. I can't believe I left out Steve Cohen.

COHEN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just want to thank you for your work. We had Cardinal Zuppi come to visit us last week. And it was very interesting. He said that he met with some folks at the Kremlin, but he met with – the lady's name? Belt –

VAN SCHAACK: Maria Lvova-Beleva.

COHEN: Yeah. And she's their representative. That would kind of like be putting a – yeah.

VAN SCHAACK: (Laughs.) For children's rights?

COHEN: A mass killer in charge of looking out for homicide. So, have you met with Cardinals Zuppi? Are you familiar with his efforts? Well, I think the pope has assigned him as the Vatican's representative. And he's a very diplomatic man. He's very learned. He's traveled everywhere in the last couple of weeks trying to do what he can do – trying to do it. But I think he has an immense task before him. And dealing with Rasputin the second. So it's going to be difficult. Do you have any hope that that Putin would ever surrender his idea of keeping these children? His position is he's rescued them from being in a war zone, and not taken them.

VAN SCHAACK: That claim and defense obviously rings incredibly hollow, not only because the reason those children were endangered is because of his brutal war of aggression in the first place, but – although the laws of war do allow and require, in fact, sometimes civilians to be evacuated, nothing about the way in which this has been done with respect to Ukrainian civilians or children falls within the required mechanisms. So for example, these children have been taken very far from the frontlines. They're out of touch from their families. They're not allowed to be in touch with them. Their phones have been taken. They've been subjected to reeducation, militarization. We heard talk of child soldiers, human shields. So nothing about this –

VAN SCHAACK: You've heard of that? So these children that have been abducted, is there any proof that they've been used as human shields or soldiers?

VAN SCHAACK: This was in our TIP report this year. And we've heard we've seen that also from civil society actors as well. So there is – the children are definitely being mistreated and subjected to militarization.

COHEN: Thank you for your work, and I yield back.

WILSON: We'll now proceed to Congressman Chris Smith.

SMITH: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Thank you both for your testimonies and for your leadership. I deeply appreciate it.

You know, I chaired a hearing just a few weeks ago, several weeks ago, with Ambassador Dyer as our expert witness, obviously. And I did offer and sponsor the Trafficking Victims Protection Act and four other anti-human trafficking laws since. So I'm very focused on it. And I'm always worried that we are missing something that might be right before our eyes. And I know that the ambassador today says that they've identified relatively few confirmed cases of human trafficking. But she does point out there could be underreporting. And I want to raise that, you know, when our own situation on our southern border 85,000 people – and I raised this at our hearing with Ambassador Dyer – have been lost. We're not at war and 85,000 kids, unaccompanied minors, have been lost as they came across our border that originally we knew about and had provided help for once they made that crossing.

I'm wondering if enough resources, both police and humanitarian, are deployed along the borders. I do want to do a shout out to the Polish. I met with the delegation again yesterday. And thanked President Duda. I mean, not only are they not refugee camps, as we always know of them, in Poland, people are welcoming these wonderful Ukrainian families, mostly women and children, into their homes. It is unbelievable hospitality, and kindness, and compassion. And I think they need a great deal of support for that. But who are really – are enough people deployed? Is the message going out?

Are we using – and then on the abduction issue – are we using – you know, do the Russian people have any sense that their President Putin, a dictator, is doing this to children? Abducting them and stealing them from their families? We got Radio Free Europe, we got all the other freedom broadcasting. Are we making an all-out effort to reach the propaganda that's coming out from them? So how well-informed of the Russian people on these abductions?

And are there going to be additional indictments by the ICC? Yes, there's two now. But as you pointed out, there needs to be a whole lot more. Is that something that's being contemplated? And when will they be handed down, if we know?

VAN SCHAACK: I wonder whether Ambassador Dyer wants to address the question about resources on the border, and then we can –

DYER: I'm happy to do that. And of course, we need more resources on the border, frankly. I also think that one of the things that we're seeing here with regard to the low number of individuals who have been confirmed cases is delayed reporting. We know from the prior 2014 – Russia's invasion 2014, and we know from other – the OSCE has looked at other similar crises, that you don't see large numbers of reported trafficking until approximately two years after. Now part of this is because initially, even when good screening occurs, victims don't disclose because they don't think that there's a problem. They think that they have something set up. You know, they've got a temporary shelter. They may even think that they have a temporary job.

But the problem is that over time that shelter doesn't pan out and that job doesn't pan out. And that is when they become more vulnerable. So part of it is increasing screening and identification. But part of it is constant vigilance, because as time goes on more victims will be needing to reach out and more victims will reach out. And so I think that that is something that we need to be constantly vigilant about. And I think that especially we have also – we also know that some of the individuals had – they had shelter, but there is some compassion fatigue, and that shelter doesn't work out. And so now they're going to more communal shelters. That is where the trafficking will occur. So I just think that constant vigilance on this issue.

VAN SCHAACK: You asked about what the Russian people are hearing. And, of course, we know they're being fed a steady diet of propaganda and misinformation, disinformation. So this is why it's so important for hearings like this and for the work of organizations like the Conflict Observatory, Ukrainian civil society, to continue to shed a light on this and to disseminate that information very broadly. So that the Russian people can see for themselves what is happening to these children.

You asked about additional indictments. And we know that the International Criminal Court's investigation is ongoing. The prosecutor there is working very closely with Andriy Kostin, the Ukrainian prosecutor general, in order to share information and strategies. Our European colleagues have formed a joint investigative team that is working together under the Eurojust network. And our prosecutors now have new tools, thanks to congressional action with the War Crimes Victims Act.

I want to just call attention to the fact that Dick Durbin's draft crimes against humanity bill includes trafficking as a constitutive act of crimes against humanity. This would give our prosecutors the ability to prosecute trafficking as a crime against humanity when it's committed on a widespread or systematic basis. That's different than other definitions. And I think it's a real innovation and fully support it.

SMITH: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

WILSON: Thank you, Congressman Chris Smith. And now we proceed to Congressman Emanuel Cleaver.

CLEAVER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And very seriously and strongly I want to express appreciation for this very, very important hearing, particularly when we know that the

disinformation and misinformation is out there. Hopefully, this Committee's work will also get out there.

Like every seminarian who's from the Christian tradition has had to study Dietrich Bonhoeffer. You don't graduate unless you study the great German theologian. There were 200,000 Polish children stolen by Hitler and brought to Germany. And the irony here is there were also 20,000 Russian children taken by Hitler into Germany to, they called it Germanizing them, but there was also some experimentation to get down to the real cruel and ugly parts of this.

And one of the things that Bonhoeffer railed about on his radio show was what's happening to the children. And two days – two days after Hitler became the chancellor Bonhoeffer's radio program was shut down. And then, of course, he was hanged. And I think we have to be the modern-day Bonhoeffers. I mean, I think we need to talk about this as much and as prophetically as we can. My issue is that there are so many similarities of, you know, between what Hitler did and what Putin is doing that, I mean, I'm not sure whether they're Russia-tising them, whatever the proper word would be.

But my question is – well, two questions. One is, are they – are some of the children – have some of the children been returned to the Ukraine? And then, secondly, is there some kind of process or is there something that the United States can do to deal with these children, who must be traumatized at a level that none of us in this room can even remotely understand?

VAN SCHAACK: Yes. Thank you so much. The irony really is thick. Of course, Russia stood with the allies at Nuremberg, and now we're seeing Russia committing some of the same acts that were prosecuted before that tribunal, and particularly when it comes to the Russification of these children, denying them their heritage, extinguishing their pride in their history, not allowing them to speak their language, implying that Ukraine doesn't exist as a concept. So you're absolutely right to point out that intense hypocrisy.

My understanding is that of the upwards of 20,000 children that have gone missing or that have been forcibly brought into Russian occupied or territorial Russia itself, in the hundreds have been returned. It's obviously quite difficult to do this. Civil society actors are very active. Parents are active. Mothers and grandmothers are having to cross borders and track down their children and grandchildren. Because we know men. It's hard for men, obviously, to travel to Russia. So women are having to do this, working with networks, et cetera.

There are efforts within civil society to trace and identify these children, including using facial recognition software, because websites have been set up to facilitate adoptions and children have been identified through those websites. Those often immediately get taken down, because the realization is that they're being used to collect evidence of the abduction of these children.

In terms of psychosocial support, that will be critical. There will be long-term psychological harm, not only for children abducted but for children who've experienced war, particularly in tender ages. And I know that will be a topic of our next – our next panel.

CLEAVER: Thank you. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

WILSON: Thank you, Congressman Cleaver. And you can tell he's actually a pastor, and so very effective, and a dear person. And we've been joined by Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee. And again, I'm so grateful that we're working together on bipartisan legislation regarding the issue of kidnapping of children of Ukraine.

JACKSON LEE: Good morning. Let me say, I was unavoidably detained in a Judiciary Committee hearing dealing with similar issues and Secretary Mayorkas. So thank you for your presence here today. And let me also, on record, wish Trevor Reed a speedy recovery for the efforts that he has personally and independently made.

I join with my colleagues who are here, in particular, Chairman Wilson, on the outrage of the question of Ukrainian children being stolen and women being raped and kidnapped. Russia pretends to be the person on the white horse rescuing children. And in the earliest days of the war, we saw children sitting by deceased, what we perceive, parents, you know, others by themselves in the midst of war. What is the fallacy of that narrative that they are rescuers? And what more can we do to reinforce the United Nations that should take a larger space, a larger voice in the outrage of what is going on, and provide their own sanctions against Russia, that is evidence of the wrongness of what they're doing? So I'll just start with that, the narrative that they are projecting.

VAN SCHAACK: You're absolutely right. It's a completely false narrative. They are responsible for the danger that these children have been put in, which then creates their justification to abduct them. But true rescuers would allow the International Committee of the Red Cross to have access. True rescuers would allow parents to stay in touch with their children. There would be a tracing mechanism. There would be a recording mechanism, so there would be records of where these children were. And true rescuers would return those children as soon as the risk that they faced was no longer present.

And that, of course, is not happening. These children have been held. They have been retained. They have not been allowed to be in touch with their families. There is not monitoring or record keeping of where these children are. And organizations like the International Committee for the Red Cross and other humanitarian organizations are not being given access to these children to ensure their wellbeing. So all of the facts on the ground belie this claim that this is a humanitarian gesture on Russia's part.

JACKSON LEE: So I'm just going to stick along those lines. I'm going to first of all call this a forced – I'm going to call this clearly kidnapping, violent kidnapping. And then let me get to the other dastardly part of this, which we saw in Europe when we saw the reprogramming. We've seen that in other countries. China has done some of this, if I might. And some of this was done in most heinous moments of European history. How do we – how do we interject or hold Russia accountable for the reprogramming so these children are not Ukrainian, they're Russian? And I think that that is mental genocide, to be honest with you.

VAN SCHAACK: There's no question that Russia has deployed Russification and anti-Ukraine rhetoric since the beginning of this war, implying that there is no such thing as Ukraine. And we understand that many of these children are being subjected to political re-education, in which they're denied their own history, their culture is insulted or is ignored, they pretend it doesn't exist. We've also seen acts of cultural destruction within Ukraine, most recently, a precious cathedral was destroyed. Clearly not a military objective. Efforts to destroy anything that would speak of a unique, proud, faith-based Ukrainian culture.

So these are all – can be – can be prosecuted as war crimes. The destruction of cultural property, but also the abduction of children can be prosecuted as a war crime, as a crime against humanity and, as it has been mentioned, it is even potentially an act of genocide under the Genocide Convention.

JACKSON LEE: So we understand that Russian families have adopted these children. Obviously, you're not directly a lawyer for each of these children. But how do we reverse that? And how do we raise our collective voices before it gets too late? And again, I want you to go back to the United Nations. Obviously, the United Nations has an array of crisis a day, because it is the United Nations. And it is regional. It is international, in terms of every nation-state, but then there are regions that are of concern.

But we look to the United Nations to be the standard bearer for really calling you out. And what do we have to do as members of Congress? Should we, the Helsinki Commission, seek to meet, have, Mr. Chairman, a joint hearing or task force with the United Nations, raising this up to an international crisis? And I hope if it was children from somewhere else that were being stolen – no one should be silent on children. So we've got to reprogram. We've got Russian families now with who knows how many children in their midst that are theirs. We have Ukrainian families, either parents deceased but relatives longing for their children. And we need a vehicle. And maybe you would include in there sanctions, but I really have slept on this – (laughs) – in essence, and I want the United Nations, maybe I've missed it, to really capture this alongside of the democratic fight that is going on by the Ukrainian people.

VAN SCHAACK: Yeah. Yeah, thank you. I hear the passion in your voice for this issue, and I share that with you. I was just at the United Nations last week for two days of hearings and panels on the imperative of accountability for the Commission of International Crimes. And Ukraine featured front and center, and the abduction of Ukrainian children was a constant theme in many of the interventions by those states present. Of course, Russia and its intervention spewed a set of lies and falsehoods that was unbelievable to hear. It was incredible. And then dropped the mic and walked out of the room and did not hear the rest of the criticism that was leveled against the way in which this war has been prosecuted, and the very fact that this war was initiated in the first place.

In terms of these adoptions, of course they're null and void, particularly if the children have loved ones, guardians, parents, others who have responsibility for those. But there will be a massive untangling of some of these legal issues that will have to happen as those children get rescued. This may be one issue that could be taken up in connection with this new legislation,

would be creating some resources for organizations to be able to work to trace where these children are and to help support families as they're trying to bring them back into Ukraine.

JACKSON LEE: Mr. Chairman, my time has ended, unfortunately, but I do want to thank you. You're right. We have bipartisan legislation that has enormously detailed – and I want to thank Chairman Wilson publicly for joining this passion and being an articulate spokesperson at the OSCE, and then wanting us to do it. I hope he heard me when I said maybe – I don't know the firewalls of the Helsinki Commission – but maybe it needs to be at the United Nations, and in the normal work of the United Nations.

I'm sure there were great meetings that you just had that we can elevate that cry that we're making, because what we do for the Ukrainian children is going to be what we will do in other crises where children are the fodder, the bargaining tool to create a – just a havoc amongst the people of Ukraine and people around the world, who see this dastardly act occurring. So, Mr. Chairman, I dropped the mic, and thank you so very much for your yielding to me.

WILSON: Hear, hear. And, Congresswoman, thank you again for your passion on behalf of kidnapped children, whether they be in Texas or be in Ukraine. She's quite proficient in both.

We've been joined – and somebody's really unique, OK? Congresswoman Victoria Spartz. She has a really broad perspective, having been born in the Soviet Union and being a very proud heritage of Ukraine. Victoria Spartz from Indiana.

SPARTZ: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Madam Ambassador. I want to share with you a little bit of frustration and wanted to – you know, I appreciate you being here. About a year ago, actually, former Speaker Pelosi and I raised this question with leadership with State Department and CIA, and they were smirking at that issue, it was kind of interesting. And she was not very happy, if you remember. (Laughs.) Speaker Pelosi, she doesn't take that lightly. And asked to have some actions and numbers, which we've never seen, haven't heard. We're still talking now. We do a lot of resolution meetings, but it's a real crisis. We have serious crisis with, you know, children getting abducted. We have serious crisis was human trafficking that happened very significantly. And, you know, your departments and all this were given a lot of resources to try to deal with that.

So I want to see what actions – you know, you advise us on all of this – what actions the State Department and you are doing, and or not doing? And because we have to stay dealing with this issue. So tell me, what actions have been taken to deal with all of these serious crimes that are happened right now.

VAN SCHAACK: Thank you. I'm happy to discuss what we're doing in the war crimes and crimes against humanity front, and then I'll defer to my colleague Ambassador Dyer to talk about the trafficking front. On the war crimes front, we have created the Atrocity Crimes Advisory Group with the European Union and the United Kingdom. And the goal is to support Ukrainian's prosecutor General in his efforts to prosecute these cases in Ukrainian courts. We've also created a War Crimes Accountability Team in the Department of Justice that can

focus on cases here in the United States. And we've talked about ways in which we could strengthen our own laws.

The International Criminal Court has been engaged. Two indictments have already been issued against President Putin himself and the Children's Rights Commissioner Maria Lvova-Belova. My understanding is that investigation is continuing, and we imagine that there will be additional indictments that will be issued. And our European friends and colleagues have created a joint investigative team. We're also supporting that team, and we have memoranda of understanding that enable us to share information, intelligence, and potential evidence so that all of these prosecutors are in touch, working together, coordinated, and able to act quickly when someone falls within their jurisdiction.

SPARTZ: So the political process is coordinated? Is it coordinated? Because that's what I hear. When I talk to Europe and meet with all their governments, that's a different thing I hear. So you're telling me that – who's coordinated? You coordinated all this process?

VAN SCHAACK: There's something called Eurojust, which connects all the European prosecutors. That's really the hub of coordination amongst prosecutors –

SPARTZ: So if I talk to them, they're going to tell me all this coordination they're doing? Because when I meet with different governments and talk to people, no one even knows who's responsible for that. It's like all over the place. Everyone says someone is doing something, but it's not a very organized process. So you're telling me this organization is ultimate responsibility, that it's a coordinated process and it's actually done? Is that correct?

VAN SCHAACK: It's based in The Hague, and I would absolutely recommend that you attend. And maybe the Commission can go as a unit. It's remarkable to see how Europe is increasingly united around the imperative of –

SPARTZ: Well, it's united. There is a lot of talk, OK? (Laughs.) I just ask actions, because I'm trying to figure out who's really in charge. So you're saying this group, you know, is in charged? So they actually know what's going on? OK. Then another question I have. What is the purpose of U.N.? What do they exist for?

VAN SCHAACK: United Nations exists as a body in order to facilitate multilateral engagement.

SPARTZ: OK, is it working? Engagement?

VAN SCHAACK: Here we have a problem, of course, where we have a permanent member of the Security Council – which is supposed to be the executive body, the enforcement body of the United Nations – which has breached, blatantly and manifestly, the United Nations Charter. So in that respect, the work of the Security Council has completely shut down. And it has been left to the General Assembly and other bodies to try and step in and fill that void. But it's very clearly a failure of the Security Council, given Russia's role here in the in the war in Ukraine.

SPARTZ: So what needs to happen with U.N., in your perspective?

VAN SCHAACK: It's impossible to amend the U.N. Charter without the concurrence of all five permanent members of the Security Council. This was the mechanism – this was the structure that was put in place after World War II, when Russia stood side by side with the Allies after World War II. And now that structure has, in some respects, come to haunt the institution.

SPARTZ: So do you think it's pretty much obsolete at this time?

VAN SCHAACK: There still is work that can be done at the United Nations. It's still a forum in which individuals, experts can be convened, decisions can be made, mechanisms can be created, evidence can be shared. There's still work to be done. It's not as strong as we would like, but it's all we have.

SPARTZ: So do think it needs to have serious reforms?

VAN SCHAACK: There are lots of discussions of reform. This administration has come out in favor of expanding, for example, the membership of the Security Council to allow for broader geographic representation. There's other reforms that could be done around the veto that have been proposed, so that permanent members don't utilize their veto in the face of an atrocity situation. But much of this would need to involve the amendment of the U.N. Charter. And that is probably impossible.

SPARTZ: Well, from my perspective, the organization either need to be dissolved or reformed, otherwise we're wasting time. There are a lot of dinners and money sent by it, but I haven't seen them on the ground be useful at all. And we have a major war. You're dealing with war crimes, you know, and you kind of deepened this. What things you believe – because it's not just, you know, we come after Putin, but what about all of the generals and people under them that making commands to kill people? I mean, civilians – truly commanding to kill, you know, human beings that have nothing to do. So what things needs to be done there to have a proper evidence and mechanism, and to really – to maybe even deter further this atrocity that happening?

VAN SCHAACK: It's incredibly important to create the most robust system of accountability that we can so that as soon as Russian perpetrators fall within any particular state's jurisdiction, or the jurisdiction of the ICC, they can move quickly. As you mentioned, responsibility exists all the way up the chain of command – from the individual perpetrator, to the individual who gave that order, and even to commanders and political leaders who knew or should have known that their subordinates were committing abuses, or were about to commit abuses, and they failed to take all necessary measures to prevent them.

These doctrines exist, except in U.S. law. We do not have a command responsibility in our domestic statute. So we can only prosecute those direct perpetrators. That's a gap that needs to be filled.

SPARTZ: OK. OK, thank you. Thank you. I yield back.

VAN SCHAACK: I know these issues are personal to you. And I appreciate the questions and your passion.

WILSON: Thank you very much, Congresswoman Victoria Spartz, for your leadership.

We now proceed to Senator Richard Blumenthal of Rhode Island.

BLUMENTHAL: Connecticut.

WILSON: Oh, my goodness. (Laughter.) Connecticut.

BLUMENTHAL: I know that they are next to each other and – (laughter) – may be difficult to distinguish. But –

JACKSON LEE: I know Connecticut well, Senator. (Laughter.)

BLUMENTHAL: Thank you. Thank you so much for being here. And thanks to the leadership of the Helsinki Commission for convening this critically important gathering. Thanks to the ambassador of Ukraine. Ambassador, thank you for being here again, and to the people of Ukraine. You have our support and it will be unwavering, I am sure, having talked to my colleagues in the United States Senate just this morning, on both sides of the aisle. Again, we want to support Ukraine in its military effort, but also its effort to seek justice. And let me begin there, Madam Ambassador to ask you, have you been coordinating with the prosecutor general of Ukraine?

VAN SCHAACK: Yes. Thank you. We have. And we're in touch on a regular basis. I know we'll hear from him in the next panel. He is faced with an incredibly daunting task, which is to sift through over, potentially, 90,000 confirmed or reported instances of war crimes and other atrocities. He has an incredible team, but even the most well-resourced prosecutorial office would find this an enormous challenge. We have created, with the European Union and the United Kingdom, the Atrocity Crimes Advisory Group to provide this kind of support.

Individuals who came from the world's war crimes tribunals. So, for example, the individual who might have prosecuted the siege of Sarajevo is now helping Ukrainian prosecutor general deal with the siege of Mariupol. Experts on vulnerable populations, experts on conflict-related sexual violence. We're providing that assistance to the prosecutor general so that he can sift through all of the potential cases, determine where to put his energies, and how to bring cases fairly under the Ukrainian system.

BLUMENTHAL: And I have met with him here and a number of times in Ukraine. And many of us on the Judiciary Committee in the Senate are eager to help in whatever we can – again, on a very bipartisan basis.

Let me ask you, you know, the issue of child trauma. And not just children who have been victims of trafficking and kidnapping, which are maybe the most prominent and the most egregious of these cases, but in many ways all Ukrainian children in one way or the other, living through this heinously brutal time there, have suffered serious trauma. Even if it's just to watch the bombing of their country at this age. But obviously, most seriously, children who have been rescued. What kinds of healing programs are there available now? And what more can we do?

VAN SCHAACK: Yes, thank you. And I know there are experts on the next panel that are going to take this up directly, but to quickly answer your question – and as I mentioned in my opening remarks – these children have witnessed and experienced events that are going to haunt them for their lifetimes. And so this sort of psychosocial support is incredibly important. It's being done in Ukraine, but there aren't enough resources there. So that is an area where I think additional investment could be very timely.

I attended a meeting that Kerry Kennedy hosted. And one of the ideas that came out of that was using remote talk therapy. That gets done all the time now here in this country. Could we not tap into the enormous Ukrainian diaspora communities in Chicago and elsewhere, individuals who are trained in providing psychosocial support, and make those resources available to Ukrainian children and other victims and survivors? That is something very concrete that we can do to help these individuals move past what they've experienced, and experienced what we know happens in the field of post traumatic growth. That that is – it is not a death sentence. It is not – these children are not necessarily condemned to suffer the rest of their lives. They can move beyond this, but they will need help to be able to do that.

BLUMENTHAL: Are there programs right now that could be made available through the diaspora enabling perhaps some of them to go to Ukraine?

VAN SCHAACK: It's a wonderful idea. There are no programs yet in place, but maybe this new legislation that's being continued could think about putting forward some resources and inspiring that to be – to be put in place. I know that individuals here are looking for ways to support what's happening in Ukraine. And this might be a very tangible way to do that.

BLUMENTHAL: Thank you.

VAN SCHAACK: Thank you.

BLUMENTHAL: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. I apologize. I'm not going to be able to stay for the second panel. But I know this is going to be a very, very important hearing. And we'll make good use of it in the Senate. Thank you.

WILSON: Senator, thank you. And, actually, I'm so grateful that Senator Blumenthal is here, of Connecticut, because we can tell you that there's bicameral bipartisan support for Ukraine. We can tell you that every day. Except you can see it, and so even better. So thank you so much for being here. And, hey, it's also unique to have a U.S. senator humble himself to come over to the people's house. (Laughter.) So thank you for coming.

BLUMENTHAL: I'll get my passport stamped on the way out. (Laughter.)

WILSON: This is – hey, hey, we always welcome people from the House of Lords. (Laughter.)

So with this, again, as – Ambassador, thank you. And we'll proceed immediately to the second panel. And so thank you very much, Ambassador. And with the second panel, we'll first hear virtually from Ukraine's Prosecutor General Andriy Kostin, who was appointed to his post in 2022. Prior to that, he served as a member of Ukraine's parliament. He is a lawyer, attorney and was in private practice before his government service.

And then, remarkably, we are so grateful to have Ambassador of Ukraine to the United States Oksana Makarova, who prior to this post served as First Deputy Minister to Ukraine's Ministry of Finance. And then additionally, really, Ambassador Markarova has been become a nationally known figure, extraordinarily effective in promoting to the American people the situation – the humanitarian cause of Ukraine.

Additionally, we have Sebastian Stachowski, an environmental and social entrepreneur and founder of Lion Environmental. He joined the Polish Red Cross after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, where he worked on provision and coordination of aid for the Ukrainian refugees coming into Poland.

Additionally, we will then have virtually Mykola Kuleba, who is the director to Save Ukraine, and the former Ukrainian presidential commissioner for human rights. Currently Save Ukraine is providing assistance to orphans, children with disabilities, low-income families affected by the war in Ukraine, and is conducting evacuation operations of Ukrainian children who have been forcibly taken to Russia or Russian-controlled areas of Ukraine.

And finally, Dr. James S. Gordon, M.D., is founder and executive director of the nonprofit, The Center for Mind-Body Medicine, in Washington, a clinical professor at Georgetown Medical School, and was chairman under Presidents Clinton and George W. Bush of the White House Commission on Complementary and Alternative Medicine Policy. With this, we proceed to the prosecutor general, and with a timeline that he is firm in about 20 minutes. We'll hear from the prosecutor general, and then go to questions for him. And then we'll proceed with the rest of the panel.

KOSTIN: Chairman Wilson, you hear me well? Dear colleagues, do you hear me?

WILSON: Yes. Yes. Thank you.

KOSTIN: OK. OK, thank you. Chairman Wilson, distinguished members of the panel, members of the U.S. Helsinki Commission, it is my great privilege to have an opportunity to contribute to the hearing on rescuing Ukrainian children and women from Russian aggression. I fully share the concerns and opinions voiced during the previous panel by Ambassador Beth Van Schaack and Ambassador Cindy Dyer.

It's more than 17 months since Russia initiated large-scale aggression against Ukraine. Throughout these days, we Ukrainians have defied the onslaught of Russian tyranny, as we battle for truth, freedom, and peace on our soil, while the world witnesses widespread transgressions and destruction – all planned and executed by Kremlin regime. Civilian casualties are as high as 10,731 deaths, including 498 children, with more than 15,500 wounded, including 1,077 children. And this are only casualties we found. We can only imagine the scale of casualties on temporary occupied territories.

Schools, care institutions, hospitals, and other essential infrastructure are attacked and destroyed, depriving local population, including women and children, of essentials, health care and welfare services, as well as access to education. To our knowledge, 2,609 educational and 576 medical facilities have already been severely damaged or destroyed. We survived when Russia weaponized winter by systematically targeting Ukraine's civilian energy infrastructure. Two hundred eight-two attacks with strikes on 115 electric power facilities, depriving millions of Ukrainians of electricity, heat, and hot water amidst harsh Ukrainian winter conditions. As a result, the accumulated and protracted suffering aggravated vulnerabilities and trauma.

In such circumstances, effects of armed conflict are felt hardest by women and children. Having said so, there are just miniscule of our grievances. The most painful part is when one witnesses women and children being direct target of the war. Women are predominantly survivors of the conflict-related sexual violence. One hundred forty-three women, including children, have been victims of rape, mutilation, or violence of genitals, forced nudity, and threat of rape. We know this is spit in the sea compared to true numbers. Therefore, we had to adapt prosecutorial policies by establishing a specialized conflict-related sexual violence unit within the war crimes department of my office and introduce new survivor-oriented approaches.

In parallel, the joint mobile working groups composed of prosecutors, investigators, experts, and psychologists carry out proactive missions to the occupied territories, systematically revealing new cases of CRSV. Undeniably, Russia uses it as a weapon of war. Incidents take place in all regions that were or fall under Russia's temporary occupation. We already identified 30 suspects, indicted 10 of them, and convicted two perpetrators for conflict-related sexual violence war crimes.

We need to remember that CRSV survivors often have to live with the terrifying memories for the rest of their lives, suffering from stigmatization and unwanted consequences. Thus, we need to implement victim-centered, trauma-informed, and gender-inclusive response through adequate services and communication strategies. For that purpose, within my office I have introduced Victims and Witnesses Coordination Center. We are deeply grateful for the support and assistance provided by Special Representative of the General Secretary of United Nations Pramila Patten, international organizations, and civil society organizations.

Forced deportation and transfer of Ukrainian children is another atrocious consequence of Russia's aggression. Russia forcibly displaces, completely removes and separates children from their parents, immediate family, and setting in which they have initially been reared. Under international law, it is called war crime and crimes against humanity of forced displacement, that

also could amount to crime of genocide. It is a clear violation of U.N. Convention on the Rights of Child, as well as Fourth Geneva Conventions of 1949.

As of today, we have information about more than 19,000 Ukrainian children being forcibly transferred and deported to Russia. Our law enforcement authorities are currently tracing and gathering information about each and every child. So far, only 385 of children have been returned. As you all know, the first two arrest warrants issued by the International Criminal Court are for President Putin and Child Commissioner, in brackets, Lvova-Belova, related to forced deportation of children. We commend Prosecutor Khan and his team for their efforts and will continue our close cooperation in parallel to international proceedings.

Regards national investigation, we have already issued three suspicion notices, one against acting Russian and being involved in forced deportation of Ukrainian children from Kherson foster care. In parallel, Ukrainian government is in process of preparation of a plan to prevent and eradicate grave violations of children's rights during an armed conflict, in close collaboration with our international partners. Our primary goal is to establish effective modalities that will secure tracing, safe, and unimpeded return of children to Ukraine to their families, guardians, and homes.

In this regard, we appreciate efforts undertaken by our partners, but Ukraine needs meaningful assistance from international community since such processes necessitate access to information, including intelligence data and setting up of the appropriate instruments guaranteeing safe return of children to Ukraine. Ukrainian children are forced to undergo so called re-education into Russian. For teenage boys, it often includes militarization programs. A classic example is the network of forty-three reeducation camps depicted in the conflict observatory report, where its children are indoctrinated into Kremlin's vision of nation, culture, history, and society.

It is a part of Russia's planned policy aimed to smear Ukrainian identity by robbing us of our children. Since 2014, the Russification policy has been heavily implemented in occupied territories through re-education programs and by so-called Yunarmiya training, Russian Young Army National Military Patriotic Social Movement Association, funded by Russian Ministry of Defense, that aims to instill the so-called values of patriotism and national service. Imagine the grotesque sights of children dressed in military-type of uniform glorifying the war through Kremlin-distorted view of historic facts.

Unfortunately, our tragedy does not stop there. We already witness severity and brutality of the indoctrination in occupied Crimea, as these children entering adulthood are mobilized in the Russian Army to fight against their own people, against their own state, Ukraine. Therefore, it is vital that we mobilize all efforts in order to rescue Ukrainian children in Russia in occupied territories in parallel to securing accountability of all persons depriving Ukraine of its future.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of our partners and friends, Ambassador Beth Van Schaack, all group of our Atrocity Crimes Advisory Group experts and leaders, including Ambassador Clint Williamson. And, of course, our friends and partners in U.S. Senate and U.S. Congress, for unwavering support in all of our endeavors for justice. Thank you.

WILSON: Thank you very much, Prosecutor General. And indeed, what an honor to have you. And in lieu of a question, I'd like to make one point. And that is, with a cell phone every citizen of Ukraine has an opportunity, for the first time in history, to document war crimes as they occur, with date and time. This has never in world history been possible, but today it is. And I hope that the citizens of Ukraine are encouraged to use this capability. And then you, from that, will also have – and the perpetrators need to know, through facial recognition, we're going to know who they are. And then there will also be an opportunity for a chain of command to be established. And so, as war crimes are proven, this conflict – war, murderous war – there's an incredible opportunity for good to occur.

And Congressman Smith, I look forward to your questions. Yes.

SMITH: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. And Prosecutor General Kostin, thank you for your leadership, your strength. It inspires. You are standing up against the worst bully on the planet. And you are standing up for justice and accountability. So words are inadequate to express all of our thankfulness to your leadership, because it is extraordinary.

I just want to make a note that two of the staffers that are here today who were absolutely critical on issues related to Russia and to Belarus. Kyle Parker, who literally wrote the Magnitsky Act. I want to thank Kyle for his leadership. And Orest Deychakiwsky, who literally wrote the Belarus Democracy Act. Now, I was the prime sponsor of the Belarus Democracy Act in '04, '06, '08, '12, and just a couple of years ago. But Orest was the inspiration behind it all. I want to thank him for that leadership. And Janice is doing an unbelievably great job for this Commission and for this cause. Can't thank her enough as well.

If I could ask you, Mr. Prosecutor General, you know, are there going to be, in your opinion, additional indictments coming from the ICC? And one issue that I've raised, I raised it at the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, I am the special representative for trafficking, and tried to get some movement on the idea that the General Assembly could call for a tribunal. Yes, the ICC, thank God they're taking this up. But there's so much more that could be done. And a lot of the delegates there were very enthusiastic about it. And nothing has happened. Any country in the world can file that. And the United States I would hope would do it. I've asked Secretary Blinken on more than one occasion to do so. But we need additional tribunals.

The ICC, if they get to the larger issues, of course, the abduction of children is one of the cruelest things we can possibly imagine. And it is reminiscent of the Nazis and others, so here we go again. But I hope that we would look at doing – and your thoughts on such a tribunal. We would have the votes, I believe, beyond any reasonable doubt, in the General Assembly. There's no veto power there. There will be a lot of abstentions, unfortunately, but we will have the votes if that is offered. I would hope that the U.S. would lead with that. Your thoughts on that?

Also, on Lukashenko. You know, we've all met with him on the Helsinki Commission over the years. I'm barred from going there. I've been barred for years because of the Belarus Democracy Act. But that man is a monster. And he is an enabler like no other to Putin. Now, why isn't he also – and you might want to answer the question whether or not children are being

abducted there. Are there concerns about that, and re-education with him? But he has been a partner in crime like few others. And I do think he often is left off the focus for his crimes against humanity as well. So if you could speak to that. And I have others, but those two. Sure. So the first one, on not there would be a tribunal larger in scope. Do you think other indictments will be forthcoming vis-a-vis the two that have already been laid down by the ICC? And then this whole idea of Lukashenko's complicity in all these crimes.

KOSTIN: Thank you so much. First of all, with regard to tribunal, I'm grateful for the wide support of our endeavor to make Russia accountable for the most serious crime, the crime of aggression. Because the waging of aggressive war led to all these crimes we are talking about now – led to casualties to people, children, women suffered from this war, from this aggression. And it's our obligation of the old, civilized world to make Russia and all its allies accountable for the crime of aggression. We all understand that due to legal constraints, ICC has no jurisdiction to prosecute this crime. That's why the establishing of special tribunal to prosecute and to punish the highest political and military leadership of Russia for waging of the war of aggression, including incumbent president of Russia Putin, it's our obligation.

It's our joint obligation before all casualties of this war of aggression, including – I would point out – including Ukrainian servicemen. Because they, we, are protecting our country. We are not aggressor. And our servicemen are killed by Russians. And the only possible way to give them matter of their justice to their families is to make Russia accountable for the crime of aggression. And I'm grateful for your position that this should be the common joint solution of all civilized world by General Assembly of the United Nations. This will show not only to Russian leadership that they will be held accountable, not only by the ICC, but by the tribunal for the crime of aggression.

But this will also deter any future potential aggressor, because these potential aggressors are now looking at us. If we all together will be weak, it will not prevent aggression in any other part of the world. That's why it's our, once again, joint obligation to make Russia accountable for the crime of aggression. And establishing a special tribunal is the most – is the most suitable solution. It could be established on the basis of multilateral agreement, like it was in Nuremberg. It could be established on the basis of the agreement between U.N. and general secretary and Ukraine based on General Assembly Resolution of United Nations.

It could be established in any other way, but it should be international in its nature because crime of aggression is a global international crime. And it should include in any – it should include as the persons who should be prosecuted, so called troika. So incumbent President Putin, potentially Minister of Foreign Affairs and Prime Minister, and others who were involved.

SMITH: Thank you so much. Let me just – one brief follow up. I chaired a hearing right after the invasion began. And I had David Crane, who was the special prosecutor for the court of Sierra Leone. The court did put Charles Taylor behind bars for fifty years for his atrocities in Liberia. And he made the recommendation – he said, the ICC has a place. All of these other mechanisms have a place. But this crime of aggression could be – and almost easily

– done if the U.N. had the will and member states – including the United States – would take the lead on this. And so I, again, make the appeal to the administration to try to make that a reality.

And I will say, you know, with all the other – whether it be Rwanda, Sierra Leone, or the terrible atrocities committed by Slobodan Milosevic, all of those tribunals were far after, long after the atrocities occurred. And, of course, that means getting information is even harder because memories fade, although Milosevic was being prosecuted and he died at The Hague awaiting trial. But let's do it now and have a chilling effect, and hold everybody accountable, including his generals and everyone else. They need to know they're going to prison, and they're going there for the rest of their lives, just like Charles Taylor. Thank you so much, Mr. Prosecutor General.

WILSON: Thank you, Commissioner Smith.

And thank you, Prosecutor General. And, gosh, your professionalism is so important, as is so widely reflected.

And with this we're going to proceed immediately to Ambassador Makarova.

MARKAROVA: Thank you, Chairman. Thank you, all the members. It's truly an honor to be here with you, and prosecutor general, and with all the witnesses, talking about one of many, but probably the most horrendous crimes of Mr. Putin and Russians – crimes against our children. Whether it's about them being killed or tortured, or raped, or kidnapped into Russia, whether it's just about their lives to be interrupted and their dreams to be cut short, whether it's about stealing their future or their lives, this is something that all of us, as adults, as people who believe in democracy and in decency, as people who believe democracies should defend themselves, it's our duty to protect them in any country. And it's our duty to protect them in Ukraine.

And we're very grateful for everyone here. But everyone in this house of democracy, everyone in on the Hill, everyone in administration, President Biden, for very strong bipartisan and bicameral support, in every. In providing us with security assistance, budget assistance, in allowing us to do what we need to do to win, to return peace, to return just peace, and to get justice for all of Ukrainians, for everyone who became victim of this unprovoked, unjustified Russian aggression, but especially for Ukrainian children.

So this work is very important for us. But it's also in the national security interest of the U.S., because your country is built on the values for which we are fighting now in Ukraine. So thank you very much. And let's all of us together, please, stay the course, so that we can win and we can get justice for everyone. Thank you.

WILSON: Thank you so much, Ambassador. And your service is so inspiring. Thank you.

And we're so grateful to have with us Sebastian Stachowski. And thank you so much for your leadership. And I was just grateful to have visited you recently in Poland. Thank you.

STACHOWSKI: Thank you, Chair Wilson. Thank you, distinguished members of the Congress and guests for allowing me to be here. It's a great honor and privilege. So as a former volunteer of the Subcarpathian Red Cross, I'd like to stress that my testimony here represents my own opinion not the one of the Red Cross.

So my presence here is a continuation of a journey that I started after the full-scale aggression of Russia on Ukraine, where I joined the Red Cross in the southeast region of Poland that is the forefront where refugees were arriving in great numbers. So, from being a CEO of an environmental consultancy, almost overnight I turned into a crisis response volunteer, working for the Red Cross who, at that time, was an organization that was completely unprepared for what was coming ahead, was on a daily basis dealing with paramedical training, with blood donations, with secondhand clothes resale. So didn't have the skills on the ground to counteract a crisis of this scale.

So when I arrived, almost overnight I was responsible – or at least felt responsible – for tens of thousands of Ukrainian women and children passing through the region. And I soon realized that there were many other people just like me arriving trying to help, and also associated or unassociated individuals trying to volunteer. There were many organizations showing up at key sites. And providing – or, setting up temporary or permanent posts, trying to fulfill key services such as health care, such as catering, such as emotional support. And as much as all of this was remarkable, and it wouldn't have happened with a great support from the local communities, from the Polish people, Polish businesses, local politicians. But observing the situation, we realized that there are also some great risks behind this uncoordinated response to the crisis.

So we were overwhelmed by sheer numbers of the refugees. We were also – so at that stage there was no clear plan to what to do because the efforts of different NGOs was not coordinated. People turned to us, like to the Red Cross, because we were well-established before the escalation of the conflict, and we had some connections. So other NGOs looked towards us to coordinate efforts. But we had our own struggles. We didn't have the resources or the right people to do this. We were trying to organize ourselves as much as we could. We put to work a lot of great volunteers. However, these volunteers with time started to be really worn out, because they worked really hard for a long period of time with no breaks. And this great chaos, basically, we didn't see a way ahead.

And few weeks in, the U.N. agencies arrived. And then at this stage that was quite liberating, because we felt, oh, sure. The big boys arrived. They will be able to provide the funding. They actually promised us that they will be able to secure the sites for us, provide global refugee registration system, they will be able to provide the vetting systems for volunteers, provide us funding. So that was a great relief. We were especially happy about the registration systems for refugees, and for the background check systems for some of the volunteers. Because unfortunately, we already at that stage had some serious safety and human trafficking incidents that we experienced.

Unfortunately, after working with them for numerous weeks, we realized that we are going nowhere. That is, none of the key demands or key services that we were hoping that they will fulfill can be fulfilled. That is they were not really willing to take over the responsibility to coordinate the resources. They were not really able, or they just didn't provide us with the registration system, the vetting system. And then they didn't really secure the parameters. So we felt crushed at this stage, because we felt that, OK, we are on our own again. And that created a lot of tensions between different NGOs, because everybody was exhausted at that time. Everybody was looking for answers. Everybody was looking for funding. And we didn't get it.

So we felt, OK. So if we were on our own, we have to step up and just reinvent the wheel, basically. Try to go and obtain these necessary mechanisms to close these gaps. That is, we started going out to different businesses to try to get the refugee registration system. Then we were trying to secure the parameters, trying to coordinate – or, continue to coordinate – the resources of different – coordinate efforts of different NGOs. And, of course, to do background checks on some of the volunteers. However, with limited resources that we had at the time, we were failing. And that was heartbreaking.

So at this stage, the numbers of refugees arriving to the Ukrainian-Polish border actually dropped, and with some time these numbers dropped to the pre-war level. Which kind of –the problem sorted itself out. However, none of these key issues have been solved. That is, there are no mechanisms in case this crisis escalates tomorrow. Again, I hope it won't, for the sake of the Ukrainian nation. I hoped that they will –the refugees will not arrive to Poland at these numbers. I really hope that this won't happen.

However, the critical things that could have been solved easily are not there. And according to what Chairman Wilson said, I see that the Helsinki Commission is working towards an act that will actually fill the gaps. And I would like to express my sincere gratitude for this. And I really hope that this act will actually go through the House of Representatives and through the Senate, and it will become legislation. So thank you very much, again, for allowing me to speak. And I'm open to your questions.

WILSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Stachowski. And you, as a representative of the Polish Red Cross, Poland has just been such an extraordinary ally for Ukraine. And it's exciting to know that Poland has the second-fastest growing economy in the world. Thirty years of uninterrupted economic growth, what a model that can be for the recovery of Ukraine.

With this, we now proceed virtually with Mykola Kuleba, who is the director of Save Ukraine.

KULEBA: Dear Mr. Chairman, dear friends and supporters of Ukraine, on behalf of all Ukrainians, I am grateful for the opportunity to speak about the terrible effects of Russia's war on Ukrainian children and women, including the forced deportation of children. I'm the founder of Save Ukraine Rescue Network, which is the largest organization working in Ukraine today to rescue families and children affected by war, including returning Ukrainian children from Russia and Russian-occupied Ukrainian territories.

We managed to save more than 100,000 women and children from war zones and 131 children who were abducted by the Russians. Mr. Wilson, you had the opportunity to personally talk with the kids from there returned – who we returned to Ukraine from Russia. The Russians had already been taking Ukrainian children since they first invaded Ukraine in 2014. Almost 1 million children then ended up in the occupied territories of Crimea and Donbass. And how many of them were deported to the Russian Federation is still unknown. The children kidnapped after 2014 were later brainwashed, and now many of them even wield weapons against their fellow Ukrainians, manipulated into fighting on Russian side.

Even for a whole month before the full-scale invasion in February 2022, Russia was actively deporting people from the occupied Donetsk and Luhansk regions, according to their own figures. In that month, they relocated over 58,000 Ukrainian children. And after the full-scale invasion in 2022, the scale of these abductions increased dramatically. Now they are openly reporting the removal of Ukrainian children, but under the pretext of evacuation. Maria Lvova-Belova, who has already been indicted by the ICC, has stated that Russia has evacuated 744,000 children since its full-scale invasion. And she has also said she will not provide the Ukrainian side with any list of children.

What Russia is doing now is genocide. It is clear to us that Russians are carrying out a policy of destroying Ukrainian identity. The children we managed to return from Russia have reported to us that the Russians tried to brainwash them, constantly telling them about the greatness of Russia empire, teaching them to hate Ukraine, promising certificates for housing, education, and a successful future in Russia. They send our boys to study at military colleges. And if children refuse all these benefits, they punish and intimidate them. Russians threaten these children that they and their parents would be persecuted in Ukraine, criminal cases would be opened against them, and they would have to undergo interrogations, and even torture.

Some children thought Russia had already won the war and Ukraine no longer existed. These children have severe psychological trauma, exacerbated by the fact that they were in Russia without parents, without their loved ones who could protect them. Another serious consequence of the illegal deportation is the difficulty of restoration of trust in relationship in families. Russians took their children away and prevented family reunification for a very long time. As a result of this, children and their families were traumatized. And it could take years of them to recover.

As an example, I would like to tell you this story of a Ukrainian 16-years-old orphaned child named Sergei (sp), who was kidnapped from his foster family from occupied territory in Kharkiv region last October. He was simply stopped on the street by Russian soldiers dressed in camouflage and put in the military car, together with militants. At gunpoint, he took the kid's documents from his foster father and deported him to Russia, and Russian boarding school, and left him there. His documents were taken away by the school principal. He was constantly abused because he identified himself as Ukrainian and refused to get a Russian passport.

He tried to escape to Ukraine three times, but each time he was stopped on the Russian-Ukrainian border and turned back, until Save Ukraine Rescue Network helped him get back. But while crossing the Russian border, Serhei was hit on his ankles and feet with metal bars. During

interrogations, the Russian special services abused the boy and placed him in an isolation room. They also forced him to undress and kept him naked in a basement in front of the FSB officers, who filmed how he took all his things out of the bag.

He barely managed to escape because at that time the Wagner Group tried to stage a coup and march on Moscow, and the FSB ran into the room and shouted at him to get out. And he ran towards the Ukrainian border. And he told me that he thought he was going to die while he was running. Now he's undergoing recovery at our Hope and Healing Center and has an obsessive thought in the future to find and kill those FSB officers who abused him.

I want the whole world to know what horrible things the Russians are doing to our children. And now we also have reports of Belarus assisting Putin to take our children, even with the help, unfortunately, of the Belarusian Russian Red Cross. That's why we continue our work to return our children. That's why we create our Hope and Healing Centers, in order to heal and deprogram Ukrainian children. We continue to develop our programs and need to increase our capacity because after the liberation of the occupied territories, thousands of children will need such services.

We are grateful for U.S. assistance, and we need this help. We were happy to welcome USAID Administrator Samantha Power recently as our guest at one of our community centers, together with U.S. Ambassador Bridget Brink. They were able to hear firsthand from children saved from Russian deportation. There are hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian children remain on the territory of Russia and in the occupied Ukrainian territories. These children are crucial for the future and the reconstruction of our country.

Although we returned many children, 10 times more children are still waiting to be returned. The Ukrainian state, together with other countries, should develop a single mechanism for returning abducted Ukrainian children. But first, the international community should force Russia to provide a list of children it took out of Ukraine to inform about their location, their current condition, and their status. This is directly covered by the Geneva Convention. This is not an act of goodwill by Russia. It is their direct duty. And we ask for your help to save them. We call on the international community to do everything possible to return Ukrainian children home, and not allow their aggressor to transform them into Russian children or erase them from the face of the earth.

Save Ukraine Rescue Network continuous saving children. And right now we return to Ukraine another child from Mariupol, who just crossed the border with his older sister, and is on their way to Kyiv. Please join and support us. Save Ukraine. Thank you so much.

WILSON: Thank you very much, Director Kuleba. And it was really so inspiring in Kyiv to meet two of the children who had been rescued. And it can be done. And what an inspiration you are.

Another person who makes a real difference is Dr. James Gordon, who has, sadly, over the years had to address these issues around the world. But your background is so important as we help the people of Ukraine recover. Please.

GORDON: Thank you. Thank you so much, Chairman Wilson, and Representative Jackson Lee, and Representative Smith, for being here and for the legislation that you're moving forward.

I wanted to respond to some of what's come up this morning before I go into my presentation. First of all, what Senator Blumenthal said is absolutely true. Every child in Ukraine is traumatized. And every human being in Ukraine is traumatized. So when we look at the response, we need to have a public health response that addresses the trauma across the board that's non-stigmatizing. It is not pathological to be traumatized in this situation.

Second of all, Ambassador Van Schaack, your comment about post-traumatic growth, it is possible. It is possible, and we are seeing this already for people who've been deeply traumatized to come out on the other side stronger, wiser, more compassionate, and more committed to building the society, and to one another. We've seen this in the Middle East, in the Balkans, in Africa. And now we are beginning to see it among the people in Ukraine.

I'm going to go through some slides. I'm not going to go through all of them. All of them will be in the record. I want to touch on a few of them. Ian, thank you. This one has been touched on before. There is a – and several of the people have made clear – this war is grounded in a war crime. And the war crime is the attitude, the public statements, the propagandizing that Ukrainians are not human. They're Nazis. They're subhuman. They're vermin. They're insects. And they have to be destroyed. And their language has to be destroyed. It doesn't really exist – the culture, the nationality, the music, the art, everything.

So this is a huge threat. This is – people talking about existential threats. This is the ultimate existential threat. I showed this picture with a little girl from Irpin, which is one of the communities that the Russians occupied early in the war. Eight year old – (comes on mic) – thank you. Eight-year-old Sophia drew this. And this is a community where there were multiple massacres, where there have been rapes and massacres of children, as well as adult civilians. Wait, leave that on, please.

The child there is the representative of all the children. This is what – this is what Sophia saw on the street. A child was murdered by a Russian soldier who is covered in red. And then behind the Russian soldier, she drew Ukrainian soldier who was killing Russian soldier. We looked at this with some satisfaction for a couple of minutes, and then then she shook her head and she drew the plane overhead. And she drew the plane raining down more red on the Russian soldier. And she said, now, maybe – maybe – the Russian soldier is dead.

This uncertainty about the future, this overwhelming disregard that the Russians have for the children and for adults, is felt by everyone. And this little girl is just – she's speaking and drawing for everyone. And the same sense of uncertainty about what is going to happen that is reflected in the way she did her drawing is there in everybody I met in Ukraine. Next, please, Ian.

This is just a three-generation family from Mariupol, which of course was a destroyed city. The most vulnerable people are the most targeted. Next, please. We'll go through these slides very quickly. Essentially, what we're showing here is some of what you've heard already. And the evidence is here in the slides, and you can read it at your leisure. Thirty-five hundred schools have been severely damaged, 800 hospitals. The forcible transfer of Ukrainian children that my friend and partner Mykola Kuleba was talking about.

But there is a sense of wanting to destroy the future of Ukraine by targeting the children. And rape is a means that has been used to not only intimidate, dominate, terrorize children, boys as well as girls and women, but it's also a way in the minds of the Ukrainian – some of the Ukrainians who are doing it – of serving the Russian – greater Russian purpose, in planting their DNA in Ukrainians and having a future which will be a Russian future. The estimates of child – severe child mental health or problems are 3.5 million, maybe more, from various organizations.

But the point is that everyone is traumatized. And yes, some of those kids will need more special services. But what's needed for the whole – is a program for the whole country. Next, please. Oh, wait, let me show the picture for one sec. This is little boy. He's on his way out to Poland. There's no more danger to him or his family. I said, would you do a drawing? And the drawing he did is of the grave of his cousin who was killed in Mariupol. Next, please. Everyone is traumatized.

Justice is necessary for the people for the perpetrators, but healing is necessary for the whole country. Let me talk a little bit about that process of healing that we, among others, are engaged in. The Center for Mind-Body Medicine – and some of my colleagues who are working on or work in Ukraine, are here with me – we have been working around the world for over 25 years, working with whole populations traumatized by war, by mass shootings here in the United States, climate-related disasters. We work with both Palestinians and Israelis, many, many places. And we've trained 7,500 people.

And we've shown that our model – which is a model that is not a medical model. It's a public health model. Teaching people skills for self-awareness and self-care, creating small groups to support them. Giving them – then taking those people whom we've trained – doctors, nurses, mental health professionals, teachers, community leaders, leaders of women's groups, clergy – then helping those people bring what we've taught them to us first for themselves – because they're all traumatized – to then work with the whole population. That is the basic model.

And what we've shown is that 80 percent of the children who begin – well, The New York Times has this to say about our model, which is very nice. We do have a lot of evidence showing its efficacy. And what we've shown is that 85 percent of the children who begin a group where they learn these techniques of self-awareness and self-care, where they can share it with other people in the group, other children who've been through the same experience, 85 percent of those kids – 82 percent, I'm sorry – of those kids who begin that group, 10 weeks or 12 weeks later they no longer qualify for the diagnosis of PTSD.

No drugs. No work with individual therapy, which of course can be useful, but simply being in a group, learning the tools, understanding that they are not so different, that what has happened to them has happened to many other people. And that that doesn't mean that there's anything wrong with them. It means that they've been through a terrible experience, and they can come through it.

So next, please. We've been working in Ukraine. This is a copy of my book. I'd be very happy to give you copies of the book. It's now in Ukrainian, so we're able to give it out to everybody in Ukraine. We've been working there. I first went about a month after the 2022 invasion in February and March. I've been back five times. I've been there five times altogether.

Most recently, we began by working online with 270 Ukrainian psychologists, physicians, community leaders, teachers for a two-day emergency training, followed by four months of supervision as they took our – what we taught them – what we could teach them in two days out into their communities. We had 800 people on the waiting list. There's a huge appetite for a program, and programs, that will help the whole country to heal.

We're now in the middle of a program, next, please, sponsored by Pact, a USAID grantee, next, please, where we are bringing our approach to 138 – initial 138 psychologists, psychiatrists, mental health professional – other mental health professionals, teachers, leaders of women's groups, and organizers – people who don't have this kind of background, this kind of specialist background. We can train people who want to do this work to work with others. So we are training people who are truck drivers and farmers, and who are construction workers who are intelligent and committed to doing this work. Next, please. No, no, you've gone too far.

I just want to show you – let me just show you just a couple of pictures of the people in the group. That is a sample. We were working in Ternopil. We were originally supposed to work in Kyiv, and do the training and Kyiv, and nine days of training. Our sponsors were concerned about safety, so we went to Ternopil. And these 138 people came to this intensive nine-day training. Next, please. Part of the work – an important part of the work is in small groups. People need to come together. We've learned this from veterans here in the United States, from the rap groups of Vietnam War veterans coming together, talking about their experience. And indigenous people all over the world have always known this. So we do this. Next, please.

This is a man whose son was murdered in 2015. His son was a doctor, and his son was – had white coat on. And this is another example of a war crime. He was bending over an injured soldier and he was targeted by a sniper. This man, who is a construction worker and owns a grocery store, has organized 300 families in his region. He's working with other groups of families of fallen warriors all over the country. And he's working with the Ministry of Veterans Affairs, and we hope to be working with him. He came through our training and was profoundly trained changed by the training. He used the word “transform.” Next, please.

This is a woman working in a shelter for women in Lviv. She's working with women who were brutalized in the east. Next, please.

This is a young woman doctor who was in Bucha who hid out during the occupation who was there and who is now working with the most seriously troubled veterans. Next, please.

This is my translator, also from Bucha. Just to give you these pictures of human beings who've been through this experience, who are committed to working with the children and the adults. Next, please.

And here they are. This is post-traumatic growth, a little bit of it. These people are – have come through the workshop. They began very dour, very shut down, many of them withdrawn and this is how you see them now, and the man with the glasses is somebody we worked with during and after the war in Kosovo 1998-99 and he's back with us on our faculty.

So we're hoping to expand the work considerably. It's so good to be here and be able to talk with you and to feel your interest and receptivity and to be making the bill – to have created the bill that you're hoping to bring forward. So thank you.

WILSON: I thank each of you and it's remarkable, your testimony, and I really look forward to people around the world hearing what's being done. We're going to begin the five-minute questions now and I'm very strict on me beginning and then we'll proceed. And, indeed, I was looking forward to the hearing because I share the passion of Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee. Can you imagine bipartisan? We actually work together because of the concern about children.

But it's really – and I'm so concerned this could be – I had fully anticipated even with the leadership of Ambassador Mike Carpenter – Michael Carpenter – that this could be a negative event. No, this is inspiring, each of you. Obviously, the ambassador, my goodness, and then the Polish Red Cross, how incredible, that saved Ukraine and then, Dr. Gordon, your background, and then to have the book in Ukrainian and then the bright faces over here of individuals working with people in Ukraine, being proactive, this is really inspiring and, in fact, it really fits right in with Ambassador Markarova and that your service of presenting to the American people over and over again on national broadcasts has been so meaningful, and it really has been inspiration in what we have.

And this is something we didn't start. It was war criminal Putin who started this war. He is the one who could end it in a day by just stopping and withdrawing and restoring territorial integrity.

But the American people need to know, sadly, that this is existential for Ukraine, for America, and that what we have, sadly, is something we didn't start and that is a worldwide conflict between dictator's rule of gun opposing democracy's rule of law, and we see this first in Ukraine but we know it would spread to Moldova, Georgia, to the Baltic republics, to Poland, to – we know the threat to the people of Taiwan. We know the threat to the people of Israel and what the dictator Khamenei and the consequence of their planning ICBMs to attack the United States.

And so the people of Ukraine have really been so successful in putting Republicans and Democrats together here, even House and Senate members. Who would ever imagine? But the success of bringing the European Union together and providing over a hundred billion dollars in aid, a lot of people are not recognizing this. But the European Union has been so successful and, in fact, the American people need to know that we're number nine in terms of GDP contributions to supporting Ukraine.

Sadly, there's a misinterpretation that we're the only ones. No. I'm grateful. A country that I greatly admire – we tie with Bulgaria to be number nine to support the people of Ukraine. And then we have NATO itself in our lifetime. Particularly, Dr. Gordon, can you imagine that Finland and Sweden are now members of NATO? Never.

The industrial capabilities of Sweden and the people of Finland, who were successful in stopping an invasion in 1939, how incredible all of this is. And then the OSCE with, again, people like Ambassador Michael Carpenter and others with the resolution supporting the people of Ukraine and it's because of the inspiration of the people – the valor of the people of Ukraine.

And with that, Ambassador, what organizations do you see making the greatest difference on behalf of the children of Ukraine? Yes.

MARKAROVA: Well, you know, in this situation it will take a village, as we say, to help. Nobody can do it alone. So from the government and the help bilaterally that we receive through many programs funded by USAID, funded by different U.N. agencies or supported by private not-for-profit initiatives, all of them are doing their part and it's still not enough, from, you know, just doing the different types of therapy, helping those who already are on the ground, to simply helping children also return back to education, return back to their vaccination schedules, health-care help.

So helping children in this horrible situation is not only addressing the trauma or saving them from the initial, you know, horrible experiences, tortures, and everything else, but also returning them to normal life as much as it is possible. And that also means helping with the housing. It also means helping their parents with work or access to work.

So it's a very complex issue, actually, and that's why in the rapid recovery and reconstruction in general we're talking about all of these priorities, which start with demining and then goes to energy and then to housing and then to everything, everything, everything.

So we need everyone to step up and we need more support in each of these directions through all the organizations.

WILSON: Thank you very much.

And my time is up but I'm really grateful to now defer to the champion of persons who have suffered from human trafficking, Congressman Chris Smith.

SMITH: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I do have a lot of questions and I will have to submit some because the time will run out.

But let me just – Sebastian, if I could ask you, and I thank you for your leadership and being there right from the start. What could be done and what should be done to make sure the vetting process that – particularly when there's homes and people who are moving large numbers of people, to ensure that the police are properly trained?

And simultaneous, I would also like – Mr. Kuleba, we've met a number of times. I deeply appreciate – we all do – your work. There's got to be a sense of urgency to everything you're doing because this theft of children's identities by Putin it's not unprecedented but it's absolutely shocking. And we all know that they erase their names, they erase their – they just take everything that was personally identifiable and they make it moot and then how do you find them?

You know, and I'm just wondering if you could give any indication whether or not Samantha Power made any commitments on funding, which we can – further back we've asked that you be funded robustly for the great work you're doing with your hope and healing centers.

And, Dr. Gordon, are you collaborating at all with Mr. Kuleba or is that something that you might consider? You know, because you bring – you know, I chaired the Veterans Affairs Committee and no one did PTSD work and, of course, you've been a part of that and the VA wrote the book on it, and that – those lessons learned, obviously, need to be shared as well and when you showed those pictures of people smiling after all they've been through it shows there is hope. Maybe you could speak to that as well.

But delay is denial in terms of that funding. Sebastian, if you could maybe go first on that and as well as the ambassador.

STACHOWSKI: Thank you very much for your question. Well, we struggled so much with the vetting system for volunteers that I've been thinking really hard about this.

So you have to understand that the situation on the ground was that a lot of people came from different parts of the world. So we realized that there was a big gap in terms of the vetting system for the volunteers, and we were trying to close this initially ourselves.

So there were some mechanisms in Poland which were fairly basic but these mechanisms allowed us to just background check Polish nationals or people that were prosecuted in Poland for – well, as sex offenders. So schools use this basic system to vet people that are going on summer camps so we used that. But we soon realized that this is insufficient because we have so many international individuals that we have to screen that it's purely just not working.

So in terms of that system it would have to be global. That is, it would need to be connected to a(n) Interpol database and you need to also address different legal requirements in different countries, regions, continents. For example, in Poland, there is a data protection act. So if you're taking down credentials of individuals you need to secure it in certain –

SMITH: If I could interrupt for one second. Is the Americans – are we cooperating? We have a database that I believe is second to none called the Megan's Law. Every state has it. There's a federal database as well. So if Americans are trying to provide any kind of assistance who are unsavory and have a bad background I hope that we're being accessed to see whether or not – I mean –

STACHOWSKI: That will definitely be of great help because personally myself I tried to vet some of the U.S. nationals that appeared using different contacts with the American embassy in Poland.

But, you know, that system should be probably implemented by the U.N. because only they kind of work globally and then they have the means to do this. You know, with today's technology, like, on the technical side it shouldn't be that difficult and I think that's also this system – the vetting system should be somewhat connected to the refugee registration system so that if you register in the same place, in the same global pool – the volunteers and the refugees – and then you can with one click check who is who.

And, you know, sometimes you need to even do a background check on the refugees because if you want to know that – you really want to know, especially if they arrive to the reception points or other places where vulnerable people are, you need to know if these people have a criminal record. If they are refugees that's fine. But if they have – if they are sex offenders you need to separate them from the rest of the refugees.

So – and you also need to think about the security of the data because, like, we were really worried that for our databases where we were – where we had credentials of our volunteers, we need – we had to secure them in a way that if that conflict – touch wood – spills over the fence into Poland and that gets into the hands of Russians, that will be very dangerous. So that wherever the data is stored, it will have to be stored on very secured servers somewhere far away from the computer. And then on the second part of the question because you also asked me what could be done to train the local officers and, you know, you have – at least I can only speak to Poland because this is where I operated – you have, you know, the police, the territorial army, and other – even volunteers and other servicemen.

So there should be policies and tools that'll be at hand ready to go right away for training. There should be also people that could go and train them because I noticed on the ground that there were critical gaps on my training to the police and they were not really able to respond to human trafficking risks that we faced on the spot.

WILSON: And we now proceed the question to – for Doctor – for Director Kuleba. Thanks.

KULEBA: Thank you so much for your question.

Samantha Power was not in the position of promising specific funds but she was impressed by everything what we are doing and we are crucial and need support for our hope and

healing center for healing traumas of children who we returned from Russia, and we are very grateful USAID support because through these funds we launched our 24/7 hotline and three community centers.

But, really, we need more services – child protection services, family services – and we’re already seeing Ukraine ready to build the services all over Ukraine. We work with law enforcement. We work with local communities, and our needs is crucial. That’s why I’m asking you please help us build these services and save and rescue Ukrainian children.

Thank you so much.

WILSON: Thank you very much. And we now – it’s fitting that we proceed to, I believe, our final questions and that would be the last five minutes. I think you can’t do any better than having two superstars here with Congressman Marc Veasey or Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee. Whoever would like to proceed first.

JACKSON LEE: I would, please. Thank you.

WILSON: And good, and thank you. And, gosh, hey, to show you how important this hearing is we’ve also been rejoined by Congresswoman Victoria Spartz so this is really significant.

And so, Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee for five minutes; and then, Congressman Veasey, you have five minutes; and then Congresswoman Spartz five minutes. And we shall proceed.

JACKSON LEE: First, Mr. Chairman, I want to make sure that the Yale University School of Public Health document “Russia’s Systemic Program for the Re-education and Adoption of Ukraine’s Children” would be made part of the record. I know that it’s in our materials, but I just want to make sure it’s part of the record.

WILSON: It shall be admitted in through the record. Thank you.

JACKSON LEE: Let me thank Congressmen Veasey and Spartz for their indulgence as I proceed and, of course, acknowledging Chairman Cohen and Chairman Wilson and, of course, continued colleague in Congressman Smith on these issues.

Monday, I held a press conference in Houston on fighting human trafficking in the United States with our colleague, Wesley Hunt, and we were outraged at the description of Texas as an epicenter of human trafficking. We can imagine that human trafficking that is dastardly now juxtaposed against an open season on children in Ukraine.

And, Madam Ambassador, my time is short but as a parent and as a diplomat we’ve heard that the Ukrainian war is impacting all Ukrainian children. Children are the future of a nation. What does this do to the growth of Ukraine if its children are traumatized without any help whatsoever?

MARKAROVA: Thank you. This is one of the most crucial concerns for not only the president and the government but for everyone in Ukraine and, you know, that in general Ukraine was an aging population even, you know, before Russia invaded us in 2014.

As any European population, we went through very difficult first years following the breakup of the Soviet Union. I mean, it was great that we became independent, but it was very hard years. So we do have – we had the demographic problems even before. We now have 6 million people, primarily women and children, outside of Ukraine as refugees.

This is our productive force that we all would like to create conditions for them to return, and on top of that all our children are affected by this horrible war either directly or indirectly. So it's actually a must for us not only to win this war but to do everything possible in order to get them back to normal life, to return to the normal education and health care, to treat all of them.

As we have heard from the professionals today that we all are affected. We all need to be treated. We all need to return back to the place where we can actually flourish and rebuild Ukraine. And, I mean, we are where we are. We did not choose this.

JACKSON LEE: Thank you.

MARKAROVA: It was Russia that attacked us. But we need all the help from you in order to be able to get back.

JACKSON LEE: Thank you, Madam, for your great intense work here with us in the United States and I think you are one of the key elements of the glue that sticks us together around the fight for democracy.

Let me quickly segue, as you have just allowed me to do so. Let me also thank Save the Children, the Red Cross, and, of course, Dr. Gordon. So the Oleksandr Act that Mr. Wilson and I have teamed up together to do, let me just share with you – and, Doctor, if you will comment on the vibrancy and the cruciality of this – it deals with the United States getting intimately involved on the trauma and healing support developing programs. It deals with making sure that there is access to Ukrainian children in Russian custody. We have heard testimony that is impossible. Can't imagine these frightened children.

It provides for the unified Ukrainian registry so that these children can ultimately be reunited, and I'm picking out the crucial points. Child protective service, we know that we need to improve some of that in the United States, but to be able to have a framework of a child protective service that be developed in Ukraine. And then the meat of it, the human-trafficking measures that we should be dealing with for refugees at major refugee border crossing points to deal with what's happening to the children – human trafficking, refugee protection, trained law enforcement – is I wanted to get to the meat that we're going to be serious about these crimes that are coming about and now sanctions regarding – from the United States regarding those responsible for transfer of Ukrainian children to Russia, and then to sanctions for outright human traffickers, and of course working with the fight to protect women and children.

Would you just give me a summary of how you think this legislation will be an important tool, going forward?

GORDON: Yes. Thank you so much, Representative Jackson Lee.

I think it's really important that we convey that this is a public health perspective, that we train – we're prepared to train large numbers – several thousand people – in our method who can then share it widely in their communities and that this is a way of helping people to be – to come together, to heal from the trauma, and to move ahead together and I think this is inspiring.

To me, the Ukrainian people are incredibly inspiring – their commitment to one another, to the survival of their nationality, of their language, of their culture, and their willingness to sacrifice for each other.

What we see as we're training Ukrainian physicians, psychotherapists, teachers, leaders of women's groups, and others is that they are willing to go through the process of healing from their own trauma and they are dedicated to bringing what they've learned out to the children and families in their community.

This is – it's part of reviving the national spirit and I think we could see it happening on the ground and I think we can all be a part of that and this legislation is very important to promote that. So I want to thank you again.

JACKSON LEE: Thank you.

Sebastian, forgive me for calling you your first name. Can you quickly say how important the sanctions are, sir – how important the sanctions are that will be coming about through this bill?

STACHOWSKI: Well, I think that it will be absolutely critical because you have right now individuals that feel that they can get away with pretty much anything and, you know, the history shows that sanctions maybe don't work immediately but slowly but surely they will actually create the right environment in which the perpetrators will be, with time, prosecuted and then, ideally, if the sanctions are actually also imposed on their relatives, their (close bys ?), then as wide sanctions as possible, I think, will be in this case, first, show that this is not the right way to do, like, in Ukraine and then anywhere else in the world.

JACKSON LEE: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I yield back. Thank you for your courtesies.

WILSON: Thank you, Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee.

We now proceed to Congressman Marc Veasey from Texas.

VEASEY: Mr. Chairman, is Prosecutor General Kostin still on? He's not? He's off?
OK. OK.

I wanted to ask – you know, following the invasion of Ukraine last year I became increasingly concerned about reports of discrimination at the border of Ukraine. I know that some of the – that you guys remember the footage that we saw. It was, you know, quite – it was sad. You saw women being pushed down, being told that they couldn't get on trains to leave the Ukraine. There were students there that had been studying from Africa.

And as a result myself and Gwen Moore and Chairmen Cardin and Cohen sent a letter to the European Commission asking them to combat these efforts. Since those reports came out last year what has been the situation regarding refugee discrimination at the border? And was hoping that – I know that I wanted – is Ambassador Dyer – I don't think that they're here anymore. But if anyone could answer that question, that would be great.

MARKAROVA: I would be happy to.

WILSON: Yes.

MARKAROVA: Just to say that Ukrainian government takes any information about potential discrimination very seriously. So at the beginning of this, of course, when we had millions, literally, of people trying to get out and as soon as we have heard about any incidents both the minister of foreign affairs, the border guards, reacted very quickly, you know, and those very isolated events have been addressed right away.

We did not hear, although we monitored together with our partners from the neighboring countries together with the international organizations, of any of the violations so far but we're watching it very actively and right now we're working with a number of countries as I'm also representative to the Organization of American States, for example, to service a number of students who were in Ukraine but they returned or fled to their own countries. But because they were students we are trying to get all the documents to them and to ensure that, you know, they stay in contact with also their educational facilities, and they can either continue their education when time is appropriate or continue it somewhere else and get all the proper documentation.

So just to say, once again, that we are looking at it and taking it with very serious concerns any type of discrimination, to be honest and, you know, this is a devotion of the Ukrainian government, even though we have been attacked but also to ensure that the human rights are being upheld in Ukraine and that we also are very serious about it. Thank you.

VEASEY: Thank you very much.

Mr. Stachowski, do you have any comments on that?

STACHOWSKI: Well, I don't really have any comments on that because from my experiences I haven't really seen any discriminations.

VEASEY: From the reports that were earlier on, you know, when it first started with the students there that were from Africa, and they were being told they couldn't get on trains. There was one African woman that was pushed down and hit the back of her head and that was – you know, that was something that people saw.

STACHOWSKI: And that happened on the Polish side or in Ukraine?

VEASEY: I believe on the Ukrainian side. They were trying to leave Ukraine like a lot of people were at the time at the very infancy of the awful invasion.

STACHOWSKI: When they were leaving Ukraine and during the transfer of – so when they crossed the border and then were trying to travel on in – so that happened in Poland. Well, I'm not familiar with these incidents so I can't really speak to that.

VEASEY: Oh, thank you. I appreciate that very much.

And I also wanted to ask, just before I close on here, do you believe – I wanted to ask you, Ambassador: Do you believe that the Russians are targeting particular ethnic backgrounds when they're abducting children in Ukraine? Kind of shifting my focus here but kind of in the same area, do you think that they are actually targeting people based on a specific racial background or religion or any – or the sort of ethnic marker?

MARKAROVA: Definitely yes. They're targeting all Ukrainians whether we are White or Black, whether we are Catholic, Orthodox or Jewish or Muslim, whether we are old or – they are just targeting any Ukrainian who's –

VEASEY: Just anyone, not anybody – not anyone – you don't see any proof that they're, like, particularly going after a certain class or segment or –

MARKAROVA: Well, they're going after Ukrainians and that's very particular. So they would like to – and, again, regardless of the languages we speak or in what types of – or shapes we come in. So it's very much a genocide directed at the Ukrainian nation, which is very diverse in itself.

But then, of course, you know, they also continue to target anyone, you know, LGBTQ, any – some religion they particularly target anyone. They also target the people of beliefs. They target Christians. So, again, anyone in Ukraine. It's a genocide against anyone who wants to live independently and free on our territory.

Thank you.

VEASEY: Thank you. Thank you very much.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

GORDON: Mr. Chairman, if I could add a word to that. I have talked with people I think reliable observers, a number of them, who have seen firsthand Russian soldiers pointing their guns and killing children and the young woman whose picture – I don't think you were here – the young woman doctor from Bucha buried the body and she knows enough as a physician – she buried the bodies of children who had been tortured and raped in Bucha. Same thing happened in Kherson and I'm sure it's happened other places. So there is reliable reporting that this is a genocidal war. It is – the whole war is in a sense a war crime and is targeted at the most vulnerable, and to a significant degree at children.

WILSON: Thank you. And again, thank you, Congressman Marc Veasey, for your leadership.

And I want to thank also and recognize now Congresswoman Victoria Spartz.

SPARTZ: Thank you so much. Sorry; I have too many committees today. But it's very important – it's an important issue. And I thank the chairman for really talking about that because this is a war, you know, going to have a very, very detrimental effect on a lot of women, a lot of children.

But one issue – actually, perfect, Sebastian, you're here, because one issue – unfortunately, I didn't realize it we had the ambassador at large on trafficking on the TV when I came earlier because I had some questions for her. I wish I would have. But you were involved with Red Cross – Polish Red Cross. Were you involved in any way of helping or assisting some in dealing with this issue of human trafficking at the border crossings when – right after the invasion, when you had material – a lot of people going through? Were you involved in that, the Red Cross, the medicine?

STACHOWSKI: So primarily this is not a Red Cross' responsibility to deal with these kind of issues, but we know that there are some serious incidents. There are some serious security incidents and human-trafficking incidents. I can give you just a couple of –

SPARTZ: All right. So do you know who was actually in charge at that point, actually dealing with the issue? Since you were involved but you were not involved with this issue.

STACHOWSKI: We asked around. We asked around because there were community of interest meetings organized by the U.S. military which we attended on a regular basis. We were actually asking if there was Interpol there because we thought that maybe they would feel responsible for human trafficking, but they wouldn't show up. Then we realized that there is – actually nobody wants to take that responsibility, so we knew that there was a serious systemic gap. And that gap, in our eyes, what we could do was to talk to servicemen from Poland to bring – and also we spoke to representatives of the U.S. military because their presence would actually be very encouraging in some of the key sites, and whenever they could they showed up. We spoke to Polish police, but we realized that they were – they didn't receive the proper training. They were also rotating; like, the police officers, they were there for a couple of days coming from different parts of Poland, then they were rotating out. So they were not really prepared for the sheer size of this crisis.

So if you ask me who was really responsible for this, I don't think that there was anybody who would feel responsible. We felt responsible, and this is why we were trying to at least be able to vet the volunteers that were working for us. And then we could only do this, unfortunately, for those who were prosecuted for – as sex offenders in Poland or Polish nationals, not for the rest of the volunteers. And we spoke about this numerous times with different U.N. officials to close this gap, as well as close many other systemic gaps, but –

SPARTZ: Well, I – my observation, I was shocked and surprised, you know, what happened at the border. And you saw – you know, this is a huge opportunity for criminals to –

STACHOWSKI: Absolutely.

SPARTZ: – take advantage of very desperate people. And I was really – I couldn't believe that with all of the resources that were given and instructions were given, and I'm not sure what our agencies were doing too. And I haven't seen much changes happen, too, just recently visiting Poland and talking to that. So that is very surprising and very disturbing to me because this is a very serious issue. And I appreciate that you did what you could, but ultimately you don't have a police authority to be dealing with this issue effectively. So this is more conversations we need to have with our government, too.

And, Madam Ambassador, just a quick question for you just to understand, because every time I go, I mean, they are very serious, you know, dealing with war crimes and everything. That's a very serious issue and we need to mention it's coordinated. So I want to make sure that entities that we talk, you know, that work in – because we're talking about war crimes, and I think Madam Ambassador mentioned the entities that, you know, coordinated to make sure that this is all done. And we might need to meet with that entity. But from your perspective, who is the people really – I know that a lot of time, you know, your government needs to do but you have a lot of other issue, and some of them are very challenging issues. So who is actually handling coordination to make sure that – you know, that proper justice will be served at some point? Because with the crimes they committed, it's unheard of and unbelievable what's happening.

MARKAROVA: On the bilateral issue, the main two agencies that we work here in the administration, of course, is the Department of State on the – on general support to the efforts that our general prosecutors are doing, but also investigators – you know, the national police, the national guard, and others – but also DOJ. So we have –

SPARTZ: And who's leading that? Do we have a specific – because everyone, when I meet with them, they say, oh, no, no, no, we just help. Everybody's helping, but who is actually leading – the leading edge?

MARKAROVA: Of course – of course we are leading it because we are doing –

SPARTZ: So which is your agencies leading that?

MARKAROVA: In Ukraine?

SPARTZ: Yes.

MARKAROVA: It's the general prosecutor office.

SPARTZ: OK.

MARKAROVA: It's the minister of justice. And of course, the investigation depending

—
SPARTZ: Any entity in Europe or anywhere that want to work, they need to work directly with your prosecutor general office.

MARKAROVA: With the general prosecutor. The international aspect of it and the bilateral support, especially getting the help with the investigation, prosecution, adjudication is the general prosecution.

SPARTZ: Right. So if they're not working with him – if they're not working with him, they're not working with the right people because that's not what – when I hear – and we meet with a lot of different entities/governments and it's very all over the place. So you said if they want to work on these issues that it's coordinated, they need to work – if they're not working with him, they're not really working through proper channels.

MARKAROVA: On criminal prosecution, yes.

SPARTZ: Yeah, on war crimes.

MARKAROVA: On war crimes, absolutely.

SPARTZ: On war crimes – actually on war crimes, he handles all that.

MARKAROVA: Absolutely.

SPARTZ: OK. That's all. Thank you so much.

MARKAROVA: Thank you.

WILSON: Thank you very much, Congresswoman Spartz. And of course, it's so fitting that we would conclude with Congresswoman Spartz, who was born in the Soviet Union but very proud of her Ukrainian heritage. And what a perspective she has.

And as we conclude, I want Lilia Kolesnikova, the dear grandmother who is going to make a difference not just for her murdered grandson but for all children in the world. And then – and it was so inspiring, Oleksandr Ivanov, good gosh. Every American family, as he was in the piano recital playing “Summertime,” the American classic, but every family around the

world, that video needs to be seen as to what needs to be avoided in the future. And just – but each one of you have made such an extraordinary part of addressing, first for the children of Ukraine, but really worldwide. And goodness, Doctor, thank you for your efforts and expertise. And I'm just – in every way what a(n) inspiring situation. Gosh, the people of Poland, God bless them. How far we've come.

And with this, I would like to adjourn. And I'd like to have a – we're going to get a picture with you if you will stay seated. Thank you, and we are adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 12:57 p.m., the hearing ended.]