

UKRAINIAN CHILDREN

Russian transfer of kids amounts to ‘war crime’: UN

AFP, Geneva

Russia's forced transfer and deportation of Ukrainian children to areas under its control amounts to a war crime, UN investigators said yesterday, also warning of possible crimes against humanity.

In its first report, the high-level investigation team created by the UN Human Rights Council a year ago determined that Russia had committed a vast array of violations since its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

"Many of these amount to war crimes," the report by the so-called Commission of Inquiry said, highlighting the forced transfers of children.

"The commission has concluded that the situations it has examined concerning the transfer and deportation of children, within Ukraine and to the Russian Federation respectively, violate

international humanitarian law, and amount to a war crime," the report said.

According to Kyiv, 16,221 Ukrainian children were deported to Russia.

The investigators said they could not verify the figures but pointed to indications that Russian officials had taken measures to place transferred Ukrainian children in institutions and foster homes, and give them Russian citizenship.

The report pointed to a decree signed by Russian President Vladimir Putin facilitating the granting of Russian citizenship to some categories of children.

The report stressed that "international humanitarian law prohibits the evacuation of children by a party to the armed conflict," with few exceptions. The investigators reviewed incidents concerning the transfer of 164 children, aged four to 18, from the Donetsk, Kharkiv and Kherson regions.



New Zealand teachers and early childhood educators gather outside Wellington's Parliament House as part of a nationwide strike for better pay and conditions, in Wellington, New Zealand, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Won't meet Erdogan

Says Syria's Assad until Turkey ends its 'occupation'

AFP, Moscow

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad has said he will only meet President Recep Tayyip Erdogan if Turkey withdraws troops from northern Syria, according to a Russian media interview published yesterday.

His comments come one day after he met Russian President Vladimir Putin, who is seeking to repair ties between Erdogan and Assad severed after the Syrian war broke out in 2011.

"(Any meeting) is linked to our reaching the point when Turkey is ready -- fully and without any uncertainty -- for a complete withdrawal from Syrian territory," Assad told Russia's state-run RIA-Novosti news agency.

The Syrian leader, who arrived in Moscow on Tuesday, demanded that alongside a withdrawal Turkey end "support for terrorism", a reference to rebel groups that control regions of northern Syria.

"This is the only way in which my meeting with Erdogan could take place," Assad was cited as saying.

"What significance would any kind of meeting have -- and why organise it -- if it doesn't lead to a conclusion of the war in Syria?" he added.

China's brokering of pact ‘a good thing’

Says Blinken on Saudi-Iranian deal; UN says the pact opens door to peace in Yemen

AFP, Addis Ababa

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Wednesday offered guarded praise to China for brokering a deal between rival Middle East heavyweights Iran and Saudi Arabia, saying it could benefit the region.

"From our perspective, anything that can help reduce tensions, avoid conflict and deter in any way dangerous and destabilising actions by Iran is a good thing," Blinken told reporters on a visit to Ethiopia.

"I think it's valuable that countries, where they can, take action, take responsibility for advancing security, for advancing peaceful relations," he said.

China, a major oil importer, last week concluded the deal to restore relations between Iran, a US foe since the 1979 Islamic revolution, and Saudi Arabia, whose longtime partnership with Washington has frayed over human rights concerns by President Joe Biden.

The United States frequently denounces China's role in the world as destabilising, though it has also said that Beijing needs to take greater responsibility in international affairs if it wants to be a major power.

The surprise rapprochement between

Saudi Arabia and Iran should offer momentum toward peace by the warring parties in Yemen after eight years of conflict, UN officials said Wednesday.

Hans Grundberg, the UN Secretary General's Special Envoy for Yemen, urged the parties to the conflict to "seize the opportunity" of this diplomatic breakthrough in the Gulf.

"Intense diplomatic efforts are ongoing at different levels to bring the conflict in Yemen to an end," Grundberg told the Security Council via videolink.

The Swedish diplomat was in Tehran this week, while his US counterpart Timothy Lenderking visited Riyadh and Oman on Tuesday, according to the State Department.

Grundberg welcomed a new "regional and international diplomatic momentum" to find a peaceful settlement in Yemen.

The 2014 seizure of the capital Sanaa by Iranian-linked Huthi rebels led to a 2015 intervention by neighboring Saudi Arabia, which leads a military coalition



supporting Yemeni government forces.

The war has since claimed hundreds of thousands of lives -- direct and indirect victims -- and displaced millions. A truce in force since April 2022 and renewed twice expired in October without the Yemeni government and the Huthis reaching an agreement to renew it.

But the situation on the ground has remained relatively calm for nearly a year.

Facing the press at the UN in New York, Stephane Dujarric, spokesman for Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, also welcomed the rapprochement between Riyadh and Tehran.

"This is clearly an opportunity (...) It is a big deal, to put it in diplomatic terms," he said. "We hope that this creates a climate that is conducive to enshrining a political path towards peace in Yemen."

However, this Iranian-Saudi detente will not bring a magic solution to Yemen, where the influence of the two regional powers on the protagonists is only one dimension of the conflict, analysts warn.

LIBYAN SITE 2.5 tonnes of uranium missing

AFP, Vienna

The UN's nuclear watchdog said two and a half tonnes of natural uranium had gone missing from a Libyan site and "may present a radiological risk," according to a confidential report seen by AFP yesterday. International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspectors on Tuesday found that "10 drums containing approximately 2.5 tonnes of natural uranium in the form of uranium ore concentrate... were not present" as previously declared at the location, it said. The site "is currently not under the regulatory control of Libya's state authority," the report said. The IAEA will conduct "further activities...to clarify the circumstances of the removal of the nuclear material" from the site and investigate the material's "current location".

Poland breaks up Russian spy ring

AFP, Warsaw

Polish counter-intelligence has dismantled a Russian spy ring that gathered information on military equipment deliveries to Ukraine via the EU member, Poland's interior minister said yesterday. "The ABW counter-intelligence agency has arrested nine people suspected of working for the Russian secret service," Interior Minister Mariusz Kaminski told reporters. "The suspects had been conducting espionage activities against Poland and preparing acts of sabotage on behalf of Russian intelligence services," he added.



A petrol bomb explodes near riot police as they clash with protesters during a 24-hour nationwide strike over the country's deadliest train disaster last month, in Athens, Greece, yesterday. Flights to and from Greece were grounded, ships remained docked at ports, and public services and state schools were closed as workers joined the 24-hour strike called by Greece's largest labour unions, GSEE and ADEDY.

PHOTO: REUTERS

