



Norwegian
Helsinki Committee

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Foreign Minister Espen Barth Eide
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Ukraine: Proposal for Norwegian political and diplomatic support to the People First campaign

Dear Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Støre,

We hope this letter finds you well.

These are demanding times for anyone engaged in international politics, not least those in charge of the policies of a small democratic nation that experiences war in its neighbourhood and works to see a solution based on international law. We commend Norway for having stepped up its support for Ukraine.

An essential aspect of NHC's extensive work in Ukraine is to support Ukrainian civilians who suffer from the war and its consequences. Civilians in Russian captivity form a particularly vulnerable group, and we appreciate that Norway is working together with Ukraine and Canada in the so-called Working Group 4 to support the identification and release of illegally deported children, civilian prisoners and prisoners of war in Russia and Russian-occupied territories. In line with the mandate of this Working Group, we want to raise a few questions with you as a member of the **People First Campaign** (<https://people1st.online/>), a joint effort by Ukrainian, Russian and international human rights organisations to influence the peace negotiations.

The People First Campaign's demands

The goal of the People First campaign is to underline that any peace deal must prioritise the release of Ukrainian civilians in Russian captivity as well as political prisoners in the Russian Federation.

Among the central demands of the campaign is that

- *All Ukrainian civilians*, captured and illegally detained by Russian forces, including those sentenced by Russian courts, be released following international law and allowed to return home.
- All illegally transferred or deported children must be returned.
- Those whose homes are in Russian-controlled areas must be allowed to leave for Ukrainian government-controlled areas of the country, should they wish to do so.

A special independent international mechanism should be established to facilitate these processes, monitor their compliance with international humanitarian law, and ensure regular, transparent reporting on progress, including updates on the release of prisoners and adherence to humanitarian standards.

Russia must provide immediate full access to all the captives and all illegally transferred or deported children for the UN agencies and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

How the Norwegian Government can help

The core of these demands is integrated into the Ukrainian official framework for peace negotiations with Russia. However, knowing the US's vital role in facilitating and framing these negotiations, *we want to ask you, with this letter, to influence US officials to include the release of Ukrainian civilians in Russian captivity as a priority in the peace negotiations.*

We think that the release of Ukrainians who have not been accused or convicted of any crime by Russian authorities is a demand that no one would refuse, regardless of their view of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine. Even states that hesitate in condemning Russia's aggression should not be against the release of civilians who are protected by unambiguous provisions of international humanitarian law. If the US brings this to the negotiation table, it may receive support from all corners of the world. The leaders of Brazil, India, Turkey, and China may favour this move, and their view is important for Putin.

While release is essential and should be prioritised for all Ukrainian hostages in Russian captivity, certain groups are more vulnerable than others, such as ill and elderly persons, and persons held in severe conditions. The organisations involved in the People First Campaign will develop lists of individuals belonging to such groups, and we will ensure that they will be shared with Norway's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The situation with Ukrainians *convicted* in Russia for war-related activities is more difficult. These are persons convicted for specific actions against the Russian troops, various security agencies or Russian or pro-Russian officials. There will be little interest, if any, by the Putin regime in letting them go, and nationalist groups will criticise it. Therefore, extra measures may be needed to achieve their release and return to Ukraine. One proposal is to simultaneously release collaborators convicted of serious offences in Ukraine who want to go to Russia.

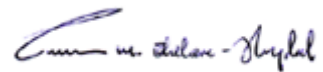
We thank you for your attention to this letter, in which we ask you to make efforts to influence the US negotiation team and, ultimately, US President Trump to include the proposals of the People First Campaign.

We believe Norway is in a strong position to increase attention from the US team to the situation of Ukrainian civilians in Russian captivity and find ways to ensure their release.

With our best regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Berit Lindeman'.

Berit Lindeman
Secretary General

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Gunnar M. Ekeløve-Slydal'.

Gunnar M. Ekeløve-Slydal
Deputy Secretary General