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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6225

June 10, 2022

The Honorable Antony J. Blinken
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20520

The Honorable Samantha Power
Administrator of United States Agency for
International Development
U.S. Agency for International Development
1300 Pennsylvania Ave. NW
Washington, DC 20004

Dear Secretary Blinken and Administrator Power:

As Vladimir Putin continues his brutal attack on the Ukrainian people, we are deeply concerned for the safety of children with disabilities across Ukraine, particularly those living in residential institutions. While millions of Ukrainians are fleeing ongoing violence, many children with disabilities remain trapped and abandoned in institutions. Recent reports draw attention to the plight of children living in horrific conditions, largely left out of international relief efforts and evacuation plans. We urge the administration to take immediate steps to identify the needs of children with disabilities in Ukraine, facilitate their access to life-saving aid, and support their safe evacuation.

Prior to the conflict, more than 100,000 children were living in residential institutions across Ukraine. Since the start of the war, some of these children have successfully been evacuated, but many, particularly those with severe disabilities, remain in institutions. Large numbers of children in Ukraine's institutions are simply unaccounted for and those who have been released may not have a plan for their continued care, access to necessary medications, or follow-up services to ensure they are safe and receiving care. Initial reports also indicate that some children who have been released may be missing and abandoned. Children who have the highest care needs are frequently being placed in already-overcrowded and under-resourced institutions in western Ukraine where reports reveal that they often have limited access to life-saving medication and care. Despite these urgent needs, many children with disabilities lack assistance and evacuation options.

Given the extraordinary vulnerability of children with disabilities across Ukraine, we urge the administration, working with the international community, to swiftly take the following steps:

- **Implement a targeted process to identify the location of children with disabilities in institutions across Ukraine, including children who have been released, and seek to assess their needs.**
- **Ensure that children with disabilities are provided with immediate access to humanitarian assistance** and that all implementing partners factor their unique needs into their responses. This includes providing resources for those who are unable to evacuate and must shelter in place.

- **Facilitate access for children with disabilities to humanitarian corridors and ensure they are included and prioritized in ongoing evacuation plans.** Whenever possible, children with disabilities residing in institutions should receive assistance so they can be reunited with their families or placed in foster families to ensure greater individualized care and protection within a family environment.

For too long, the needs of children with disabilities have been an afterthought in the international response to conflict and humanitarian emergencies. As the war rages on in Ukraine, we fear that these children will be left behind if there is not intentional planning to include them in relief and evacuation efforts. In carrying out this work, our implementing partners must work closely with civil society organizations with expertise on disability rights to help identify, reach, and protect persons with disabilities. As the United States leads international efforts to respond to the crisis in Ukraine, we must not abandon people with disabilities. We urge you to take immediate steps to address these concerns.

Sincerely,



Robert Menendez
Chairman



Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator