

*Statement by the Czech Republic and Slovakia*

*UN Security Council Arria-formula Meeting on: “Addressing the Abduction and Deportation of Children During Armed Conflict: Concrete Steps for Accountability and Prevention”*

28 April

Mr President,

I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of a group of two states, Czechia and Slovakia. We also align ourselves with the statements of the European Union and with the statement delivered by Canada on behalf of the group of states.

We welcome the convening of this this Arria-formula meeting, as this global problem undoubtedly requires attention of the Security Council, which in its Resolution 2225 (2015) added the abduction of children during armed conflict to the list of crimes to be closely monitored.

The forcible transfer and deportation of children that are happening in many parts of the world are clear violations of the children’s rights and of the international law, including humanitarian law. We strongly condemn these reprehensible acts whose perpetrators must be held accountable.

There is ample evidence that these crimes are unfortunately currently occurring in large numbers as part of the ongoing Russian Federation’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine outlined in its main findings that there was evidence about forced transfers and deportations of Ukrainian children to the Russian Federation. According to the authorities of Ukraine more than 19 thousand children have been illegally transferred to Russia since the beginning of the war.

We call on the Russian Federation to immediately halt forced transfers and deportations, to return the children to their families or legal guardians and to grant to the UN entities the access to information on forcibly transferred children in order to facilitate their safe return.

Unlawful deportation or transfer of population, including children, during an armed conflict, constitutes a grave breach of the Geneva Convention, and thus a war crime under the customary international law. Czechia and Slovakia support efforts aimed to ensure that perpetrators of these crimes are held accountable, in particular the ongoing investigation of the ICC into the situation in Ukraine. In this sense, we welcome the issuance of the recent two arrest warrants by the International Criminal Court and we will follow closely the further proceedings while respecting independence of the Court and our obligations stemming from the Rome Statute.

Mr. President,

All parties to armed conflict must prevent violations and abuses against children, including their abduction and deportation, and ensure accountability of perpetrators. We expect the Security Council to take action to protect children worldwide and not remain silent in the face of grave violations of their rights, wherever they occur.

I thank you.