

U.S. Blasts Moscow for 'Forced Deportations' of Ukrainians to Russia

By [AFP](#)

July 13, 2022



U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken. **U.S. Department of State**

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken accused Russia Wednesday of forcibly deporting up to 1.6 million Ukrainians to Russia, accusing Moscow of a deliberate criminal operation to depopulate parts of Ukraine.

In a statement a day before the Ukraine Accountability Conference in the Hague on alleged war crimes in Ukraine, Blinken said Moscow is conducting a "filtration" operation to relocate Ukrainians from the occupied east and south to areas deep inside Russia.

"The unlawful transfer and deportation of protected persons is a grave breach of the Fourth Geneva Convention on the protection of civilians and is a war crime," Blinken said.

He said that estimates from sources including the Russian government itself indicate that from 900,000 to 1.6 million Ukrainian citizens have been taken from their homes into Russia,

including to isolated areas in the Russian Far East.

The number includes some 260,000 children, some of whom are being deliberately separated from parents to be put up for adoption in Russia, Blinken said.

He said the filtration program appears to have been planned early and matches similar operations that Russia undertook in other wars, including in Chechnya.

"President Putin's 'filtration' operations are separating families, ✖confiscating Ukrainian passports, and issuing Russian passports in an apparent effort to change the demographic makeup of parts of Ukraine," he said.

Blinken said it is "imperative" to hold the Russians accountable.

"This is why we are supporting Ukrainian and international authorities' efforts to collect, document, and preserve evidence of atrocities," he said.

The one-day Ukraine Accountability Conference on Thursday is being hosted by Netherlands Foreign Minister Wopke Hoekstra, International Criminal Court Prosecutor Karim Khan, and EU Commissioner Didier Reynders.

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