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Russia Returns 9 Ukrainian Children With Help From Qatar

September 26, 2024



Maria Lvova-Belova and Qatari Ambassador Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani. **Maria Lvova-Belova / Telegram**

Authorities in Moscow returned nine Ukrainian children with the help of Qatari mediators, Russia's presidential commissioner for children's rights, Maria Lvova-Belova, announced Thursday.

Lvova-Belova posted photos on Telegram showing her alongside Qatari Ambassador Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani, speaking to the children at the Qatari Embassy in Moscow.

"There are eight boys, ages 12 to 17, and one 17-year-old girl. She had been living with her grandmother in Crimea but wanted to reunite with her mother in Kyiv, so we facilitated her return," Lvova-Belova wrote.

She added that her office has helped return 80 children from Ukraine and third countries, as well as 13 children from families with relatives in Russia. Lvova-Belova also thanked Qatari mediators for their support.

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AFP, citing Qatari officials, later reported that four Russian children were also returned as part of the negotiations. However, Kyiv disputed that report, saying that "Ukraine has not kidnapped and does not hold Russian children on its territory, nor does it prevent their return to Russia if they are on our territory."

Ukraine's Ombudsman Dmytro Lubinets said no "exchange of children" took place, accusing Western media outlets of "promoting Russian narratives."

"I ask Ukrainian and international journalists not to spread more Russian propaganda and contact official sources," he wrote on Telegram

Since July 2023, Qatar has helped bring back scores of Ukrainian children taken to Russia and occupied territories. Kyiv accuses Moscow of unlawfully taking over 19,000 Ukrainian children since the full-scale invasion, a claim the Russian authorities deny.

Fewer than 400 children have been returned to Ukraine so far. In April, through Qatari mediators, Ukraine submitted a list of 561 children whose return it is seeking from Russia.

Last year, the International Criminal Court issued arrest warrants for President Vladimir Putin and Maria Lvova-Belova, accusing them of unlawfully deporting children from Ukraine.

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