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Satellite Images Locate Ukrainian Kids Abducted by Russia – Lab

By AFP

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A view of the Kherson Regional Orphanage in the Russian-occupied village of Voskresenskoye. **Alexei Konovalov / TASS**

Researchers at a Yale University lab in the United States are using satellite imagery to locate Ukrainian children abducted by Russia, and have uncovered 210 re-education and military camps housing some of them, the lab's director told AFP.

The Humanitarian Research Lab (HRL) was tasked by the U.S. State Department in 2022 with assessing the number of children displaced by Russian authorities and the scope of the phenomenon, explained lab director Nathaniel Raymond during a visit to Stockholm for a seminar on the issue at Sweden's parliament on Monday.

Initially, Raymond thought the task seemed impossible.

"How do you find concealed kids protected by Russia's security services? In a kidnapping case

where all we have is the internet and satellites?" he said.

The answer came after a gaffe by the Russians: local Russian officials posted selfies of themselves with some of the Ukrainian children.

"Local officials wanting to curry the favor of the Kremlin took over-the-shoulder selfies of them on the buses with the kids."

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"The super funny part of the story" is that they forgot to deactivate the geolocation services on their phones.

"And so we extracted the latitude and longitude of the position of the officials when they were taking a selfie," he explained.

"And then we began to see in the photographs that we could identify the devices, including their Apple Watches. And then we started to dig," he said.

The information they got was shared with Ukrainian authorities.

Since then, by analyzing all other available information, including official photos published by Russian authorities, the HRL has uncovered the existence of 210 re-education and military camps across Russia, where some of the children are being held.

The lab estimates that a total of around 36,000 children have been abducted by Russia.

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Russian authorities stopped publishing such information online after the International Criminal Court issued an arrest warrant in 2023 against President Vladimir Putin for the "unlawful deportation" of thousands of Ukrainian children.

"They begin to try to clean up the crime scene. And they're moving the kids," he said.

The fate of these children should be a top priority in the current negotiations aimed at ending the conflict, Raymond stressed.

The HRL risks having to shut operations by the end of the year due to funding cuts announced by the Trump administration, and has therefore transferred all its data to Europol.

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