

Ecological Identity

How Environment Shapes Personality



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The Fourth Summit
of First Ladies
and Gentlemen



Olena Zelenska,
the First Lady of Ukraine

Wars, ecological disasters, disinformation, and an increase in mental health problems are just some of the global issues facing the world today. Even adults find it difficult to overcome these challenges, but for children and adolescents, they are critical.

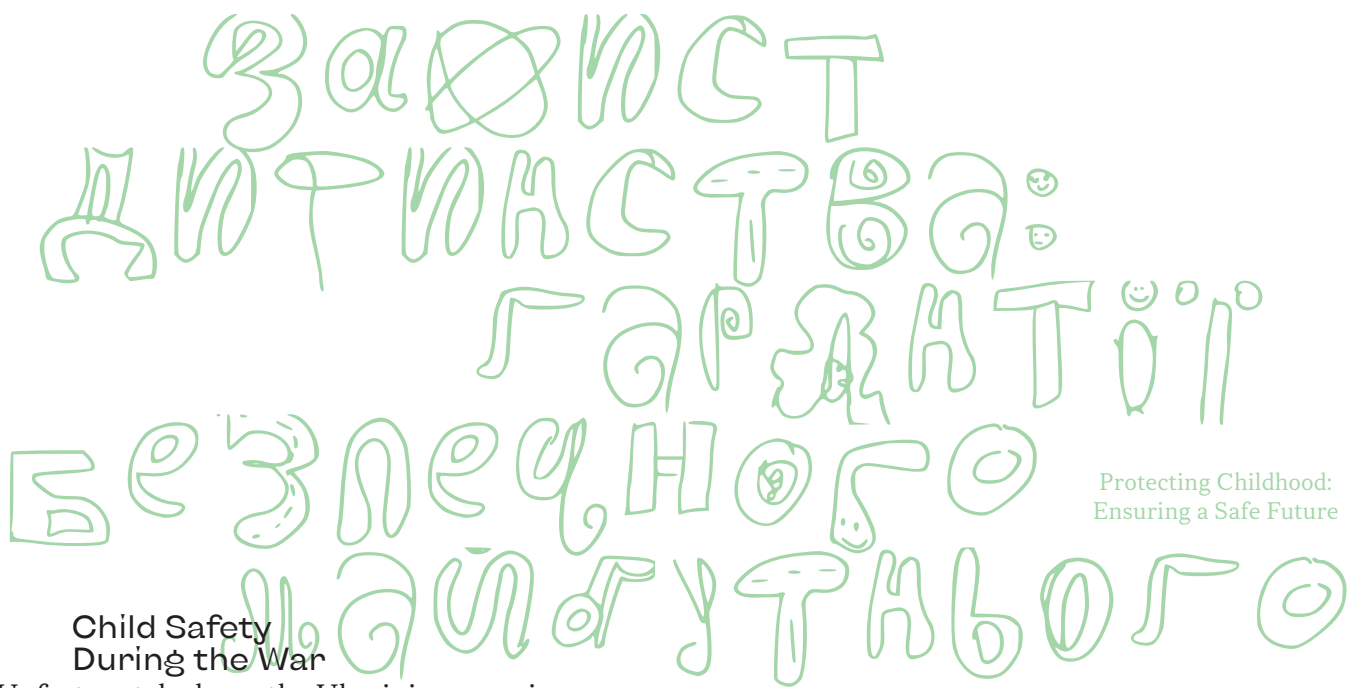
Childhood is fragile and delicate. It requires care and attention because the physical, mental, and emotional health obtained during this period shapes a person for life.

Children are just beginning to explore the world, searching for a sense of self, gaining knowledge, and forming connections with other people. Still, the global state of the world forces them to grow up quickly. How they respond to circumstances with resilience and courage and take responsibility for their loved ones is admirable, yet adults must be adults. And therefore, they must fulfill their duty: to protect children, to make every effort to unlock their full potential, and to create necessary conditions for their well-being.

That is why the theme we have chosen for the Fourth Summit of First Ladies and Gentlemen is 'Protecting Childhood: Ensuring a Safe Future.'

Together with international experts and public representatives, we are addressing the key challenges faced by children during four panel discussions along with environmental threats as a fifth, cross-cutting dimension of safety. We seek practical solutions to ensure a safe future.

Speech of the First Lady of Ukraine



Child Safety During the War

Unfortunately, here, the Ukrainian experience is central, but we discuss how children globally suffer from military conflicts and how their childhoods are destroyed by shelling, occupation, and deportation. We address critical issues, such as child recruitment and indoctrination—in other words, the systematic imposition of hostile ideas on children in order not only to abduct them physically but to steal their very identity. And, of course, holding war criminals accountable and establishing the necessary legal mechanisms to protect children is an urgent issue as well.

Child Safety in the Family

Here we examine the challenges parents face, especially during wartime, and how various parenting approaches impact the development of a child's personality and human capital in general. We discuss state mechanisms that support families and parenting, as well as the importance of mental health care in the family environment.

Child Safety at School

We explore how military conflicts and natural disasters affect both the access to education and its quality. We focus on physical and psychological well-being in schools and on fostering leadership in children who will later, as adults, shape a safe environment in the world.

Child Safety in Cyberspace

We examine the issues of privacy, online fraud, disinformation, and data fabrication, along with the risks and benefits of artificial intelligence for children.

At the Summit, we also present the large-scale sociological survey conducted in 15 countries on the topic: 'Protecting Childhood: Dimensions of Safety for the Young Generation.' Together, we analyze these results and discuss practical solutions that can be implemented globally.

This year's Summit also features the 'Safe Environment for Children' dimension presented through interactive exhibitions, podcasts, and more. The Summit of First Ladies and Gentlemen has undergone significant changes, evolving from an annual event into a permanent global platform. This expansion has allowed us to broaden our range of participants and the geography of our community, giving us even more tools to achieve practical results. Previous Summits have already proven their effectiveness. For instance, on the sidelines of the Second Summit in 2022, which was a response to the unprecedented Russian invasion, we raised \$6.2 million for 92 ambulances. At the Third Summit in 2023, we launched an international medical partnership, which has now grown to 44 partnerships in less than a year. Doctors are collaborating, learning from each other, and jointly performing unique surgeries. Lives are being saved.

So, I am pleased to welcome you to the Fourth Summit of First Ladies and Gentlemen in Kyiv. The safety of children is the responsibility of every adult. Let us be worthy of our children.
*Olena Zelenska,
the First Lady of Ukraine*

Reference: The Summit of First Ladies and Gentlemen was founded by the wife of the President of Ukraine, Olena Zelenska. Launched in 2021, it serves as an international dialogue platform for the spouses of world leaders to share experiences and implement joint projects for global well-being.

Speech by Youth

Supported by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in Ukraine

We, the youth of Ukraine, are facing challenges that require our determination and unity.

Our faith in the principles of international cooperation to protect the environment and fight climate change remains unshakable.

Given the important international agreements and resolutions confirming the need to preserve nature, we realize that the realities of war and climate change demand our bold actions and conscious decisions. Our youthful years are not only marked by the tragic circumstances of war, but come at a time when the environment is deteriorating and being destroyed daily, which seriously threatens natural and human systems around the world—because ecology has no borders.

We reaffirm our commitment to the fundamental purposes of the United Nations: the maintenance of peace and security, the development of friendly relations among nations, and international cooperation to solve global problems. Ukraine has been experiencing the environmental consequences of the war that began in 2014 for a long time. The International Court of Justice clearly emphasizes that the environment is a vital space for our health and future generations.

Our future is determined by today's decisions.

We contribute to strengthening environmental protection measures following international treaties, such as the Basel Convention (1989), the Convention on Biological Diversity (1993), the Ramsar Convention (1971) and others.

We want the international community to implement these measures at the United Nations Climate Change Conference. Climate change exacerbates inequality and threatens fundamental human rights. Ecocide—the destruction of the environment by humans—and war crimes against the environment lead to serious consequences, such as the displacement of wildlife and the diminution of biodiversity. The war in Ukraine, which has been going on since 2014, has increased our carbon footprint and worsened the state of the environment. The state parties of the Rome Statute (1998) must

criminalize ecocide at the national and international levels and condemn the military actions as a threat to the ecology of the Eastern European region. It is important to conduct a thorough investigation of the Kakhovka dam destruction as a war crime.

While evidence shows that military conflicts deepen environmental degradation and contribute to climate change, in Ukraine the war has destroyed about three million hectares of forests, threatened the extinction of more than 600 species of animals and 750 species of plants, and left 156,000 km² of Ukrainian territory mined. The state parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change must recognize these facts and take measures to minimize the negative environmental impact of armed conflicts. On the other hand, it is important for the Ukrainian Government to ensure that national legislation complies with international obligations and enables freedom of expression and peaceful assemblies for human rights defenders and activists. Reviewing laws is a crucial step, namely the ones that allow the prosecution of activists and reaffirm the implementation of the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights.

Concerning the rise of sea levels and the possible flooding of low-lying states, it is necessary to review the mechanism of financing the Fund for the Coverage of Losses and Damage, taking into account global commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Every day matters. Every vote counts. Every decision is crucial. Together, we can change the world in which the next generations of humanity will live.

It is necessary to implement effective measures to prevent environmental violations and ensure transparency in the financing of climate projects. It is important to create a system of measurable indicators to track actions locally and ensure the phase-out of fossil fuels by 2050. Coordination in environmental monitoring and data management is crucial. It is recommended to include the issue of the carbon footprint of military operations in the agenda of the Conference of the Parties. This includes the development of a system for monitoring carbon emissions from military operations and ensuring transparency in climate data management.

It is crucial to involve the youth of Ukraine in the development of the Updated Nationally Determined Contribution of Ukraine to the Paris Agreement (NDC 3.0), to develop effective mechanisms for taking into account the interests of children and youth in the development and implementation of Ukraine's climate policy, and to create the preconditions for coordination with representatives of youth organizations to monitor the implementation of Ukraine's climate policy for the years 2025 to 2030.

To ensure a global standard on teaching and learning goals for greening education at all levels, including lifelong learning, UN Member States should join the Greening Education Partnership initiative and sign the Declaration on Education and Climate Change. We also encourage the presence of youth representatives in national delegations and the implementation of the UNICEF Declaration on Children, Youth, and Climate Actions to promote the involvement of children and young people in climate change actions.

We, the youth of Ukraine, declare our determination and readiness to act in defence of our future. Our future depends on the decisions we make today.

This speech incorporates the conclusions of the consolidated Youth Statement, based on the Local Conference of Youth (LCOY) Ukraine 2024. The Statement was formed by more than 50 young voices from over 20 different regions of the country, united by the desire to create a brighter and more stable future for Ukraine.



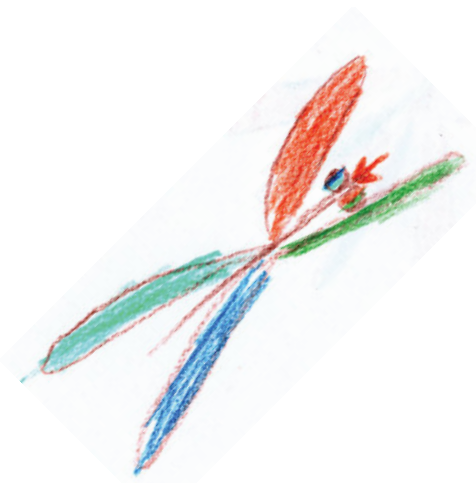
Ivanivka, Chernihiv region
July 2023



Chornomorsk, Odesa region
July 2024

“Contact with the cultural and natural elements of one’s native environment contributes to the formation of cultural identity and personal self-awareness. This connection provides a basis for self-identification and helps in adapting to social norms and values.”

*Daniel R. Williams and Jerry J. Vaske
‘Environmental Context and Personal Identity:
How the Place Shapes Self-Concept’*



How Nature Shapes Our Future

Environmental dimension

According to neurobiologists and doctors worldwide, even a short-term stay outdoors helps to reduce cortisol and improve cognitive abilities. In his work ‘The Restorative Benefits of Nature: Toward an Integrative Framework’, Stephen Kaplan writes, *“Contact with natural environments, including observing the swaying of leaves and the surface of water, has proved to have positive effects on cognitive functions, including increased attention and memory span. Nature helps to reduce cognitive load and has a positive effect on emotional well-being.”*

If the adult brain, i.e. the fully developed brain, reacts so actively to observations in nature, how does nature affect children and youth?

Environment is one of the determining factors of the children and youth’s physical and mental health. But during wartime, this environment is being destroyed.

Destruction of the Ukrainian Environment as a Result of the War

The ongoing war is destroying the Ukrainian environment. The country is losing ecosystems and unique nature reserves. At the same time, it is losing access to clean air and black soil, fields, rivers and parks—everything that shapes future generations and affects our health.

There are 13 national parks, eight nature reserves and two biosphere reserves on 26 per cent of non-government-controlled areas of Ukraine. There are four national parks and four nature reserves in the newly accessible areas of the Kyiv, Kherson and Donetsk regions.

Explosives contaminate Ukrainian soil with heavy metals, sulfur and nitrogen. The State Environmental Inspectorate has calculated that in the first 10 months of the full-scale war, more than 280,000 m² of soil was contaminated with hazardous substances. This area is larger than that of Great Britain. In some frontline areas, the level of heavy metals in the soil could reach up to 25 times the normal rate.

Due to these environmental crimes, Ukrainian children and youth are losing their opportunity for safe contact with the natural environment and access to its resources and diversity. It could be said that the new generation of Ukrainians are living through specific traumatic circumstances that are detrimental to their physical and mental health.

Have you ever tried escaping into nature to get rid of stress and anxiety? This desire is backed up by science.

Air Pollution and Mental Development

More than 20 per cent of Ukraine’s forests—over one million hectares—have already been damaged by the hostilities. Parts of these forests are mined, other parts have been physically destroyed by hostilities and explosives, and the rest has simply burned down. But we are not only losing the ‘planet’s lungs’—over the first 12 months of the war, greenhouse gas emissions amounted to 120 million tons of carbon dioxide equivalent.

Ukrainian children are breathing in these pollutants, which puts them at higher risk of developing mental health conditions. According to Valeriia Palii, PhD and psychologist, the air pollution caused by the by-products of burning—in particular, particles and substances that cross the blood-brain barrier—has a toxic effect on brain tissue, can cause serious cognitive impairment, and can significantly affect the mental health of children and youth.

Natural Conditions as a Marker of Emotional State

The ability to see and appreciate the beauty of the environment, as well as interact with it, helps children to heal and overcome negative emotions. Even color matters—green spaces provide a sense of balance and harmony, stability and integrity. However, many Ukrainian children and youth are forced to observe ruined colorless landscapes.

Nature also supports the development of emotional resilience and creates conditions for deep emotional relaxation, which is essential for overall mental health.

Building Trust in the World Through Connecting With Nature

Contact with the natural environment allows the younger generation to feel safe and secure—the calm rhythm of nature provides a sense of stability. Connection with nature stimulates curiosity, helping to form a positive attitude towards new experiences.

Observation of animals and plants fosters empathy, which is the basis for building harmonious and trusting relationships with people. Nature teaches a child about the cyclical aspects of life, which helps to develop a healthy perception of change.

Nature also instills a sense of responsibility for the environment and helps us to understand the importance of preserving natural resources and protecting ecosystems.

Nature of the Native Land as a Factor of Self-Identification

The stronger a child’s connection to nature, the more secure, grounded and self-assured they feel. More than 3 million Ukrainian children and youth will not experience this because they have left their homelands due to the hostilities.

Changes in the natural environment cause emotional pain and disorientation—children who have been forced to flee feel devastated. Also, changing their usual environment can provoke a long-term release of cortisol, which affects digestion, impairs memory, suppresses the immune system and causes sleep disorders.

Just as plants need water, light and soil to grow, children and youth need a beneficial ecological environment for their harmonious development.



As a result of the ongoing war, Ukraine’s nature has already suffered significant damage, with serious consequences for the physical and mental health of the younger generation. Along with the destruction of natural landscapes, the opportunity for children and youth to support healthy development and build a positive self-identity, as well as trust in the world around them, is disappearing. Even after the war is over, it will take decades to restore endemic conditions and bring nature back to its former state.

That’s why we have to act decisively now, so that we don’t lose what can still be saved and ensure a healthy future for the next generations.

35%
of Europe's
biodiversity
is concentrated
in Ukraine

Of more than 70,000 different species of living organisms, many are unique and found only here. It is particularly disappointing to realize that the largest number of such rare species are found in areas where the war is currently raging. The so-called "centres of endemism"—i.e., the regions where the largest number of unique species are found—are located in Crimea, on the Donetsk ridge, in the area of the Cretaceous Mountains of Slobozhanshchyna, and the canyons of the Southern Buh and Dniester rivers.

Twenty-one plant species are found only there and nowhere else worldwide. We have no guarantee that these plants will not be destroyed, or have not already ceased to exist as a result of the hostilities.

Exhibition Following the Steppes: From the Crimean Slopes to the Luhansk Expanses



Creation process for the big ceramic artifact
'Centaurea taliewii'

In working to ensure a safe future, it is crucial to focus on the impact of ecocide and the destruction of Europe's natural biodiversity on the new generation. UNICEF Ukraine, together with the Cultural Platform Zakarpattya NGO and Ukrainian youth, presents the 'Safe Environment for Children' dimension at the fourth Summit of First Ladies and Gentlemen in Ukraine through the exhibition 'Following the Steppes: From The Crimean Slopes to The Luhansk Expanses', which explores the relationship between the environmental challenges of war and the well-being of the next generation.

The creative installation, featuring five pavilions, reveals the Ukrainian steppe landscapes through the unique nature reserves. Each pavilion demonstrates the natural and cultural value of these areas that are currently non-government-controlled as of September 2024, from the mountainous Crimean amphitheatres to the vast expanses of the Luhansk steppes.

The key elements
of the exhibition are
ceramic artifacts
created by young
Ukrainian artists—
plant symbols that
reflect certain
ecological and social
challenges and the
current state of our
world through nature.

Special emphasis is placed on the younger generation, which, like these plants, is inextricably linked to nature. The flora reflects the traits inherent in youth: tenderness, resilience, and the ability to recover and transform. The deep connection between humans and nature shapes the ecological consciousness of future generations and lays the foundation for their harmonious interaction with the surrounding world.

The ecological identity of the current Ukrainian generation is presented through video, audio and artworks, created by adolescents and youth from over 60 communities across Ukraine. Ukrainian youth have developed prototypes of cultural artifacts, both large and small, that symbolize a new interaction between society and nature.

These artifacts play a significant role in global ecological geopolitics, as they not only reflect values and the identity of the new generation but also define the dynamics of social change that occurs under the impact of environmental challenges.



Contemporary art workshop
at the 'Spilno Camp' creative programme
Kryvyi Rih, June 2024

Small ceramic artifacts
of the Red Data Book plants



'Safe Environment for Children'



1 Crimean Nature Reserve

The Crimean Nature Reserve, the largest and most well-known in Crimea, is home to 137 plant species listed in the Red Data Book of Ukraine, 90 of which are endemic. The Crimean yayles, mountainous rocky plains, and the so-called amphitheatres of the southern coast of Crimea are unique landscapes.

Since 2014, the reserve has been located in a non-government-controlled area. In 2018, the territory of the reserve came under Russian control and was reclassified as a national park. Hunting and construction was permitted on 35 per cent of its territory.



A R T I F A C T PULSATILLA TAURICA, DMYTRO BILOKIN

The theme of the dimensional composition 'Flower Laughter Holds the Burning World', is inspired by *Pulsatilla taurica*, a unique Red Data Book plant found exclusively on the Crimean peninsula. Only the rocky steppes of the Crimean yayles are suitable for the growth of *Pulsatilla taurica*. You can see the flowers of this plant in inaccessible areas of the Crimean Mountains from April to May.

The world of adults is on fire. This process takes place on an invisible level until it possesses a material form of the all-consuming fire of war, disaster and destruction of everything that is living, peaceful, effective and beautiful. This is a direct allegory of war, a painful manifestation of reality. The large cracked ball is supported by the lower light and colorful part of the revival. The bright bowl is filled with colorful ornaments of *Pulsatilla taurica* flowers. It symbolizes children, new generations and hope. The combination of the two parts symbolizes eternal rebirth and reflects faith in the future of our country and the world.



2 Askania-Nova Biosphere Reserve named after F.E. Falz-Fein

The reserve is located in the very south of Ukraine in the Kherson region. It is the oldest of all and was founded in 1898. Askania-Nova was one of the first in Ukraine to receive the UNESCO Biosphere Reserve certificate.

Askania Nova's greatest value is the wild steppe, the largest uncultivated virgin land in the whole of Ukraine. In the past, the steppes covered about 40 per cent of current Ukrainian territory, but no more than 3 per cent of the former steppe areas are left nowadays. A lot of rare species of plants and animals that inhabited the steppes in the past are now on the edge of extinction.

In the twentieth century, the reserve survived two world wars. Askania-Nova has remained in non-government-controlled Ukrainian territory since the first day of the war.



A R T I F A C T CENTAUREA TALIEWII, ELVIRA DEMERDZHY

The Red Data Book *Centaurea taliewii*, which is very rare and can reach a height of one metre, represents the Askania wild steppe. This plant requires areas of natural fescue-feather grass steppes located on slopes or rocky outcrops facing the sun. *Centaurea taliewii* is listed in the Red List of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

Memories of the steppe and cornflower are rapidly moving away in time from us. Sometimes, it feels as if these flowers and steppes were with us a long time ago, just like our childhood brush paintings. The cornflower becomes an artifact, like childhood itself.



3 Grand Meadow National Nature Park

Historically, Great Meadow is the territory of an ancient forest located on Khortytsia Island, in the capital of the former Cossack Ukrainian state. It is the largest forest in the steppe zone of Ukraine, which in the past covered the entire area of the now-former Kakhovka Reservoir in the Zaporizhzhia region.

When the reservoir ceased to exist in 2023 after the dam destruction, a forest of willows and poplars began to regenerate in its place. In one year, billions of young trees not only sprouted from seeds but also managed to grow to a height of four metres and a trunk thickness of five centimetres. This is the fastest recorded growth of a young forest in Ukraine—nature continues to do its job of healing wounds, despite everything.



KHERSON A R T I F A C T ORNITHOGALUM BOUCHEANUM, OLEKSANDR MASLII

Ornithogalum boucheanum is a symbol of hope that flourishes despite adverse conditions. This plant, listed in the Red Data Book, is common in Ukraine's steppe zone, with the southern region being its main area of distribution. Like other steppe plants, it can survive in severe arid conditions, is not afraid of fires and can hide its bulbs deep underground.

Despite its elegance, the flower embodies resilience and harmony. It is not only an artistic image, but also a message to preserve and appreciate life in all its forms. The symbol of the flower reflects our youth's resilience, which, like rare plants, finds the strength to flourish even in the most difficult conditions.



4 Ukrainian Steppe Nature Reserve

The primary nature reserve of the Donetsk region consists of four branches that showcase the region's diverse and unique landscapes:

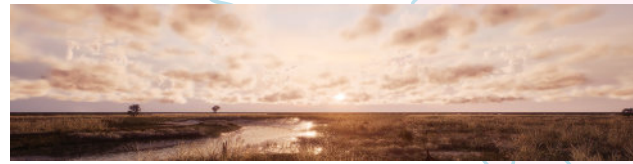
⌘ Virgin steppes with unique species of plants and animals ⌘ Unique landscapes of the Kalmius River canyon, the widest canyon in Ukraine and the only canyon in the east ⌘ The best-preserved Cretaceous outcrops in Ukraine on the mountains of the Siverskyi Donets River banks ⌘ Real granite mountains in the middle of the flat steppe, where two mega-endemic species occur—*Achillea glaberrima* and *Centaurea pseudoleucolepis*. Their entire global population covers an area of no more than five hectares.



A R T I F A C T STIPA GRANITICOLA, SVITLANA ISAIEVA × 'MAYSTERNYA' HOME MELITOPOL

The complicated process of growing up, which takes place in challenging and difficult conditions, is embodied through the image of *Stipa graniticola*. There are more than 20 species of feathergrass in Ukraine, and all of them are listed in the Red Data Book of Ukraine. *Stipa graniticola* is a unique endemic. Up to now, it has not been bred in artificial conditions. The granite feathergrass seed plants itself wherever the wind blows it, and this adaptation is the most difficult among all known plants in Ukraine.

The sculpture embodies a whole wave of feathergrass because feathergrass grows in 'families'. It is the family that gives children confidence, an invisible support throughout their lives. The process of growing up is complicated and takes place in the face of challenges and difficulties. Just like clay, which is transformed into ceramics by firing, children go through a period of transformation, forming their personality. Just like the deformations and cracks that occur during the firing of ceramics, the child's soul bears an imprint of external circumstances. The war cracks are traces of traumas, experiences and losses but, at the same time, they are part of growth and formation.

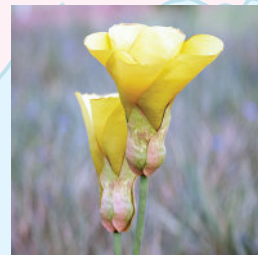


5 Luhansk Nature Reserve

Founded in 1927 as multiple separate reserves, it preserves the brightest and most untouched landscapes and vegetation of the Donetsk Ridge.

In 2014, the first hostilities began on the territory of the Striltsivskyi Steppe, the largest virgin land in the Luhansk region that has survived to this day, although it is only 1,000 hectares in size.

It was the territory of the Luhansk Nature Reserve that became the first conflict-affected area of Ukraine's nature reserves. However, it may become a source of seeds for biodiversity restoration that can spread to surrounding areas and restore them to their natural state.



A R T I F A C T 'POST-STEPPE FLOWER UNIT' BY VOLODYMYR SERHACHOV

The representative of the Luhansk Nature Reserve is *Calophaca wolgarica*—an endemic of the Azov Sea region and southeastern Europe. It is not afraid of droughts or frosts, and thrives best in steppe areas where grazing is maintained. It grows not on black soil but on crystalline rock outcrops, limestone chalk slopes, and detachments of granite and other rocks.

The flower unit is a design speculation on the future flora of the Ukrainian steppe, which communicates the synthesis of its organic and geological layers. The sample consists of two components—perianth and the pedicel. The perianth preserves the organic heritage of the modern modified steppe in its capsule. The capsule material is a composite of rye grains and resin. The pedicel embodies the geological component of the steppe zone and is shaped like the leaves of fossilized ferns, the prints of which are often found in coal, a key element of steppe industrialization.

The flower plant is made of recycled PETG plastic and equipped with a motion sensor to monitor its surroundings. It can broadcast its state to others using light signals. The light is emitted in two ways—the alarm switches to a calm state when a person or other living creature moves near the flower unit.

Interview Voices of Askania: Steppe Lost

Ukrainian
landscapes
are temporarily internally
displaced,
and continue to live
within us



The wild steppe of Askania-Nova—the largest steppe reserve in Europe

The story
of Maryna and Mykola
who grew up in the village
near the famous Ukrainian
Askania-Nova Biosphere Reserve
and lost access to it
because of the war.
The unique natural environment
shaped their personalities, values
and vision of the world. Today,
the couple experience the impact
of the war on the protected steppe
as a deeply personal
emotional
pain.

→

Interview Voices of Askania: Steppe Lost

Solastalgia

Solastalgia is a term that describes a feeling of longing, sadness or anxiety caused by changes in the natural environment that was once a source of comfort and peace. This is a feeling that is very familiar to Mykola and Maryna.

Maryna often still cries when she remembers her childhood, her family and her interaction with nature. If she could return to the time before the full-scale war, she would spend more time in the steppe. *“When I get the opportunity to go back, I will go to that hill where we used to watch the sunrise and the stars. I’ll take the Ukrainian flag with me, sit there and look out into the steppe. I just miss it so much. I would never have thought that I would miss the steppe,”* the girl says with feeling.

Mykola adds that the Kakhovka tragedy was the most difficult day for him after the war started.

“When the hydroelectric power plant dam was blown up, I had a feeling that my home was getting further away from me. The dam is a symbolic structure, a bridge to the left bank, but it is also a bridge to life, to my childhood as I remember it,” he recalls.

The man adds that he felt the destruction of the Kakhovka Dam was the destruction of his past and future—because both Askania and the nature of the Kherson region are part of his personality.

“I am sure that a person is shaped by the environment in which they live. And it’s not just the people around you, but the nature and landscapes as well,” he says.

Mykola often imagines the war ending and him crossing the Dnipro River via the repaired Kakhovka Dam, getting home and seeing Askania again. The man understands that the war has changed the place of his childhood but he believes that it still remains unique. *“It is impossible to take the beautiful sunrises and sunsets of Askania away, no matter where it is, no matter under whose control. You can send away Chapman’s zebras or Przewalski’s horses, but not stop the sun or turn it around so that it rises from the other side. Thank God, that is beyond the power of man.”*

Maryna adds that she dreams not only of restoring the biosphere reserve but also of a new peaceful life for her village. After all, Askania-Nova is not only a park and a zoo, it is also a settlement where 3,500 people lived before the full-scale war.

“This place needs to be revived in the future. We need to help nature, we need to help people, we need to make this place attractive to people again. I would hate for these unique places to be deserted,” Mykola concludes, keeping the image of peaceful Askania in his heart.

Every time Mykola meets people and says that he is from Askania-Nova, he sees sincere bewilderment in their eyes. *“People always ask me: really, straight from the reserve? I joke and say, yes, and we even had camels as our neighbours,”* 27-year-old Mykola smiles. He has been living and working in Kyiv for several years now. But Mykola’s childhood and youth are inextricably intertwined with Askania.

His wife is also from Askania. *“The last time I went home was in January 2022,”* says 24-year-old Maryna. She adds that the biosphere reserve will forever remain in her and her husband’s hearts.

A Ukrainian Miracle

Maryna recalls how, as a child, she used to list the regions of Ukraine by the license plates of the cars that came to the reserve for guided tours. These were tourists from all over the country who wanted to see the arboretum, the zoo and the unique Ukrainian steppe. As a teenager, Mykola even worked as a guide in the reserve. He conducted excursions for school children and showed them trees that have been growing in Askania for more than a century. This helped him to better understand the place he grew up in and learn to appreciate it.

“Over time, I realized that I was lucky because I could see this beauty every day. I could touch it, observe it. Often, when you have something, you don’t appreciate it and don’t pay attention to it. And, as they say, you’ll appreciate it more when it’s gone. However, I had realized all this even before we lost Askania,” the man recalls sadly. He used to spend all his free time in the park, zoo and steppe in his youth.

Maryna adds that her respect for nature was formed especially at Askania-Nova.

“It was probably really ingrained in us that we shouldn’t litter or harm nature. And we were actually very proud of the place where we were born. There are no other places like this in Ukraine that combine the rich flora and fauna, and this pristine steppe zone—still remaining in the form it was hundreds of years ago. That’s why this truly is a Ukrainian miracle,” she says.

Both Maryna and Mykola are convinced that now it is necessary to do everything possible to ensure that people in Ukraine and abroad do not forget about Askania-Nova.

Askania-Nova Biosphere Reserve in the Kherson region has been at risk due to potential fires, hostilities and the movement of military equipment.



Photo: Iryna Hladchenko

Due to the full-scale war in Ukraine, since 24 February 2022 return to Askania-Nova is no longer possible.

The youth of Ukraine have been living amid war for 10 years and have been forced to embed dust, iron and fire into their identity. Their resilience enables them to adapt to new conditions but the environment of their current existence is destructive.

Read along to 'Valentin Silvestrov—Bagatellen: IV'

The Forest Shapes the Tree —the Tree Shapes the Forest

Their experience differs from previous generations but the role of young people in rebuilding and developing society is becoming central. They have the right to protect their interests and determine their future, even in the most difficult times.

A 10-year-old teenager in Ukraine is a person who has no experience of peaceful life.



© UNICEF / Photo: Olena Hrom

Engaging young people in public life, enhancing their independence and skills, and developing their civic competencies helps them realize their potential. Social cohesion among young people can be achieved and improved through collaborative creation, which fosters mental resilience.

What strategy will best define and ensure accountability for actions that deprive Ukrainian youth of access to their native landscapes and destroy their natural and cultural environment, making their well-being difficult to achieve?

According to the National Youth Strategy 2030, Ukrainian youth have the right to choose their future, and the state must provide opportunities to develop their potential. Today, young people must shift from waiting for directives to taking action and becoming responsible for their decisions and actions.

The role of civil society organizations in this communication is to create a platform for open discussion, which would allow a deeper understanding of the current state of society. They can initiate the process of forming a structured representation of the landscape—a symbolic 'slice' that not only reflects the existing problems, but also analyzes their causes and connections. This approach allows us to look at the situation from a broader perspective, identifying the roots of problems and potential solutions.

Civil society organizations can act as architects of the social ecosystem by creating symbolic installations that capture the current state of this ecosystem. These installations serve not only to record reality but also to rethink it, by helping society to better understand itself and its place in the broader context of social, cultural and environmental processes.

That is why it is high time to create cultural artifacts that will become new material elements of communication, new points of interaction between generations and natural landscapes. These artifacts should reflect a new vision of the world that demonstrates modern aesthetic priorities, cultural values and development trends. We must not only preserve nature as heritage, but also form a contemporary identity that is capable of adapting to the challenges of today and reflecting the dynamics of social change that have arisen under the influence of ecocide.

Ukrainian landscapes are a symbol of resilience.

That is a part of our culture that shapes us. In a world where environmental challenges are becoming a threat to the future, the issue of nature conservation takes on new meaning, especially for youth who have grown up amid war and environmental crises.

We are talking about our land and our unique landscapes, while nature is under threat of destruction. We are fighting indifference and oblivion by preserving nature for the future. This is our civic duty to generations to follow.

156,000 km² of Ukrainian territory is contaminated by explosive ordnance.

Our goal is to give a future to our native places.

This is the responsibility we take on: * To explore our roots and talk about them through art * To preserve the environment by finding ways to implement environmental standards even during wartime * To give youth a chance to live in a country that preserves nature as part of its identity * To preserve the human in nature and the natural in humans.

We exist in a common space of transformation—humans and nature are always inseparable. Our connections are the breath of the earth, flora and fauna, which make our well-being possible and create balance.

The environmental, aesthetic and ethical are one—intertwined like roots, stems and flowers. The full development of a personality is impossible without the harmony of these components. They mutually flow into each other making us resistant to external challenges. Our perception of beauty and well-being is inextricably linked to the environment in which we grow up.

As long as the voices of our territories are forced to keep silent, the only way to ensure the well-being of the future generation is through a strategy of comprehensive international cooperation and compliance with international environmental legislation.

After all, ecology has no borders.

Public sector,
Cultural Platform Zakarpattya

Credentials
Cultural Platform Zakarpattya
NGO team

*Yevhen Zabarylo, Maryna Mykhaylenko,
Anastasiia Mishustina, Yana Polupanova,
Olena Smirnova-Kochetkova*

UNICEF Ukraine team

Expert contributors

**Oleksii Vasyliuk, ecologist, zoologist, co-founder of the Ukrainian Nature Conservation Group NGO *Olha Yevstihnieieva, Advocacy Manager for Green Deal reforms and green transition in Ukraine *Oleksandra Koltsova, publicist, journalist *Valeriya Palii, candidate of psychological sciences, president of the National Psychological Association *Viktor Parkhomenko, scientist, member of Ukrainian Nature Conservation Group NGO*

Interviewees

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Design and layout

Oleksii Salnykov, KULTURA Studio

Youth artworks used
in the newspaper

*Kryvyi Rih, Zaporizhzhia, Mykolaiv,
Voznesensk, Pavlohrad, Petrykivka, Kamianske,
Chernihiv*

Typefaces

*ЇMariupol, Andrijtype *Kharkiv Tone, Kate Drozd *Kyiv Type, Dmytro Rastvortsev *Nyght Serif, Maxym Kobuzan *Periodica, MintType *Fonts created by youth: Tetiana Burkut, Diana Merzliakova*

Live broadcast and the materials of the Fourth Summit of First Ladies and Gentlemen are available on the website and social media



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The Fourth Summit
of First Ladies
and Gentlemen

unicef
for every child



10:00–11:00 Guest arrivals

STAGE 1

11:00 Summit opening

- Welcome addresses by First Ladies and Gentlemen
- Children's portraits
Children's stories on the challenges of growing up around the world.
- Presentation of the research 'Protection of Childhood: Security Dimensions for Children and Adolescents'

STAGE 1

12:00–13:30 Child Safety During the War

This dimension will explore the challenges children face in wartime, including issues like physical safety, propaganda, indoctrination, recruitment, and the legal frameworks for child protection.

Moderator: Anne Applebaum, Polish-American historian, writer, journalist.

- Special performance by the children
- First session of the 'Child Safety During the War' discussion
Speakers: ♦Olena Zelenska, First Lady of Ukraine ♦Janine di Giovanni, journalist, author, and war correspondent ♦Daria Herasymchuk, Advisor-Commissioner of the President of Ukraine for Children's Rights and Child Rehabilitation.
- Second session of the 'Child Safety During the War' discussion
Speakers: Dmytro Lubinets, Ombudsman of Ukraine ♦Karim Khan, Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court ♦Andriy Kostin, Prosecutor General of Ukraine.
- Keynote speech
Speaker: ♦Elina Svitolina, professional tennis player, United24 ambassador, founder of the Svitolina Foundation.

13:30–14:30 Break: lunch, networking

STAGE 1

14:30–16:00 Child Safety in the Family

This dimension will address parenting challenges, government support for families, and mental health care for children within the family environment.

Moderators: ♦ Munir Mammadzade, UNICEF Representative to Ukraine ♦Timur Miroshnychenko, Ukrainian TV presenter and journalist ♦Polina Medvid, host.

- Original theatre performance
- Expert panel on parenting
Speakers: ♦George Faller, family and couples therapist ♦Poul Nyrup Rasmussen, former Danish Prime Minister, founder of the Social Network/Headspace Denmark ♦Oksana Zholnovych, Minister of Social Policy of Ukraine ♦Mykola Semenyuta, better care advocate.
- Conversation with the special guest, the UN Ambassador Michael Douglas, and his family
Speakers: ♦Michael Douglas, award-winning actor/producer and U.N. Ambassador of Peace ♦Dylan Douglas, actor/podcast host.
- Dialogues with First Ladies
Speakers: ♦Tamara Vučić, First Lady of Serbia Rossana Briseño, First Lady of Belize ♦Lucrecia Peinado, First Lady of Guatemala ♦Diana Nausėdienė, First Lady of Lithuania.

16:00–16:30 Coffee break

STAGE 1

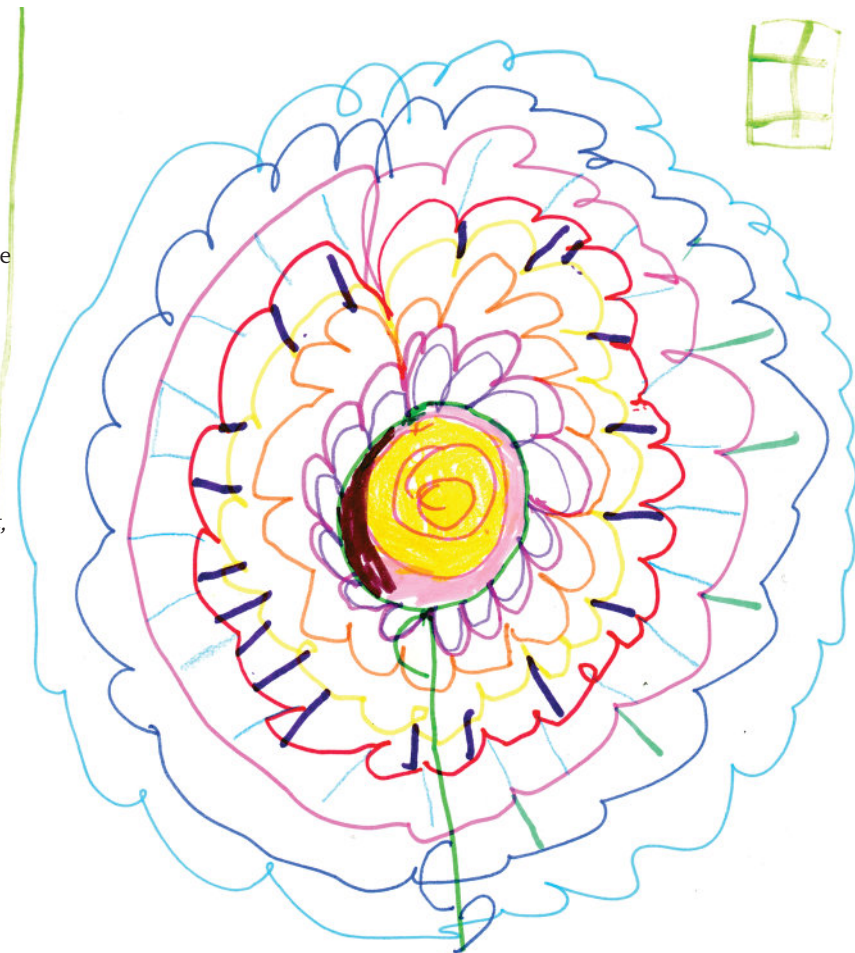
16:30–17:00 Final part

- Keynote speech of Francis Fukuyama, American political scientist, political economist, international relations scholar, and writer
- Keynote speech of Olena Zelenska, First Lady of Ukraine
- Keynote speech of the special guest

17:00 Closing of the Summit

Host:
Timur Miroshnychenko

Summit Programme



STAGE 2

Child Safety at School

This dimension will highlight approaches and solutions to safety challenges within educational systems worldwide, combining elements of physical and psychological safety in schools and fostering resilience and leadership in future generations..

Moderator: ♦Olga Budnyk, Advisor-Commissioner to the President of Ukraine on the Fund of the President of Ukraine for the support of Education, Science, and Sports.

- Keynote speeches by the First Ladies
Speakers: ♦Suzanne Innes-Stubb, First Lady of Finland ♦Sirje Karis, First Lady of Estonia ♦Brigitte Macron, First Lady of France.
- Panel discussion
Speakers: ♦Oksen Lisovy, Minister of Education and Science of Ukraine ♦Yasmine Sherif, Executive Director of Education Cannot Wait ♦Bob Saum, Regional Country Director for Eastern Europe, World Bank ♦Andreas Schleicher, Director of the Education and Skills Directorate at the OECD.
- Special speech
Speaker: ♦Mykhailo Fedorov, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Digital Transformation of Ukraine.

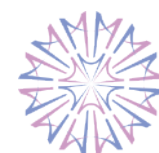
STAGE 3

Child Safety in Cyberspace

Experts will discuss safeguarding children in the digital world, share case studies from countries and companies, and examine the risks and benefits of AI for children.

Moderator: ♦Luukas Ilves, former Government Chief Information Officer of Estonia.

- Keynote speeches
Speakers: ♦Ylva Johansson, European Commissioner for Home Affairs ♦Valeriya Ionan, Deputy Minister for Eurointegration at the Ministry of Digital Transformation of Ukraine.
- International collaborative efforts: industry and organisations
Speakers: ♦Bo Tengberg, First Gentleman of Denmark ♦Aleš Musar, First Gentleman of Slovenia ♦Ihor Klymenko, Minister of Internal Affairs of Ukraine.
- International collaborative efforts: industry and organisations
Speakers: ♦Iain Drennan, Executive Director of WeProtect Global Alliance ♦Annette Kroeber-Riel, Vice President of Government Affairs and Public Policy at Google in Europe ♦Kateryna Kruk, Regional Public Policy Lead Central and Eastern Europe, Meta ♦Thomas Davin, Global Innovation Director, UNICEF Office of Innovation, Sweden ♦Stephan Mergenthaler, Head of Strategic Intelligence and Member of the Executive Committee at the World Economic Forum.



The Fourth Summit
of First Ladies
and Gentlemen

ONLINE
PROGRAMME

