

Shorten to tell world Australia stands with Ukraine

[Matthew Knott](#), SMH/The Age, June 3, 2024 — 7.38pm

Former Labor leader Bill Shorten says he will use an appearance at a high-profile global summit to warn that Russian President Vladimir Putin cannot be allowed to win the war in Ukraine as it would embolden autocrats around the world.

As Prime Minister Anthony Albanese and other senior ministers are unable to attend the event, [Shorten will represent Australia](#) at a Ukraine peace summit being held on July 15-16 in Switzerland.



NDIS Minister Bill Shorten will represent Australia at a Ukraine peace summit. *CREDIT:ALEX ELLINGHAUSEN*

“We are unwavering in our support for the Ukrainian people in their fight against Vladimir Putin’s criminal and unforgivable war,” Shorten said.

“We may be a long way away, but our distance doesn’t diminish our support for the struggle.”

The government services and NDIS minister said Albanese had asked him to attend the summit because of his longstanding interest in Ukraine and his seniority as a former Labor leader, even though he does not hold any portfolio responsibility for international affairs.

The Australian Federation of Ukrainian Organisations has its headquarters in Shorten's Melbourne electorate of Maribyrnong, and Shorten developed close ties with the Ukrainian-Australian community after the [downing of flight MH17](#) in 2014 during his time as opposition leader.

Shorten, who led Labor from 2013 to 2019, said he hoped the summit would represent a global display of solidarity for Ukraine in its struggle over more than two years against Putin's invading forces.

"Putin may doubt the ability of liberal democracies to maintain their focus, but he's wrong," Shorten said.

"Victory for Putin would embolden dictators globally."

Shorten would like to see Australia's embassy in Kyiv reopen, but said that he understood the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's concerns about exposing Australian diplomats to danger.

Australia's focus should be on providing military and humanitarian support to Ukraine, Shorten said.

More than 60 nations have re-established their Ukrainian embassies since Russia's invasion, including the United States, Japan, Britain and Canada. Australia's ambassador, Paul Lehmann, remains based in the Polish capital of Warsaw.

Stefan Romaniw, the co-chair of the Australian Federation of Ukrainian Organisations, said he had written to Albanese last week to say that he should send Shorten to the event if one of the government's "big three" ministers – Albanese, Foreign Minister Penny Wong or Defence Minister Richard Marles – could not attend.

Albanese and Wong will be in Australia for a planned visit by Chinese Premier Li Qiang at the time of the summit, while Marles has plans to travel in the Indo-Pacific at that time.

Romaniw said he had recently met in Ukraine with President Volodymyr Zelensky, who urged Australia to send a high-level representative to the summit and expressed his interest in receiving more [Australian-made Bushmaster](#) armoured personnel carriers.

Albanese [spoke on the phone last week to Zelensky](#), who has been rallying world leaders to attend the summit.

In an appearance at the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore at the weekend, Zelensky accused Russia and China of working to undermine the summit, which he said would address nuclear security, food security and the return of Ukrainian children abducted by Russia.

The summit will be attended by world leaders including Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.

Putin and US President Joe Biden will not attend the summit, which is intended to map a pathway out of the war.

Opposition foreign affairs spokesman Simon Birmingham said Shorten had been a strong supporter of Ukraine and “arguably would have done a much better job of delivering more timely support than those ministers who actually hold relevant portfolios”.

“But the fact remains that Mr Shorten is the minister for the NDIS and doesn’t even sit on the national security committee of cabinet, making this a most confusing and inadequate appointment for anyone who looks at it,” he said.