

## Outrage as Ukrainian teens forced to face Russians at Australian AI summit



**Rob Harris**, The Sydney Morning Herald, 1 July 2026

[International Cybersecurity Olympiad of AI: Russian team participation sparks protest from Ukraine government and officials](#)

A Russian youth team is in Australia competing in an international cybersecurity and artificial intelligence competition despite repeated warnings from spy agencies that Moscow is a [malicious state cyber actor](#).

The team's presence has prompted protests from Ukraine's government, accusing organisers of the International Cybersecurity Olympiad of AI of failing to respond to formal requests to exclude the Russian delegation and of overlooking the welfare of Ukrainian teenagers competing alongside them.



*Australia's ambassador to Ukraine, Vasyl Myroshnychenko, pictured with the Ukrainian teenager competing at the International Cyber Olympiad in AI in Sydney. @AmbVasyl*

Australia has repeatedly attributed malicious cyber activity to Russia and [imposed sanctions](#) on Russian cybercrime actors, including those linked to the 2022 Medibank Private hack.

The week-long event is being hosted at the University of Technology Sydney by the Australian STEM and Robotics Advancement Association and features around 50 national teams of school-aged competitors.

Competitors use AI as a tool to automate cyberattacks and defend networks, using real-world techniques like prompt injection, adversarial machine learning, deepfake detection, and red-teaming.

Also competing is a Ukrainian delegation of students under the age of 18 from Kyiv, Kryvyi Rih, Poltava region and Odesa, areas that have been repeatedly targeted by Russian missile and drone attacks since Moscow's invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

Before the competition began, Ukraine's Ministry of Education and Science and Kyiv Polytechnic Institute wrote to organisers urging them to bar the Russian delegation, arguing that allowing representatives of an aggressor state to participate was inconsistent with the values of international educational events during Russia's ongoing invasion.

Australia's ambassador to Ukraine, Vasyl Myroshnychenko, separately wrote to organisers backing that request, saying international educational initiatives should remain guided by "responsibility, solidarity, and respect for the rules-based international order".

In his letter, the ambassador said initiatives such as the Olympiad fostered innovation and international cooperation but participation "should be consistent with the values these initiatives are intended to promote and uphold".

The Australian Federation of Ukrainian Organisations said neither letter had received a response.

The organisation's chair, Kateryna Argyrou, said it was difficult to understand why a Russian state-approved team was training in cybersecurity and AI on Australian soil and gaining insights, when Australia itself has repeatedly named Russia as a malicious state cyber actor.

"This isn't just a question for Ukraine — it's a question for every Australian institution that takes cybersecurity seriously," she said.

Argyrou said Ukrainian participants had spent years living through air raid sirens, school disruptions and attacks on their communities, and should not be expected to compete alongside the Russian delegation or attend shared sightseeing activities and award ceremonies.

“To place them in a competition, excursions and a shared awards ceremony with a Russian delegation, without any apparent assessment of the impact on their wellbeing, is a basic failure of care by ASRA towards these children,” she said.

Neither the International Cyber Olympiad in AI nor the Australian STEM and Robotics Advancement Association responded to questions.

ASRA received funding from the Department of Science, Industry and Resources to enter Australian teams in past Olympiad events overseas. A source confirmed it was not directly sponsoring this event.

After four years of being banned from major sporting events, the world bodies governing judo, taekwondo, gymnastic and cycling recently removed restrictions on Russia. In April, World Aquatics removed its restrictions on Russian athletes, paving the way for Russia to [compete under its own flag in the Water Polo World Cup in Sydney later this month](#).

Assistant Foreign Affairs Minister Matt Thistlethwaite told a meeting of the Sporting Diplomacy Consultative Group last week that Australia was “deeply disappointed” by the decisions made despite the continuing war in Ukraine.

He said while it was a decision for individual bodies, they “represent a break in global solidarity”, creating a precedent for ending Russia’s isolation while it continued its “campaign of violent aggression” against Ukraine.

“They augur a normalising of relations with Russia,” he said. “Australian community sentiment remains strongly supportive of Ukraine as it defends itself against Russia’s brutal invasion.”

The federal government imposed sanctions against two Russian cybercrime service providers in November last year – Media Land and ML Cloud – and two of their key personnel – Aleksandr Alexandrovich Volosovik and Kirill Andreevich Zatolokin.

It was alleged the organisations had provided their ransomware infrastructure to malicious cyber actors and cybercriminals, allowing them to conduct cyberattacks in Australia and around the world.

Last month it emerged that independent MP Zali Steggall’s [WhatsApp account was hacked](#) in March as part of a phishing scheme believed to have been orchestrated by the Russian government that led to the messaging platform being blocked on parliamentary laptops.

A Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade spokeswoman said the government was “steadfast in its support for Ukraine in the face of Russia’s unprovoked and unjustified invasion”.

Australia had imposed over 1800 sanctions on Russia and its supporters, she said.