



## United States Mission to the OSCE

# The Russian Federation's Ongoing Aggression Against Ukraine

As delivered by Ambassador Michael R. Carpenter  
to the Permanent Council, Vienna  
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Today I'd like to speak about a topic that sometimes comes up in conversations about Russia's war against Ukraine; namely, what would happen if the frontlines were frozen in place. The obvious answer is that Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity would be violated, and its internationally recognized borders would fail to be respected. Both the UN Charter and the Helsinki Final Act would be undermined. That's one aspect. But let's also peel away the curtain and look a little closer at what would happen behind the front lines.

We actually have the data to know what this picture would look like. It has been over ten years since Russia illegally invaded and attempted to annex Crimea. This decade of Russian Federation occupation of Crimea gives us plenty of insights into what life looks like for Ukrainian citizens forced to live under the Kremlin's rule. It's a grim reality.

For ten long years, Russia has repressed the exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms in Crimea. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Russia, "established effective control over all spheres of public life... Expression of minority religions and culture, including those of the Crimean Tatar and ethnic Ukrainians, have been suppressed."

Most of the delegations here heard earlier this week from Refat Chubarov, Chairman of the Crimean Tatar Mejlis, about what this has meant for Crimean Tatars. Chubarov told us about the forced displacement of his people. He explained how thousands of Crimean Tatar political prisoners have been removed from Crimea to penal colonies across Russia, including Siberia and the Arctic north. And Chubarov recounted how he was woken up at 4:00 a.m. earlier this week to be notified that Russia had conducted raids against Tatar families in their own homes. Masked men carrying automatic weapons had broken into the homes of 10 Tatar families, throwing children to the floor. Five men were taken, accused of "terrorism." Chubarov said this type of call was tragically common after ten years of Russia's occupation.

But let's talk about how we got to this point. Here's how the Kremlin asserted this control, according to the UN High Commissioner:

- One. Russia compelled residents of Crimea to accept Russian citizenship in 2014. If they refused, people would lose the right to live in Crimea and be denied social

services. As a reminder, international humanitarian law prohibits forcing the inhabitants of an occupied territory from swearing allegiance to the occupying power.

- Two. Russia facilitated the settlement of its own citizens in Crimea. According to Russia's official statistics, some 247,000 Russians have moved to Crimea since 2014. The actual number of course is likely much larger. It could be millions. This has significantly skewed the population of Crimea towards being more ethnically Russian.
- Three. Russia imposed stringent requirements for public assemblies, and harsh penalties on anyone who gathered without authorization.
- Four. Russia cut off access to independent, Ukrainian, and minority media. Prominent Crimean Tatar media outlets such as ATR and Avdet were forced to cease operations. Ukrainian regulators had empowered over 3,000 media outlets to flourish in Crimea, but under Russia's occupation administration, that number has collapsed.
- Five. Russia allowed only Russian citizens to legally register religious communities in Crimea. Remember, Russia had already tried to force everyone who lived in Crimea to become a Russian citizen. As of December 31 of 2022, the number of registered religious organizations had dropped therefore from 2,083 to 907. That's a decline of 57 percent. The Orthodox Church of Ukraine, as well as other religious groups not favored by the Kremlin, have been harshly targeted for repression.
- And six. Russia enacted policies that ensured education in the Crimean Tatar and Ukrainian languages virtually disappeared from Crimea. Before Russia's invasion, 12,694 students were educated in the Ukrainian language. As of last year, only 197 were fully instructed in Ukrainian. That's a mere 1 percentage point of all students in Crimea.

Taking all of this into account, it's unsurprising that Russia announced in January its decision to withdraw from the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, denying members of its national minorities the protections afforded by the treaty.

What I outlined is just a short summary of what Russia's imposition of its legal and administrative system in Crimea has meant for the people living there. The UN High Commissioner has called this a violation of international humanitarian law. Russia's colonial actions presented the residents of Crimea with stark choices: be forced to comply with the occupation authorities, leave your home, or dissent. Those who chose to dissent faced repression, detention, torture, and disappearance.

Take the experience of Iryna Danylovysh, a nurse and civic journalist covering health issues in Crimea. Danylovysh chose to dissent. A Russian kangaroo court sentenced her to seven years in prison after she reported on problems in Crimea's health care system, including

Russia's response to the coronavirus pandemic. While in prison, Danylovyh said her Russian captors tortured her and denied her necessary medical treatments. To pressure Russia into giving her the medical care she needed, Danylovyh started a hunger strike. Her strike went on for 17 long days until her jailors promised to transfer her to a civilian hospital for treatment. But they lied. They never moved her to a hospital. Instead, they transferred her to a penal colony within the Russian Federation.

Danylovyh is but one of more than 150 political prisoners from Crimea held by Russia. Russia also holds journalists Servyer Mustafayev, Vladyslav Yesypenko, Enver Krosh, and Vilen Temeryanov. Russia has imprisoned Nariman Dzhelial, Deputy Chairman of the Mejlis. Russia persecuted and continues to detain Bekirov Dzhebbbar, Murasov Rustem, and Tairov Rustem for participating in religious activities that are legal in Ukraine but illegal in Russia.

Madam Chair, much of what I've raised today sounds all too familiar. That's because it's exactly what we've seen Russia do in other areas of Ukraine that it occupies. There is no question about whether the Kremlin's actions in Crimea constitute Russia's blueprint for its conquest and subjugation of broader Ukraine.

Those pressuring Ukraine to accept Russia's illegal attempted territorial seizures need to realize what this would mean for Ukraine's citizens living under Russian occupation. They are asking that we accept Russia's detention of public figures like Iryna Danylovyh and Nariman Dzhelial. They are asking that we ignore Russia's forced demographic changes in the areas of Ukraine it occupies. They are asking that we acquiesce to the Kremlin's desire to drag us back to the violent nationalism and revanchism that characterized the darkest days of the 20th century. As Refat Chubarov told us, capitulating to Russia for a ceasefire would be tantamount to the destruction of his people.

We will not and cannot accept this. We will continue to rally international support for Ukraine. We will never tire of doing so. And we will continue to support Ukraine's efforts to liberate its sovereign territory within its internationally recognized borders.

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