



Permanent Mission of Ukraine
to the International Organizations in Vienna

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Statement on “Russia’s ongoing aggression against Ukraine and illegal occupation of Crimea”

As delivered by Yevheniia Filipenko,
Deputy Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the International Organizations in Vienna,
to the 1159th meeting of the Permanent Council,
5 October 2017

Mr. Chairperson,

Last weekend, the residents of Pikuzy in Donetsk region, which is currently controlled by the Russian hybrid forces, gave the SMM a letter “that outlined the difficulties faced by the residents and included a request for the immediate withdrawal of armed men and of weapons from residential areas of the village”, as stated in the SMM report of 2 October. This letter highlights the plight of local population, which is seriously affected by the Russian occupation of certain areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine.

I would like to remind you that more than 1.6 million inhabitants have left their homes and became IDPs to avoid the horrors of Russia’s military presence and massive human rights violations in Donbas. The difficulties faced by the local population are furthermore aggravated by the lack of access to humanitarian assistance in non-government-controlled areas due to the “complex and rapidly changing rules and procedures as well as freedom of movement restrictions for humanitarian actors”, as was reported by the SMM Chief Monitor Report to the Permanent Council last week. The militants continue to block the opening of Zolote entry-exit checkpoint, which would become the second crossing point in the Luhansk region and would substantially ease the pressure on thousands of people daily staying in long queues in Stanytsia Luhanska. The Ukrainian authorities did everything in their power to have Zolote ready for opening: 12 traffic lanes, 8 pedestrian lanes and one dedicated lane for international humanitarian organizations cargoes were made available for usage. Still, the Russia-backed militants keep demonstrating a total disregard to human lives.

Distinguished colleagues,

The SMM weekly report of 27 September documents only a fraction of Russia-supplied weapons, which the residents of Pikuzy, as well as millions of Ukrainian citizens living under the Russian hybrid occupation, would like to see withdrawn:

“the SMM also observed 283 weapons that should have been withdrawn beyond respective withdrawal lines but are outside designated storage sites – all in areas outside of government control”. It should come as no surprise that the same weekly report informed on 25 per cent more ceasefire violations and higher number of explosions attributable to the use of weapons that should have been withdrawn according to the Minsk agreements compared with the previous week. On 3 October, for the first time since the beginning of “school ceasefire”, the Russian hybrid forces used MLRS “Grad” near Talakivka, as well as a light portable rocket system “Grad-P” near Shyrokino.

As Russia-backed illegal armed formations continue to use weapons that should have been withdrawn, they “demonstrate a lack of co-operation and act as though they have something to hide”, as stated in the Chief Monitor’s report. This report provides a detailed picture of the daily restrictions faced by the SMM patrols, almost all of them taking place in non-government controlled areas, especially near the border with the Russian Federation, where the militants indeed have something to hide.

The Russian side maintains its vile and cynical tactic of gradual squeezing the SMM out of the areas, where the Mission can highlight Russia’s presence in Donbas. After the external security was lifted two weeks ago at the SMM FPB in non-government controlled Horlivka, the SMM patrols in that area came under further pressure by the illegal armed forces. As stated in the recent SMM report, the SMM vehicles were stopped and searched by the armed men in the areas outside Ukrainian government control.

Mr. Chairperson,

Russia’s multifaceted aggression against Ukraine continues unabated. It includes not only military attacks and provocations, propaganda and disinformation, but economic pressure and steps undermining the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine as well. We have repeatedly drawn attention of the Permanent Council to the numerous violations of the OSCE principles and commitments taken by the Russian Federation in its efforts to destabilize Ukraine and to reap the benefit of its aggression against my country. This spring, Russia instructed its hybrid forces to expropriate Ukrainian enterprises in the occupied areas of Donbas, introduced Russian currency and taxation system, and recognized the fake documents issued by the militants.

In the previous week, Russian Deputy Economy Minister Sergei Nazarov in his interview to Bloomberg confirmed that Russia helps the militants to sell coal, which is mined in certain areas of Donbas, on international markets, nearly 1 million tons of coal per month. It is supplied to Russia through the uncontrolled segment of the Ukrainian-Russian state border, which the Russian side so desperately insists to be kept under its total control. We wonder if the possibility to earn money on the illegal trade stands behind Russia’s continued efforts to fuel the conflict. We reiterate our persistent request to the SMM to assess the impact of those steps of Russia on the local population living in the conflict-affected areas, as well as on the implementation of the Minsk agreements.

Last Thursday, the SMM reported on yet another Russian so-called “humanitarian convoy”, which moved into Ukraine’s sovereign territory with flagrant violation of the Ukrainian legislation and international law. We once again urge the Russian Federation to refrain from this practice, as the humanitarian assistance must be delivered based on the international mechanism as envisaged by the Minsk agreements. Instead, the Russian side could stop blocking the access of international humanitarian organizations, which are able to ensure transparent and effective distribution of humanitarian assistance to those most in need.

Distinguished colleagues,

This week, the Russian occupation authorities started conscription in the temporarily occupied Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol. More than two thousand persons will be drafted to the Russian army, part of them will be transferred from Crimea to perform military service in the territory of the Russian Federation.

Russia should be reminded that compelling residents of the occupied territories to serve in their armed forces and the transfer of drafted citizens of Ukraine from the occupied territory to the territory of the Russian Federation violate Articles 51 and Article 49 of the Convention on the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War (Fourth Geneva Convention). We also remind the Russian Federation of the UN GA Resolution 71/205 of 19 December 2016 on the situation of human rights in Crimea, which in particular urges Russia to uphold all of its obligations under applicable international law as an occupying Power.

The recent Report of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, which was released on 25 September as a first step of the systematic implementation of the above resolution refers to a multiple and grave violations by Russia as an occupying Power: altering the ethnic composition of Crimea, forcible imposition of Russian citizenship, large-scale nationalization of private, communal and public property, as well as illegal detentions, enforced disappearances and abductions, extrajudicial executions and other violations of fundamental human rights and freedoms. The report makes 20 recommendations to the Russian Government, urging it to respect “its obligations as an occupying power,” uphold human rights for all, and effectively investigate alleged torture, abductions and killings.

We expect the OSCE participating States to maintain and strengthen their diplomatic, political and economic pressure on the Russian Federation in order to make it stop massive human rights violations in the temporarily occupied Crimea, to revert its occupation of Crimea and to start finally implementing the Minsk agreements by ceasing fire and withdrawing its hybrid troops out of Donbas.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.