

Opening Statement
by H.E. Ambassador Ihor Prokopchuk, Permanent Representative
of Ukraine to the International Organizations in Vienna,
Deputy Head of the Delegation of Ukraine
at the 2016 Human Dimension Implementation Meeting
(Warsaw, 19 September 2016, 10:00-13:00)

Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The delegation of Ukraine aligns itself with the EU statement and would like to make some remarks in its national capacity.

At the outset, the delegation of Ukraine wishes to express gratitude to the OSCE German Chairmanship and the ODIHR for their tireless efforts in organizing the 2016 Human Dimension Implementation Meeting. We also thank the Polish government for its hospitality.

We continue to view the HDIM as the main OSCE instrument for effective monitoring of compliance by all participating States with the human dimension commitments, including through the unique involvement of civil society.

Protection of human dignity, of human rights and fundamental freedoms are at the core of the OSCE concept of comprehensive security. Ukraine stays firmly committed to the undertaken OSCE human dimension commitments despite the significant security and humanitarian challenges stemming from Russia's ongoing military aggression against my country.

The President, the Government and the Parliament of Ukraine undertake focused efforts to implement far-reaching reforms to achieve Ukraine's progress on the path of European integration, to consolidate democracy, good-governance, rule of law and protection of human rights in the country in line with OSCE commitments and international standards.

The National Human Rights Strategy of Ukraine, approved last year, aims at establishing effective mechanisms for protection and promotion of human rights and fundamental freedom in the country. The respective Action Plan until 2020 is under implementation. The Ukrainian authorities took important legislative steps to foster media freedom, pluralism and protection of journalists. The adoption by the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine of the amendments to the Constitution of Ukraine regarding the judiciary on 2 June 2016, as well as decentralization reform, elaborated in close cooperation with the CoE Venice Commission, comprehensive anti-corruption measures and the new laws on the public prosecution service and on the national police constitute important achievements. Ukraine is committed to maintain this positive dynamic.

We take this opportunity to reaffirm Ukraine's support for the mandates of the OSCE autonomous Institutions and their activities to promote human rights, fundamental freedoms and democracy across the entire OSCE region and assisting participating States in the implementation of their human dimension commitments.

Ukraine co-operates closely with the ODIHR, HCNM and RFoM, their representatives paid numerous visits to Ukraine, and many joint projects are fulfilled. We do believe that such extensive co-operation significantly assists the efforts of the Ukrainian authorities

in consolidating the democratic processes, strengthening the democratic institutions and civil society in the country, enhancing implementation of relevant human rights commitments.

Over two years ago, in face of the Russian aggression, Ukraine initiated and maintains additional mechanisms of co-operation with the OSCE, the UN and the Council of Europe.

Distinguished participants,

Dramatic changes occurred in the European security and human rights' landscape with the emergence in February 2014 of what has been recognized as the most serious crisis since the end of the Cold war. This crisis stemmed from the direct military aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine which resulted in the illegal occupation and annexation by Russia of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, as well as conflict in Ukraine's region of Donbas.

By resorting to aggression against Ukraine the Russian Federation flagrantly violated the norms of international law, the OSCE principles and commitments. Notably, the attempted annexation of the Crimean peninsula by Russia is the first such instance in Europe since World War Two when a country uses force to expand its own territory.

The plight of the people living in areas illegally occupied by Russia must not be overlooked or tolerated. We strongly support today's call by the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office that "human rights violations cannot be accepted".

Over two years of illegal occupation of Crimea have been marked by blatant violations of basic human rights and fundamental freedoms of the Crimean population. Crimean residents witnessed a sharp deterioration of the human rights situation, including illegal detentions and enforced disappearances, shutting down of media outlets and silencing of dissenting and independent voices through the repressive measures, targeting mainly the Crimean Tatar community and pro-Ukrainian activists.

In certain areas of Donbas at least 9,300 people were killed and 21,500 injured from April 2014. Over 1,7 million of people affected by the situation in the occupied territories have been forced to leave their homes to other regions of Ukraine. Against the backdrop of the continued influx of foreign fighters, including citizens of the Russian Federation, ammunition and heavy weaponry into the east of Ukraine from across the border with the Russian Federation there is a total breakdown in the rule of law and human rights in the temporary occupied areas of Donbas. Moreover, the illegal armed groups deny access for humanitarian actors depriving the population of humanitarian assistance.

We stress that Russia as the occupying power bears full responsibility for all violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the illegally occupied territories of Ukraine and the failure to stop them.

It must remain at the top of our agenda to seek, by all available instruments, ensuring permanent presence and monitoring of the situation in Crimea by the OSCE, UN and other international organizations in compliance with the UN GA Resolution 68/262 "Territorial Integrity of Ukraine", which reaffirmed the territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders.

Excellencies,

We note with regret Russia's unchanged position aiming to consolidate the gains of its aggression.

Ukraine reiterates its resolute protest over the conduct of elections to the State Duma of the Russian Federation on 18 September 2016 on the territory of the temporarily occupied Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol as these actions violate international law and Ukraine's legislation.

We do not recognize the results of these elections due to their conduct on the territory of the illegally occupied Crimea, consider them illegitimate and call on the participating States to support our position.

Dear colleagues,

On the tables outside this hall you can find the testimonies made by the Ukrainian citizens Henady Afanasiev and Yuriy Soloshenko, released in June after two years of illegal detention in Russian jails, about tortures and ill-treatment they endured in Russia. Many Ukrainian citizens remain behind bars in Russia under fabricated charges, including Oleh Sentsov, Oleksandr Kolchenko and others. They are all political prisoners in Russia. It is essential to use all instruments available to facilitate their immediate and unconditional release.

Russia's external aggression is accompanied by a clampdown on democracy, human rights and the rule of law in Russia marked by curtailing of space for civil society, independent media and political opposition, as well as unprecedented rise of violent extremism, aggressive nationalism, neo-Nazism and xenophobic manifestations.

We witness a worrying picture with the adoption of restrictive legislation on "foreign agents", "undesirable organizations" and so-called "Yarovaya Package", censorship in the media and internet, restrictions on freedoms of expression, assembly and association, violation of rights of national and other minorities. In conjunction with the 2015 legislation, which allowed the Constitutional Court of Russia to take rulings on non-implementation of decisions of interstate human rights bodies, Russia further departs from its obligations in the area of protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

We deplore the situation when the Russian authorities for years avoid meaningful co-operation with the OSCE Institutions and the UN special procedures, placing obstacles and effectively barring their visits to Russia. This course of the Russian Federation exacerbates its self-isolation on human rights issues and testifies in international legal context to its humanitarian default on obligations in the area of protection of human rights.

The state of affairs with human rights, fundamental freedoms and rule of law in the Russian Federation merits close attention and reaction of the OSCE Institutions.

Distinguished participants,

The current threats to human dignity and security in the OSCE region, emanating from the gross breach by one participating State of the Helsinki Decalogue principles and commitments, have to be duly taken into account in our Organization's activities. The fundamental principles and values must not be sacrificed or compromised as it will generate only more uncertainty and instability for the future.

Having to deal with many serious threats and challenges, including terrorism and migration crisis, cannot serve as an excuse for easing the efforts in countering the Russian aggression which imperils the vision of Europe whole, free and at peace. We should seek further possibilities to strengthen OSCE human rights protection mechanisms to address these challenges.

Thank you, for your attention.