



Permanent Mission of Ukraine
to the International Organizations in Vienna

**Statement on “Russia’s on-going aggression against Ukraine
and illegal occupation of Crimea”**

As for delivery by the Delegation of Ukraine
to the 1134th meeting of the Permanent Council,
16 February 2017

Mr. Chairman,

In the last two weeks the large-scale military offensive of the hybrid Russian forces on Avdiivka and its suburbs was in the centre of attention of the Permanent Council meetings. This offensive plunged the town and thousands of its residents into a humanitarian emergency, led to numerous casualties among the Ukrainian servicemen and civilians. The SMM informed, in particular, of 9 civilians killed and 41 wounded. It is the growing toll of victims of Russia’s ongoing aggression against Ukraine and its flagrant breach of the Minsk commitments since their signing.

Although lower intensity shellings around Avdiivka continue, the population of the town gradually recovers from the inflicted hardships as all basic utilities such as heating, electricity and water have been restored by the efforts of the authorities and the repair teams. Now the work focuses on repairs of significant damage to apartment buildings and private houses. Presently, 149 buildings have been repaired from the total number of over 800 objects damaged in Avdiivka in long-lasting indiscriminate shellings of the hybrid Russian forces.

We note with high appreciation the mediatory efforts of the SMM to enable repairs and restore utilities.

Distinguished colleagues,

The hybrid Russian forces in Donbas scaled back their attacks, but, contrary to the calls of the TCG of 1 February 2017, continue systematic shellings along the entire contact line, including from the heavy weapons and artillery proscribed by the Minsk agreements. From midnight of 2 February until 6.00 of 14 February the Avdiivka direction was targeted by 89 extended attacks when the proscribed heavy weapons were used 101 times firing at the Ukrainian positions over 2712 mortar rounds and shells. In the last 24 hours one Ukrainian serviceman was killed and four were wounded. Last night the residential areas of Avdiivka were shelled again, damaging, at least, 4 houses in different streets.

A single SMM report of 10 February informs about 24 impact sites by 122mm artillery within 50m of houses in government-controlled Kurdiuvivka, 4 fresh

impacts about 50m from the nearest house in government-controlled Malynove and two fresh impacts near government-controlled Toshkivka, all of them caused by MLRS rockets (BM-21).

The MRLS Grad systems were used by the hybrid Russian forces on 11 February in the Mariupol sector near Krasnohorivka. 28 Grad rockets, over 25 tank gun shells and over 130 mortar rounds targeted the Ukrainian positions.

Mr. Chairman,

The continuing military provocations by Russia-backed illegal armed formations further worsen the prospects for addressing the humanitarian needs of the population in the conflict-affected areas of Donbas.

The crossing point “Stanytsia Luhanska”, the only one in the Luhansk oblast, and the respective disengagement area remain a regular target of the hybrid Russian forces endangering thousands of civilians who cross the contact line every day. As registered in the SMM report of 10 February, the SMM camera in government-controlled Stanytsia Luhanska recorded seven explosions assessed as mortar round impacts near a Ukrainian Armed Forces forward position north of the bridge.

On 11 February the SMM reported about a rocket-assisted projectile from a light portable rocket system (Grad-P, 122mm) flying from south-south-east to north-north-west. It is the same Grad-P system, which I recalled in the last Permanent Council meeting as a weapon supplied by Russia to its hybrid forces in Donbas back in spring 2015. Notably, this Russian weapon is now registered by the SMM to be in use by the hybrid Russian forces in Luhansk oblast, while earlier it was registered in the Donetsk oblast.

The opening of another crossing point at the contact line in the Luhansk oblast, that is “Zolote”, which has been ready from March of last year, remains blocked by Russia’s proxies. Moreover, as the SMM informed on 13 February, a previously abandoned position of the hybrid Russian forces inside the Zolote disengagement area appeared to be in use, as fresh heavy-vehicle tracks led to a bunker with smoke coming from its chimney.

In parallel with imposing strict restrictions on operation of international humanitarian organizations in the occupied areas, the Russia-backed illegal armed formations maintain limitations on the weight of cargo that can be brought by individuals into these areas. Whereas a person can carry the load, including foodstuffs, of up to 75 kg from the Government-controlled territory across the contact line, the Russian hybrid forces limit it to 50 kg. The SMM reported on 9 February about restrictions on carrying products and fuel into the occupied area at the pedestrian border checkpoints of the uncontrolled section of the Ukrainian-Russian state border. Numerous restrictions, imposed by Russia and its proxies in areas of Donbas under their control, amply demonstrate their disregard for the needs of the people, but create a fertile ground for Russian propaganda about so called Russian “humanitarian assistance to the people of Donbas”.

Distinguished colleagues,

Last Friday the Kremlin's spokesperson, when asked about the origin of reported 700 battle tanks and other weaponry in the possession of the illegal armed formations in Donbas, advised to direct this question to the Ukrainian authorities. We wish to respond through the Russian Ambassador in the Permanent Council: those tanks, heavy artillery and hundreds of pieces of various military equipment, including exclusively used by the Russian Armed Forces, thousands of tons of ammunition were illegally transferred into Donbas by the Russian Federation through the uncontrolled segment of the Ukrainian-Russian state border. Russia's military supplies to its hybrid forces in Donbas continue. Let me point out to a few of such recent deliveries: on 29 January train echelons with fuel and lubricants arrived to Ilovaysk and Luhansk, on 2 February a train echelon with fuel arrived to Rovenky, on 3 February a train echelon with military equipment and ammunition arrived to Ilovaysk, on 6 February train echelons with fuel and ammunition arrived to Rovenki and Laryne (on the outskirts of Donetsk). Military deliveries were also made by other means. In particular, on 5 February a column consisting of tanks, APCs and howitzers arrived from Russia to the Kruhlyk training range. There is lots of work to be done by the OSCE SMM to monitor and verify the withdrawal of Russian troops, mercenaries, fighters and weapons, as envisaged by the Minsk agreements.

These illegal military deliveries happen as Russia grossly breaches the OSCE principles and commitments. However, the SMM is prevented by the hybrid Russian forces from establishing facts and reporting on these violations, as stipulated by its mandate, because of imposed restrictions on the SMM's freedom of movement and access, in particular concerning the monitoring of railway hubs, main transport routes and the border.

The SMM reports of 10, 11, 13 and 14 February informed about numerous cases of denial of access to the SMM monitors. In particular, on 11 February seven armed fighters of the hybrid Russian forces stopped the SMM on a road north of Lobacheve (13km east of Luhansk) and told it to leave the area immediately, because the SMM observed tank tracks leading to the area. A similar situation took place near Kalynovo, when the SMM was prevented from following the tracks of heavy vehicles across a railroad line, as registered in the report of 10 February. The restrictions are aggravated by intimidations as was highlighted in the last Permanent Council. Again the monitors were fired at warning shots on 12 February, when observing a camouflaged tank of unknown type in non-government-controlled Pikuzy. We strongly condemn these incidents of intimidation of civilian monitors and urge Russia to put a stop to this unacceptable practice.

We note that the Russian strategy of deception and "blinding" the SMM encompasses different aspects of the situation in the occupied areas of Donbas. In particular, on 10 February the SMM cited medical personnel in Makiivka that they were under instructions that any inquiries regarding casualties should be sent to the so-called "DPR".

Mr. Chairman,

Disregard for human lives, needs and rights is the main characteristics of the attitudes of the hybrid Russian forces in the areas under their control in Donbas. In parallel, the Russian occupation regime in the Crimean peninsula has committed serious human rights violations and continues to persecute any dissenting voices, in particular from the Crimean Tatar and Ukrainian communities. There are no signs of relaxation of repressive policies.

We urge Russia, as an occupying power, to exercise responsibility under the international law, to put an end to human rights violations and allow access of international organizations for permanent human rights monitoring.

Distinguished colleagues,

Yesterday, the meeting of the TCG focused on urgent security and humanitarian issues. Later this week they will be taken up in the Normandy Four Ministerial meeting. We hope that these diplomatic efforts will serve to stimulate Russia towards implementation of the commitments it has undertaken on peaceful resolution of the conflict it started nearly three years ago.

We urge Russia to return to the tenets of international law, to stop its aggression against Ukraine and reverse the illegal occupation of the Crimean peninsula which remains an integral part of Ukraine.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.