



Delegation of Canada
to the OSCE

Délégation du Canada
auprès de l'OSCE

**STATEMENT BY COUNSELLOR ESTHER VAN NES
ON RUSSIA'S DETENTION OF OSCE OFFICIALS
AS PART OF ITS WAR OF AGGRESSION AGAINST UKRAINE
1442nd MEETING OF THE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

21 September 2023

Mr. Chair,

I would begin by expressing our thanks to Minister Osmani, as Chairman-in-Office, and to Secretary General Helga Schmid for their recent and repeated calls for the immediate release of the three OSCE officials, members of the Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine, that have been arbitrarily detained by Russian Federation authorities for more than 500 days.

Canada joins the CiO and the Secretary General in expressing our concern for and solidarity with our detained Ukrainian officials, as well as their families and loved ones.

Yesterday, in the margins of the UN General Assembly in New York, Canada's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mélanie Joly, hosted a high-level dialogue on the initiative against arbitrary detention in state-to-state relations. Canada launched this initiative to highlight the unacceptable, unjust, and illegal practice of arbitrarily using citizens as bargaining chips for political gain. While this work has focused on arbitrary detention in state-to-state relations, we cannot avoid seeing parallels to the plight of the three SMM staff members detained in Donetsk and Luhansk where they had been performing their official duties as part of an OSCE mission mandated by all 57 participating States.

Arbitrary detention violates established principles of human rights, the rule of law and the independence of the judiciary. Attempting to justify these detentions with suspect "legal proceedings" does not legitimize the situation.

We view the arrest and detention of these individuals and the holding of OSCE assets as an attempt by the Russian Federation to further undermine the work of the OSCE and a rejection of its OSCE principles and commitments.

As a participating State, Russia agreed to the SMM mandate that these employees were working to fulfill. That these individuals were detained while working towards this mandate is completely unacceptable.

We call on the Russian Federation to immediately and unconditionally release Vadym Golda, Maxim Petrov and Dmytro Shabanov, and to promptly return all SMM assets to the OSCE.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.