



United States Mission to the OSCE

Ongoing Violations of International Law and Defiance of OSCE Principles and Commitments by the Russian Federation in Ukraine

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires Greg Macris
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
October 4, 2018

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Allow me to add my voice to yours and that of many participating States in saying that the United States welcomes the extension of Ukraine's "Special Status Law" adopted this morning by the Verkhovna Rada. We view this action as another positive demonstration of Kiev's commitment to implementing the Minsk agreements.

Another week has passed during which reports from eastern Ukraine remind us of the true costs of this Russia-manufactured conflict. On October 1, the Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM) reported that three children were killed and one injured in a mine blast at a railyard near Horlivka. These three boys, aged 12 to 14 years old, will be remembered, along with the more than ten thousand others killed in since 2014, as the victims of Russian aggression in Ukraine. The United States mourns their loss and insists that Russia's proxies in eastern Ukraine refrain from blocking humanitarian demining efforts.

Mr. Chair, the United States welcomes the SMM's recent review of education issues in eastern Ukraine and its efforts to better assess the impact of the conflict on children's daily life.

It is unacceptable that the monitors were blocked from speaking with school staff on 11 occasions, all at schools in areas controlled by Russia-led forces. These reports note that schoolchildren routinely heard bullets flying overhead while in the schoolyard and nearby explosions caused walls and windows to shake. At one school, students were prohibited from playing outside. The most striking aspects of the report, however, are its references to post-traumatic stress disorder, sleeping problems, and general anxiety present throughout student populations and the lack of adequate care to address such problems.

The conflict is also affecting the broader civilian population. On September 29 the SMM detailed how an SMM paramedic provided emergency care for a couple injured near their home by shrapnel from a large-caliber weapon system. The report detailed extensive damage to houses and towns near the line of contact. Due to limitations on its patrolling -- almost always in the areas controlled by Russia's proxies -- the SMM cannot track all of the civilian damage and carnage. The toll is likely much higher. The United States calls on Russia and the forces it arms, trains, leads, and fights alongside to uphold their commitments to

withdraw troops and heavy weapons from the line of contact and to halt exchanges of fire. Russia is the aggressor in the conflict and so we, along with the rest of the world, expect Moscow to take the first steps to improve security conditions on the ground and end the bloodshed.

As is widely acknowledged, a genuine and lasting cease-fire, followed by the withdrawal of proscribed weapons, is required before work begins on the political aspects of the Minsk agreements. These agreements remain the best path to peace in the conflict, yet Russia and its proxies seek to undo progress with the announced November 11 elections in the pseudo-statelets Russia created. Along with the broader international community, the United States repeats its calls on Russia to abandon its plans for these sham “elections” and take the steps outlined in the Minsk agreements, particularly those related to security, which are necessary to ensure an environment where real elections for local offices can take place.

The United States notes the SMM’s continued role in keeping the Donetsk Filtration Station (DFS) in operation and is concerned about reports of increased military presence in the immediate vicinity of this critical piece of infrastructure. On September 16 an SMM UAV patrol spotted improved defensive fortifications south of the DFS, assessed as belonging to Russia-led forces. The militarization of areas near critical pieces of humanitarian infrastructure is unacceptable, and we call upon the sides to take all possible steps to protect civilian infrastructure.

Mr. Chair, the United States notes the passage of the 79th so-called “humanitarian convoy” that crossed from Russia to Ukraine on September 27, a violation of Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity. Moscow’s flouting of border protocols is the reason the SMM must have unhindered access to the totality of the internationally recognized border between Russia and Ukraine, in accordance with its mandate.

Mr. Chair, in Russia-controlled areas, monitors continue to be blocked, harassed, and sometimes threatened with violence. In the September 25 weekly report, the Mission notes that its movement was restricted 28 times – 27 times in areas controlled by Russia-led forces. The SMM remains critical to our efforts in Ukraine. The United States repeats its calls on Russia to cease this campaign of interference, threats, and even violence against our SMM monitors who only seek to carry out the Mission’s mandate, a mandate that has been agreed upon by every OSCE participating State.

The deplorable conditions in Crimea continue to attract the world’s attention. We encourage all OSCE participating States to support the UNGA Third Committee resolution on Crimea, which condemns the Russian Federation for its attempted annexation of Crimea and for the severe curtailment of expression, peaceful assembly and association, and religion or belief that it has instituted there, especially with regard to members of the Crimean Tatar and ethnic Ukrainian communities. We condemn Russian occupation authorities’ October 2 decision to deny RFE/RL correspondent Mykola Semena permission to leave Crimea to seek medical treatment because he is serving a suspended sentence for stating that Crimea is part of Ukraine. And we remain concerned about the health of Ukrainian citizens of Crimea on hunger-strike, Oleh Sentsov and Volodymyr Balukh and again urge their immediate release. The United States calls on Russia to respect its OSCE commitments and end its occupation of Crimea.

The United States fully supports Ukraine's sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders. We do not, nor will we ever, recognize Russia's purported annexation of Crimea. We join our European and other partners in affirming that our Minsk-related sanctions against Russia will remain in place until Russia fully implements its Minsk commitments. The separate, Crimea-related sanctions will remain in place until Russia returns full control of the peninsula to Ukraine.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.