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STATEMENT ON RUSSIA'S ONGOING AGGRESSION AGAINST UKRAINE
AND ILLEGAL OCCUPATION OF CRIMEA

Delivered by Ambassador Steffen Kongstad at the Permanent Council
Vienna, 15 March 2018

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Mr Chair,

Norway has aligned itself with the statement made by the European Union, but I wish to make the following additional statement.

On Sunday, we mark four years since Russia's attempt of illegal annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol. On 20 February 2014, under the false pretext of restoring law, order and stability in Crimea, Russian forces entered Ukrainian territory and took control of political institutions and key societal functions. Merely three weeks later, a so-called referendum on 16 March was designed to legitimise Russia's use of force. In the absence of any form of international recognition, the referendum was used to justify the illegal incorporation of Crimea and Sevastopol into the Russian Federation on 18 March.

Since then, the human rights situation in Crimea and Sevastopol has deteriorated. As the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights stated on 25 September 2017 "The human rights situation in Crimea has significantly deteriorated under Russian occupation, with "multiple and grave violations" committed by Russian state agents". Today, four years after the occupation started, Russia is still denying international organisations and NGOs access to the peninsula.

Yesterday the Norwegian State Secretary in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Audun Halvorsen, stated the following: "We are still hearing claims that Crimea has always been Russian and that Russia was simply taking back an area of territory that was rightfully its own. The fact is that Russia chose to place itself above international law, disregarding a series of legally binding agreements developed in the wake of two devastating world wars to regulate relations between states", End of quote.

Mr. Chair

Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol violated fundamental principles of international law. It has had major consequences not only for Ukraine, but for our entire region and for global security. No one, neither small nor big countries, will in the long run benefit from discarding an international rules based order and we strongly encourage Russia to return Crimea to Ukrainian control. Norway has not, and will not, recognise Russia's illegal occupation of Crimea and Sevastopol and will continue to support the sanctions against responsible authorities and individuals.

Thank you, Mr Chair.