



United States Mission to the OSCE

The Russian Federation's Ongoing Aggression Against Ukraine

As delivered by Ambassador Michael Carpenter
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
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Last week, at the same time as we were meeting here in the Permanent Council, Russia was launching missiles at Ukraine's civilian infrastructure. Moscow's armed forces fired a total of 70 missiles last Thursday, including two hypersonic ones, killing 12 people. This latest round of attacks yet again damaged residential buildings and critical infrastructure like electrical substations, crippling the power grid on a day when temperatures in Kyiv remained below freezing. And today, one of Russia's missiles hit an apartment building in Kramatorsk, killing three people and injuring 20.

It is all too easy to become numb to these missile attacks. Our brains process the number of missiles and we can compare with the previous week to judge whether it was "a lot" or "a little." We can easily envisage more damaged apartment blocks like the ones we have become accustomed to seeing in the news every day. But these statistics and images do not adequately capture the stories of human suffering that Ukrainians cope with every day. To understand their suffering, there is no substitute for hearing directly from those who have been personally affected by the war, as hard as it may be to listen to their experiences of pain and brutality. So I'd like to take some time today to speak to some of these experiences.

Take the story of Nina Zvarech who lived near Kherson City. As Russia's attacks cut off power and as temperatures dropped, Nina was forced to go into a nearby forest in a desperate search for wood to heat her home. During her search, Nina stepped on a landmine hidden in the forest. She died instantly. However, Nina's family and friends were unable to retrieve her body for over a month because the dangers from Russia's mines and other unexploded ordnance remained too great.

Yesterday, we had the opportunity to hear from Ukrainians who survived Russia's occupation of Kherson. For the benefit of those who were not able to make it, including the Russian representative, I want to repeat their stories because they testify to what I spoke about in my statement last week: Russia's systematic attempts to wipe out Ukrainian sovereignty by targeting all those who identify as Ukrainians.

Serhii Nosach, a teacher, was taken by Russia's forces at gun point from his house in Beryslav. He was brought to a container two meters wide and six or seven meters long where he was held with 16 other people. As he noted "I stood with my face against the wall. Then they turned me around and started beating me. They hit me in all parts of the body. They threw me on the floor and told me to raise my legs – they hit me in the heels with something. The worst thing was when they tied my hands behind my back, attached two wires and started torturing me with electricity... They knew how to beat me without leaving marks on the face. It was very difficult to endure their tortures, especially the electric shocks."

We also heard about Liudmyia Shumkova's experience in captivity: "When I arrived, the girls said the corpse of a man had been brought out the other day. Later, the corpse of another man who had not survived torture was taken out from there. It was Anatoli Dzhurmii. He was tortured to death. First, they took his wife hostage. They promised him that if he surrendered, they would let her go. But they did not release her, but tortured him to death instead. Iryna Luniaka, who was kept in the cell together with me, was taken 'for a walk,' as they said, for questioning. And when she returned from 'the walk,' it was scary to look at her. They call it "working." They applied everything they had to her: water, electric current, and rubber batons."

Those subjected to this kind of torture and inhuman treatment continue to carry the physical and mental scars with them. Roman Baklzhov explained, "I was interrogated four times. They wanted me to say that I was a fascist, a Nazi. During the interrogations, I was beaten with police batons and bats and tortured with electric shock. They killed one person. They killed him. He was 58 years old. He died in five hours. The military knew about this incident. No medical care was provided."

Or listen to the testimony of the following female resident of Berdiansk: "First they took three fingers of one hand, then of another. They start torturing, intensely. I cry, scream, of course. During pauses, they were beating me in the face, I had split lips. I gave up when they attached the electrodes to my earlobes. I don't know whether the electric current was that strong, but it seemed to me that the upper part of the head separated and flew up somewhere."

Russia's war of aggression continues to bring pain and suffering to Ukraine's most vulnerable, including children. Kremlin proxy authorities have reportedly forcibly deported or otherwise transferred over 14,000 children to Russia. To facilitate this, the Kremlin's puppet governor in Sevastopol recently claimed Moscow had allocated nearly \$100,000 dollars to build new facilities in Russia-occupied Crimea to house over 400 children. Reports have also documented photos of 14 children from Kherson Oblast posted to a website titled "Adoption in Moscow Oblast." These children, aged two to five, were located at the Yolochka orphanage in Russia-occupied Simferopol. Yolochka's stated objective was to "foster patriotism and civic feeling" and to teach them to "identify as citizens of a multinational Russia." Again, I spoke to this in my statement last week, noting that Russian authorities above all seek to eliminate all manifestations of Ukrainian national identity and to turn all Ukrainians into loyal subjects of the Russian imperium.

Yesterday, just upstairs, we heard from 14-year-old Vitalii, who together with his uncle were apprehended by Russian forces at the start of the occupation of Kherson and badly beaten. They were forced into a ditch, where little Vitalii saw bloody intestines strewn all over. He was eventually taken to a detention center. As he said: "I didn't eat anything for four days. Food was brought, but not to me. On the fifth day, I was given two spoons of boiled buckwheat and two spoons of pasta." He confided that still today he does not feel safe, fearing the occupiers might one day return.

Mr. Chair, the United States will continue to work with Ukraine and our international partners to promote accountability for those responsible for these horrendous acts, many of which constitute war crimes. Last week we designated three Russian Federation officials who facilitated the recruitment of prisoners from across Russia into the Wagner Group, including contract killers, murderers, and career criminals, who were promised pardons in return for fighting in Ukraine. Wagner has reportedly used many convicts as cannon fodder in their bloody campaign for Bakhmut and Soledar in Ukraine's Donetsk region. Former Wagner commander Andrei Medvedev told CNN that Wagner "would round up those who did not want to fight and shoot them in front of newcomers...They brought two prisoners who refused to go fight and they shot them in front of everyone and buried them right in the trenches that were dug by the trainees." And most recently we have seen reports that Wagner is looking to recruit into its ranks convicts from among the several thousand prisoners whom Russia forcibly transferred from jails in Russia-occupied Ukraine.

Yesterday, the United States again sanctioned Russia's war machine and those who support its efforts, such as prominent arms dealer Igor Zimenkov. This and other sanctions designations were taken as part of the REPO Task Force, which focuses on and stands for "Russian Elites, Proxies, and Oligarchs." The REPO Task Force aims to maximize the effect of multilateral sanctions, ensuring that Russia is unable to easily evade the consequences wrought by its destructive and needless war against Ukraine. We must all do more: from supplying military equipment to ramping up sanctions and further tightening exports controls. The sooner we help Ukraine liberate its land, the sooner these reports of atrocities will end.

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