



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 1133rd meeting of the Permanent Council,
9 February 2017

Mr. Chairman,

Russia’s ongoing aggression against Ukraine and its failure to honour the undertaken Minsk commitments sharply escalated last week in the military assault by the hybrid Russian forces on Avdiivka and its suburbs and a significant increase of their shellings along the entire line of contact. The SMM report of 6 February registers the presence of thousands of new craters in the area of escalation. We are not surprised that last week the Russian delegation was discontent over the calling of a special Permanent Council meeting because Moscow has a strong preference to carrying out its criminal actions in the dark and far from international attention. The spotlight placed on these actions, including in the OSCE, the UN Security Council and the Council of Europe, has increased the diplomatic and political pressure on the Russian Federation and thus contributed to certain de-escalation of violence and stabilization of the security and humanitarian situation in Avdiivka.

The Ukrainian authorities, through close cooperation and coordination between central bodies of power, local authorities and international organizations, have managed to avert a humanitarian disaster in Avdiivka after the massive shellings by the hybrid Russian forces had left the town and its suburbs without electricity, water and heating. Socially important facilities (homes for elderly people, central and railway hospital) were provided with the autonomous power supply and kept functioning. Winter tents, field kitchens and power generators were deployed. Emergency measures were taken to maintain minimum heating of 153 apartment buildings and 3.5 thousand private households with the outside temperatures of minus 20C.

The civilians and the town’s critical infrastructure have been deliberately placed under great risk by the hybrid Russian forces which repeatedly fired at repair teams attempting to restore the electricity supply. Only in the afternoon of 5 February three power lines were repaired and the electricity supply resumed to about 20.000 residents in Avdiivka as well as to the Avdiivka coke plant.

We appreciate the considerable efforts of the SMM to facilitate access of those teams, as highlighted in the SMM reports of 4th, 5th and 6 February.

From 29 January the attacks of the hybrid Russian forces killed 3 and wounded 9 civilians of Avdiivka, damaged 102 buildings, including 7 multi-story apartment houses and 92 private houses.

Distinguished colleagues,

The situation around Avdiivka and broader in conflict-affected areas of Donbas remains highly volatile because of continuing shellings and unpredictability of Russia's further aggressive intentions in pursuit of its political goals.

Being committed to the Minsk agreements and to comply with the calls of the Trilateral Contact Group of 1 February 2017 the Ukrainian side supported the proposals of the SMM on the time and areas of cessation of fire as well as provided guarantees on full respect for cease-fire and non-movement of military units from 8.00 of 5 February. The Russian side has not provided such guarantees.

Contrary to the call of the TCG, the hybrid Russian forces continued shellings by heavy artillery and mortars, MLRS and tanks. From midnight of 2 February until 6.00 of 7 February Avdiivka areas were targeted by 43 extended attacks when the proscribed heavy weapons were used 66 times firing at the Ukrainian positions over 2276 mortar rounds and shells. Between 2-6 February 1 Ukrainian servicemen was killed, 12 were wounded and 5 – injured.

During one week only, from 29 January till 4 February, over 7148 pieces of ammunition (including 1085 MLRS rockets, 1264 152mm artillery shells, 610 122mm artillery shells, 949 tank shells, 1891 120mm mortar rounds, 1349 82mm mortar rounds) were fired by the hybrid Russian forces at the positions of the Ukrainian Armed Forces and civilian areas. The overall weight of the ammunition is nearly 340 tons. It is the load of 53 "Kamaz" trucks or 9 railway cars.

Notably, in this period from 29 January till 4 February the Ukrainian part of the JCCC initiated 312 requests for cease-fire around Avdiivka, but only in 13 cases (4%) it became possible to temporarily stop the shellings of the hybrid Russian forces. After the TCG meeting 54 attempts to establish cease-fire were made on 2 February and 28 attempts on 3 February 2017.

Last week's assault on Avdiivka and persistent shellings by the hybrid Russian forces are sustained by the permanent flow of Russian manpower, ammunition and finances to the occupied areas in Donbas. In January 2017, 2700 tons of fuel and lubricants, as well as 300 tons of ammunition were supplied by Russia to its hybrid forces through the uncontrolled segments of the Ukrainian-Russian border. On 2 February, a railway echelon of 20 platforms with approximately 40 pieces of heavy military equipment (possibly tanks or self-propelled howitzers) arrived to the Donetsk city.

Apart from firing thousands of shells and rockets at the Ukrainians, the hybrid Russian forces also contaminate the Ukrainian land with anti-tank and banned anti-personnel mines as registered in the SMM weekly report of 8 February and daily report of 6 February 2017.

Mr. Chairman,

The offensive actions of the hybrid Russian forces are not limited to Avdiivka, but take place along the entire contact line. As just one example, the SMM reported on 6 February about 62 MLRS shellings from south-east to north-west over Shyrokyne and 95 undetermined explosions and eight explosions assessed as outgoing MLRS rockets from non-government controlled Kadiivka (formerly Stakhanov, 50km west of Luhansk).

Often the same places are shelled by the hybrid Russian forces again and again. While the SMM report of 4 February registered seven fresh impact sites caused by MLRS "BM-21 Grad" in government-controlled Sartana (15km north-east of Mariupol), the next report of 6 February informed about 13 new impact sites in Sartana assessed as caused by the same weapon.

At 20.50 of 6 February in the village of Kurdiuvivka of the Donetsk oblast the shelling of the hybrid Russian forces killed a 15 year-old boy. There were no Ukrainian servicemen in the vicinity of that village.

Distinguished colleagues,

Moscow and Russia-backed illegal armed formations continue to stake no less on falsification of events, than they do on military force. While pushing for military escalation, they foster the propaganda to put blame on the Ukrainian forces, including by cynically shelling the areas under their control. In the recent days the Russian side doubled the number of propagandists performing their activities in the occupied areas of Donbas.

In particular, last week they targeted the residential buildings at Listoprotchikiv street 3A and 10 in Donetsk. In the spot report of 3 February the SMM registered in different locations in Donetsk the impacts of single MLRS rockets. Single MLRS rockets are fired by a system Grad-P, which was supplied by Russia to its hybrid forces in spring 2015 and which has a firing range of 2 to 10 km. As first mentioned in the SMM weekly report of 13 May 2015, "the Grad-Ps are seen near the line of contact in "DPR"-controlled territory, as confirmed by SMM Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) footage". Since then these systems have been constantly registered in use by the hybrid Russian forces. Preempting the claims by the Russian delegation that the "locals would not fire at themselves" we must clearly state, based on available facts, that the terrorist fighters, mercenaries and military personnel, brought by Russia to sustain conflict in Donbas, do not care which side of the contact line they shell. Russia, having a track-record of brutal and indiscriminate use of force in conflicts, has not shown sympathy to human sufferings before and there is no sign of it now.

We wish to underscore: the Ukrainian Armed Forces do not suppress artillery systems, tanks and multiple launch rocket systems which are fired by the hybrid Russian forces from residential areas using the civilians as "human shields". Last week the Ukrainian side immediately informed the SMM about artillery coordinates of the hybrid Russian forces. As a result of this step, the illegal armed formations were forced to withdraw part of their artillery from residential areas.

Mr. Chairman,

Russian military provocations in Avdiivka highlight again that the immediate implementation of the initial security provisions of the Minsk agreements remains the only efficient antidote against the new outbreaks of violence in Donbas. It has not yet happened as Russia continues its destructive practice of making security on the ground conditional on implementation of its political demands, despite it runs counter to the logic of the peaceful resolution, established by the Minsk agreements, and increases the sufferings of the civilian population.

Developments in Donbas since the beginning of the Russian aggression testify that until security on the ground is ensured it will be impossible to advance on other tracks of the Minsk agreements, including with regard to holding local elections in certain areas of Donbas.

According to the Minsk agreements these elections must be held in accordance with the Ukrainian legislation, OSCE standards and under the OSCE/ODIHR monitoring. De-occupation and disarmament of the illegal armed formations will be necessary for establishing a safe environment for a free expression of will of the local population in fair elections. Any imitation under the barrel of Russian gun will simply be a repetition of the farces of March and November 2014, which aimed at legitimizing Russian illegal presence in occupied Crimea and the certain areas of Donbas.

Distinguished colleagues,

The SMM monitors will not be able to effectively implement their mandate until they have full freedom of movement and access in the occupied areas of Donbas. However, the severe restrictions continue. Last week, in particular, when the hybrid Russian forces shelled Avdiivka and surroundings from the residential areas of Yasynuvata, they denied movement of the SMM to the centre of this town. The severe restrictions are compounded by intimidations which is unacceptable.

We condemn the incident, which took place on 3 February near Kalynove (60km west of Luhansk), when the SMM monitors were fired at by fighters of the hybrid Russian forces. We cannot regard as satisfactory the response to this dangerous incident by the Russian side of the JCCC calling it “an isolated case”. It is by far not an isolated case as it was preceded only recently by cases of intimidation of the SMM monitors in Debaltseve and Amvrosiivka and by many other cases in the past. The lack of effective measures of response by the Russian side to its fighters further worsens the environment for the mandated SMM activities.

We also condemn the sniper fire targeting the Ukrainian officers of the JCCC on 6 February near Lobachevo, despite clearly visible vehicle marks and chevrons of the JCCC.

We urge Russia to stop the deliberate policy of restrictions and intimidation and to allow the SMM monitors to duly perform their functions.

Mr. Chairman,

A week ago we informed the Permanent Council that the Russian authorities detained and placed under arrest Emil Kurbedinov, the lawyer of many Ukrainians and Crimean Tatars who oppose Russia's illegal occupation of the Crimean peninsula.

Although on 5 February, after ten days of administrative arrest, Emil Kurbedinov was released from the Simferopol isolation ward, the period of his arrest had been deliberately used by the occupation authorities for persecution of Kurbedinov's clients. The Russian Federal Security Service secured the extension of illegal detention of Redvan Suleimanov, who was deprived of the defence lawyer.

The number of Ukrainian citizens held in illegal detention in Russia as political prisoners is growing. Yesterday, on 8 February, based on thorough analysis of facts and circumstances the Russian human rights centre "Memorial" recognised the Ukrainian citizen, a Crimean farmer V. Balukh to be a political prisoner held behind bars under trumped-up charges since last December. We urge Russia to immediately release all illegally detained Ukrainian citizens.

We again urge Russia, as an occupying power, to put a halt to human rights violations in the illegally occupied territory and allow access of international organizations for permanent human rights monitoring.

Distinguished colleagues,

The humanitarian emergencies like the one, which evolved in Avdiivka last week, numerous casualties among civilians and servicemen and destruction of infrastructure, grave violations of human rights in the occupied territories – all of them continue because of Russia's unabated aggression against Ukraine and contempt for undertaken commitments and norms of international law.

The international solidarity, firmness and consolidated political and diplomatic pressure remain critically important to make the Russian Federation abandon its aggressive plans and engage in peaceful resolution of the conflict it started nearly three years ago. We strongly urge Russia to move from words to deeds in fulfilling the undertaken Minsk commitments. It is long overdue. We urge Russia to return to the tenets of international law and reverse the illegal occupation of the Crimean peninsula, which is an integral part of the sovereign territory of Ukraine.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.