



Permanent Mission of Ukraine
to the International Organizations in Vienna

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**Statement on “Russia’s on-going aggression against Ukraine
and illegal occupation of Crimea”**

As delivered by the Delegation of Ukraine
to the 1108th meeting of the Permanent Council,
14 July 2016

Mr. Chairman,

On 11 July Ukraine paid tribute to the memory of 39 Ukrainian servicemen, who were killed two years ago near the border village of Zelenopillya in Luhansk oblast in a Russian artillery attack from the territory of the Russian Federation. This tragedy and thousands of other lost lives remain today a strong reminder of the ultimate price the Ukrainians pay for defending their country, the values of democracy, freedom and independence from external aggression.

The patterns of the Russia hybrid war against Ukraine and its strategies of deception have not sustained significant change in the last two years. Presently, security situation in Donbas again deteriorates. Over the past week the level of violence increased as the combined Russian-separatist forces intensified their armed provocations against the Ukrainian servicemen and the civilian population in the region.

We strongly support the view, expressed by the Chief Monitor, Ambassador Apakan in his statement of Tuesday, that a ceasefire is a key step towards the restoration of stabilization, normalization and ultimately, peace. It is of great concern that the number of ceasefire violations remains high along most of the contact line. Heavy weapons, mostly mortars and high caliber artillery, are widely used by the Russia-backed illegal armed formations. The real number of heavy weapons in possession of these hybrid forces, in particular in the exclusion zone, remains unchecked as many have not been declared to deceive the SMM verification.

For instance, the so-called “LPR” militants hold few heavy weapons in two storage sites immovable to demonstrate their compliance with the Minsk agreements. On the one hand, the information about presence of all previously recorded weapons is regularly included in the SMM reports, on the other – the SMM registers the presence and use of heavy weapons in the exclusion zone. Last week the SMM observed some of these undeclared weapons, notably 9 self-propelled howitzers “Gvozdika” near Bugaivka in the exclusion zone of the occupied part of Luhansk region. Yesterday the SMM reported

spotting by UAV in just one Budyonivskiy district of the city of Donetsk 3 self-propelled howitzers, 1 MLRS “Grad”, 23 tanks and numerous other pieces of military hardware. It is the fraction of the weapons that have not been declared and are used for provocative shellings. We condemn such deception practice by the combined Russian-separatist forces and urge Russia to deliver on its commitments to ceasefire, withdrawal of heavy weapons and unhindered OSCE monitoring and verification.

While the regular shellings, sniper fire and subversive activities by the militants persist, the direct attacks on the Ukrainian positions become more and more frequent. A subversive group of about 20 terrorist fighters attacked on a Ukrainian unit deployed in the vicinity of Troitske on 10 July. The attack was repelled and the group had to retreat, leaving behind three fighters killed and wounded. Two of them were Russian citizens, notably Natan Tsakirov from Omsk and Aleksey Sedikov from Severodvinsk in Arkhangelsk region. The Security Service of Ukraine made public their Russian IDs and uploaded on its web-page the footage of confessions of Sedikov, placed in a hospital ward. The detainee confirmed that the so-called “military forces” of pseudo-republics were run by undercover Russian servicemen and the shelling by hybrid forces of both government-controlled and non-government-controlled areas.

Intensive shellings increase the toll of casualties. Just on 6-12 July 10 Ukrainian servicemen were killed and 51 were wounded. The UN mission reports the highest number of casualties among civilians since August 2015.

The Russian hybrid forces continue to resort to the cynical tactics of using the civilian population of Donbas as a human shield. The SMM, referring to the evidence of local residents of Dokuchayivsk, again reported on 11 July” of positions of the so-called “DPR in the residential areas of the city.

Distinguished colleagues,

The urgent need to put an end to the security degradation in the conflict-affected areas, in particular by full and good-faith implementation of the initial security provisions of the Minsk agreements, was emphasized by the Ukrainian side at the yesterday’s meeting of the Trilateral Contact group in Minsk. We are concerned that the recently agreed initiative on pilot disengagement areas is jeopardized by the Russian hybrid forces, denying access of the SMM to areas near Petrivske and hampering the disengagement process.

The persistent impediments to the SMM monitoring and verification activities by the combined Russian-separatist forces have not been removed and seriously undermine the efficiency of monitoring and de-escalation efforts. During the past week the Mission again reported on numerous cases of freedom-of-movement restrictions, again with over 90% of them in the occupied areas. These restrictions breach the agreed mandate of the SMM and its ability to report objectively on the situation. We urge Russia to deliver on its commitment on the SMM’s full freedom of movement.

We find deeply worrying and unacceptable the attempts to undermine the important part of the SMM activities on the ground, relating to facilitation of repairs of essential infrastructure in the conflict-affected areas. In particular, on 7 July the SMM had to leave the area of repair works in the area of a factory near Toretsk after the militants from the so-called “DPR” had announced the withdrawal of security guarantees. It is just one in a chain of examples of utmost disregard to the humanitarian needs of the local population. Others relate to the ongoing shellings of the areas around the contact-line entry-exit points, strict restrictions on operation of humanitarian organizations and delivery of humanitarian aid.

Mr.Chairman,

Once and again we have emphasized in the Permanent Council that the uncontrolled part of the state border between Ukraine and Russia is a crucial impediment to de-escalation. The present security degradation in Donbas proves the importance of resolving this problem as Russian fighters, weapons and ammunition continue to flow into Ukraine. We encourage the Chairmanship to take forward the discussions on the OSCE role in establishing security zones in border areas of Ukraine and Russia, agreed in Minsk. There is also an immediate need to establish a respective working group in the TCG.

We note with deep regret that the TCG meeting in Minsk again reached no progress in releasing the hostages and illegally detained persons on the basis of “all-for-all” principle. We call on Russia to stop using the Ukrainian hostages as an instrument of blackmailing Ukraine and to unblock the release process. We also underline that the relevant provision of the Minsk Package of measures applies equally to the Ukrainian citizens, who are held in illegal detention in Russia. One of them is a Ukrainian filmmaker Oleh Sentsov, who celebrated yesterday his birthday, already third in illegal detention in a Russian prison.

Distinguished colleagues,

The human rights situation in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, illegally occupied by Russia, remains extremely worrisome.

Since the beginning of the illegal occupation of Crimea journalists have been one of the main targets for attacks. They have been detained, beaten, deprived of their job and expelled from the native land. Recent official labeling of journalists Mykola Semena and Anna Andrievska as “terrorists and extremists” is another example of repressive practices. We share concerns, expressed by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, and urge Moscow to immediately stop attacks against Ukrainian journalists in the illegally occupied Crimea.

We also call on Russia, as an occupying power, to take responsibility for stopping human rights violations on the peninsula and to facilitate free and unconditional access for permanent international monitoring in Crimea.

Mr.Chairman,

The sequence and logic of the Minsk agreements is clear. We urge Russia to stop fuelling the conflict in Donbas, to take practical steps to implement its commitments on peaceful resolution, undertaken in Minsk, and to exert its influence on the militants it supports to do likewise.

We urge Russia to restore its respect for the norms of international law and the OSCE principles and commitments, halt its aggression against Ukraine and reverse the illegal occupation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol.

Thank you, Mr.Chairman.