



**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 delivered by the Delegation of Ukraine  
to the 1125<sup>th</sup> special meeting of the Permanent Council,  
20 December 2016

**Mr. Chairman,**

I regret to inform the Permanent Council that the Russian aggression against Ukraine continues unabated and the last few days registered a deadly spike in hostilities. In particular, the combined Russian-separatist forces undertook an offensive operation to seize control of Ukrainian Armed Forces positions and territory near the town of Svitlodarsk.

From early morning of 18 December 2016 the combined Russian-separatist forces resorted to intensive shelling of the Ukrainian positions near Svitlodarsk with the use of mortars - nearly 700 mortar rounds were fired - and tubed artillery. They conducted the shelling positioning their weapons in the residential areas of Debaltseve, Vuhlehirsk, Kalynivka. The extended artillery attack was followed by an offensive operation of the combined Russian-separatist forces aiming to advance in the direction of the settlement of Luhanske and to seize strategically important locations controlled by the Ukrainian Armed Forces.

In the course of the day repeated attempts of advance were undertaken accompanied by three massive artillery shellings lasting from three to six hours each. The shellings damaged the civilian infrastructure facilities and power lines leaving Svitlodarsk and villages around it without electricity. In the evening, three artillery shells exploded near the school in Luhanske. The attacks were repelled by the defences and a counter-attack of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, making the units of the combined Russian-separatist forces retreat.

Unfortunately, the Ukrainian Armed Forces sustained the biggest one-day losses in the last five months: 5 Ukrainian servicemen lost their lives, 16 were wounded and injured, 1 was reported missing.

Notably, the offensive operation by the combined Russian-separatist forces was attempted at a distance of 36 km from the line of contact established by the Minsk Memorandum of 19 September 2014 and registered in the Minsk Package of Measures of 12 February 2015.

It is a matter of deep concern that over Monday-Tuesday the security situation in Donbas has shown no signs of stabilization and decrease of violence. Areas near Svitlodarsk remained the dangerous hotspot as Russian hybrid forces re-launched their offensive attempts by tactic assault groups that followed the intensive artillery shellings. As a result of these attacks, 1 Ukrainian soldier was killed, 17 were wounded and injured.

The situation along other sections of the contact line was also marked by intensive hostilities and armed provocations by the combined Russian separatist forces. The heavy shellings were registered in Avdiyivka, Shyrokyne, Maryinka, Vodyane, Krymske and Novotroitske, including from mortars, 122 mm caliber artillery and tanks. The Ukrainian forces in Stanytsya Luhanska were targeted by intensive sniper fire.

The continuing blatant violations of the Minsk agreements by the combined Russian-separatist forces leading to loss of life and damage of infrastructure near Svitlodarsk and elsewhere along the line of contact underscore the urgent need of immediate implementation of initial security provisions of the Minsk agreements and establishment of permanent monitoring and verification by the OSCE at the uncontrolled sections of the Ukrainian-Russian state border as agreed in the Minsk Protocol of 5 September 2014.

We encourage the OSCE Chairmanship to use all instruments at its disposal to facilitate establishment of comprehensive cease-fire, envisaged as the first step in each of the Minsk documents, and stimulate the Russian Federation towards full implementation of undertaken commitments under the Minsk agreements.

### **Distinguished colleagues,**

We consider unacceptable that Russia and its proxies continue to block the process of release of hostages and illegally detained persons. As this issue remains the top humanitarian priority, the Ukrainian authorities have decided to unilaterally release 15 persons. We hope this goodwill gesture will give an impetus to the release process and will be responded by Russia and its proxies in accordance with the undertaken Minsk commitments.

We reiterate that the relevant provision of the Minsk Package of measures applies equally to the Ukrainian citizens, including Oleh Sentsov, Oleksandr Kolchenko and others, who are held in illegal detention in Russia.

### **Mr.Chairman,**

On 19 December the UN General Assembly adopted the Resolution “Situation of human rights in Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol (Ukraine)”, reconfirming the resolute position of the international community on the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol as an integral part of Ukraine’s territory, condemning their temporary occupation by Russia and not recognizing their attempted annexation.

Against the backdrop of the dire human rights situation in the occupied Crimea, we deem it of particular importance that the Resolution refers to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, which, inter alia, provide for the humane treatment of the population, living in the occupied territory, and protect its rights under international humanitarian law.

In this regard the condemnation by the UNGA Resolution of the systematic human rights violations carried out by the Russian occupation authorities, including extrajudicial executions, abductions, politically motivated persecution and restriction of basic political rights of Crimean residents should be a significant step towards defending human rights and fundamental freedoms of the Ukrainian citizens, living in the occupied territories.

We consider as one of essential elements of the Resolution a call to ensure the unimpeded access of international human rights monitoring mechanisms to the temporary occupied peninsula to monitor and report on the situation according to their mandates.

We urge on Russia as an occupying power, to take responsibility for stopping all human rights violations on the peninsula and to facilitate free and unconditional access of the international monitors to Crimea.

**Distinguished colleagues,**

I will conclude by reiterating our persistent call on Russia to restore its respect for the norms of international law and the OSCE principles and commitments, to halt its aggression against Ukraine, to implement fully and in good faith its commitments under the Minsk agreements and to reverse the illegal occupation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol.

**Thank you, Mr.Chairman.**