



Delegation of Canada
to the OSCE

Délégation du Canada
auprès de l'OSCE

**STATEMENT BY AMBASSADOR JOCELYN KINNEAR
ON THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION'S ONGOING AGGRESSION AGAINST UKRAINE
1463rd MEETING OF THE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

29 February 2024

Madam Chair,

Ten years ago, Ukrainian people, united by the idea of a better future, changed the course of history in Ukraine.

107 of them paid the ultimate price for demanding freedom and democracy.

Though Ukrainians were successful in charting a new path for Ukraine, the Russian Federation, who backed the regime that murdered those 107, chose revenge against Ukraine over acceptance of the Ukrainian people's right to self-determination.

Russia occupied and illegally annexed Crimea.

Russia then continued laying the groundwork for the illegal, unprovoked, and unjustifiable full-scale invasion and annexation of four more oblasts eight years later.

We are in the third year of Russia's full-scale war and Ukrainians continue to resist Russia's will to control Ukraine's future, as they have done countless times in the past.

The annexations of territory didn't change that.

The brutal full-scale war didn't change that.

Sham referenda didn't change that.

Pseudo-elections and threats won't change that.

And no amount of disinformation, finger pointing, or distortion of history will change that, either.

The futility of Russia's attempts to subjugate Ukrainians is obvious to anyone save – purportedly – the Kremlin, who chooses alternative reality over unmistakable fact.

Crimea is Ukraine. Donetsk is Ukraine. Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson are all Ukraine.

Madam Chair,

We are alarmed by reports from Ukrainian authorities regarding the mistreatment of Ukrainian Prisoners of War by Russian authorities, including reports that that Russia is executing unarmed and injured POWs.

The Geneva Conventions prohibit the mistreatment of Prisoners of War. POWs must be treated humanely at all times; any unlawful act or omission by the detaining power causing death or seriously endangering the health of a POW is a serious breach of the Third Geneva Convention.

Liberated Ukrainian POWs have shared their experiences of torture and ill-treatment in Russian captivity. This week, the delegation of Canada heard from a former POW from Olenivka, Ostap. His testimony left us horrified, and deeply disturbed.

The Russian embassy in the UK tweeted in 2022, after the Olenivka facility was struck by a missile, that “Azov militants deserve execution, but not by firing squad but by hanging, because they're not real soldiers. They deserve a humiliating death”.

By his own account, Ostap was in Russian captivity in Olenivka, and Taganrog in the Russian Federation, for almost a full year. He has described how, during his time, he was beaten countless times, several times a day, all over his body, his head, and his neck. He had his ribs broken from kicking. He was electrocuted on many occasions. He was hung by his hands. He underwent many, many interrogations in which he was tortured to confess having committed war crimes. He was made to testify against other POWs. He was raped, including with a foreign object. He recounts hearing screaming from others being tortured as well.

His testimony is similar to that of other PoWs who have been released from Russian captivity.

How many more POWs suffer the same fate, behind closed doors, even as we speak here today? To this point, we also heard the story of Maria, whose husband has been detained by Russian forces for over 20 months. What fate has he suffered? She does not know. She has not heard from him; she does not know where he is or whether he is alive; she does not know when – or if – he will return.

How can accounts such as these be reconciled with Russia's obligation to treat POWs humanely?

We call on Russia to abide by their obligations under international law to ensure the humane treatment of all POWs it holds in detention; to end all forms of torture and mistreatment and to ensure adequate food, clothing, hygiene and medical care. POWs must also be allowed contact with their families.

In the face of credible allegations of mistreatment, we also underline the importance of accountability for such breaches. Those ordering and committing such crimes should know that they won't escape the consequences of their actions.

We furthermore remain concerned about the detention of Ukrainian civilians by the Russian Federation. 23,000 people are reported missing by the International Committee of the Red Cross, many of whom are Ukrainian civilians, arbitrarily detained by Russia.

Credible reports and testimonies paint a harrowing picture of the detention conditions of civilians, which include but are not limited to torture, ill-treatment, and lack of adequate sanitation and medical access.

Among arbitrarily detained civilians are humanitarian volunteers, journalists, human rights defenders, and even staff of this organization, just to name a few. We call for the immediate release of three OSCE staff – Vadym Golda, Maxim Petrov, and Dmytro Shabanov – from Russian detention.

In closing, Madam Chair,

I reiterate once again Canada's full support for Ukraine. Canada and Canadians will support Ukraine until there is peace on Ukraine's terms. And thereafter.

Thank you, Madam Chair.