



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to the Address by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

As delivered by Chargé d 'Affaires Courtney Austrian
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
June 8, 2023

High Commissioner Türk, thank you for joining us in the Permanent Council in your new capacity and congratulations on your appointment.

High Commissioner, your address to the Permanent Council today comes at a pivotal time as Russia's forces continue to strike Ukraine's cities unrelentingly. Russia's increased tempo of attacks in May and into June has been among the worst this year. We continue to learn of the unchecked brutality of Russia's forces firsthand from Ukraine's civilians who have endured the horrors of war.

Since Russia's full-scale invasion in February of last year, Russia's forces have egregiously committed human rights abuses in Ukraine and have committed war crimes and crimes against humanity. The OSCE has invoked and deployed five expert missions under the "Moscow Mechanism" to document Russia's abuses in Ukraine and in Russia, as well as the abuses of the Lukashenka regime in Belarus, including the latter's retaliation against Belarusians who oppose the regime's enabling of the Kremlin's war against Ukraine. The incarcerations and abuse of peaceful protesters show the profound insecurity of both the Kremlin and the Lukashenka regime.

Each week, all participating States but two are outraged by reports of Russia's occupation authorities' arrests of civilians in Ukraine on fabricated charges; the forcible transfer, deportation, and systematic mistreatment of children; widespread sexual violence; torture; and bombardments raining death on civilians and destroying civilian infrastructure. We hear about how those speaking out against Russia and its brutal war are arrested and often tortured, both by Russia's occupation authorities and within Russia itself.

Mr. Chair, I commend the work of your office and the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine. Robust, detailed reporting and investigations are critical to accountability. We were horrified to read OHCHR's December 2022 report that included gruesome descriptions of the killing of hundreds of civilians, including children, in the territories of Kyiv, Chernihiv, and Sumy oblasts while these were under Russia's military control. The report notes the prevalence of summary executions as well as civilian victims killed while in movement—commuting to work, delivering food to others, visiting loved ones, or attempting to flee hostilities—among other bone chilling trends in the behavior of Russian forces and authorities. The reports by the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine have also made clear the breathtaking extent of Russia's atrocities in Ukraine.

Similarly, I commend the work OHCHR is doing through its Special Examination on Belarus to investigate human rights violations inside the country carried out by the Lukashenka regime, including its repression of those who speak out against Belarus's complicity in Russia's war against Ukraine.

The OSCE and UN OHCHR have a long history of cooperation built on shared values and principles. Let us continue our critical work, which has never been more important than it is now as we observe the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights at the same time as Russia's forces carry out horrific crimes in Ukraine and while we all too frequently witness human rights violations around the world. High Commissioner Türk, I look forward to a time when we truly are able to say never again. Sadly, we are not there now.

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