



United States Mission to the OSCE

**Ongoing Violations of International Law
and Defiance of OSCE Principles and
Commitments by the Russian Federation in
Ukraine**

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires a.i. Harry R. Kamian
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
March 15, 2018

The United States commends the Trilateral Contact Group's efforts to stop the fighting in the Donbas. We take note of the practical effects of the March 5 renewed ceasefire efforts, and welcome the news of the SMM's March 6 weekly report, which underscored a nearly 60-percent reduction in the use of weapons proscribed by the Minsk agreements. This is encouraging, but there will be no peace in the Donbas until Russia ends its ongoing violations of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Russia's campaign of violence, intimidation, violations of international law, and defiance of OSCE commitments continues, and should remain the focus of the international community. The United States calls upon Russia to disengage its forces and withdraw its formations in accordance with the commitments it made in the Minsk agreements.

Mr. Chair, the four-year assault waged by the Russian Federation against the sovereignty of Ukraine continues to harm the civilian population. On March 5, the SMM reported damage as a result of an explosion nearby the heavily trafficked Stanytsia Luhanska bridge. This bridge, the only crossing point in Luhansk, is a vital link for civilians in the greater area who wish to travel to a market, a bank, or to see family. Unfortunately, close calls are not limited to this one site. In its March 6 weekly report, the SMM reported shell craters approximately 50 meters from a natural gas line and near buildings that contained toxic chemicals. In all of these cases, a direct or even partial hit could cause significant – and possibly catastrophic – effects for civilians on either side of the line-of-control. The United States repeats its calls for the establishment of safety zones around critical infrastructure, and for the opening of the Zolote crossing point, which would significantly improve the current situation.

Mr. Chair, Russia-led forces continue to position troops near critical civilian infrastructure. In doing so, Russia puts civilian lives at risk, obstructs SMM monitoring efforts, and provokes further violence. For example, four times since the beginning of March, civilian vehicles clearly marked with the Donbas water company logo have been fired upon while driving in Russia-controlled territory toward the Donetsk Filtration Station. In one case, several bullets struck the cab of the truck, forcing the driver to take cover. In another case, bullets shattered the windshield of a bus carrying 30 water station workers. These attacks on dedicated utility workers and facilities must stop.

On March 10, for the sixth week in a row, Mr. Chair, the SMM reported shots fired at one of its UAVs. A militant – likely one of the many that Russia arms, trains, funds, and leads – fired upon a mini-UAV near a railway station in Yasynuvata. The United States condemns all actions against SMM patrols or equipment. We also encourage the SMM to continue to surveil rail stations and rail hubs.

Mr. Chair, the SMM's mandate, which was agreed by consensus in this body, is violated regularly, overwhelmingly in the areas controlled by Russia's proxies. On March 6, the SMM reported 15 movement restrictions, all of which occurred in areas controlled by Russia. The SMM took particular note of recurring restrictions in the Luhansk region at a railway station and at border areas near Russia. In Donetsk, restrictions included a denial of access to the town of Siedove near the Russian border, an area where the SMM has been denied access since April 2017. The United States calls on Russia and its proxies to respect the SMM's mandate, which includes safe and secure access throughout the entirety of Ukraine.

Mr. Chair, President Putin's travel to Crimea this week to bolster his "campaign" by touting his forcible seizure and occupation of Ukraine's Crimean peninsula and City of Sevastopol again demonstrates that Russia has no regard for the most basic of international principles – respect for the territorial integrity of one's neighbors. Political rallies and sham elections will never legitimize Russia's predatory behavior and blatant violation of international law.

Furthermore, Russian occupation authorities continue to harass and silence anyone voicing dissent about Russia's occupation and attempted annexation of Crimea. Activist Oleksiy Shestakovich was reportedly beaten by security agents and detained for 11 days, apparently for his association with another activist charged with "extremism." Russia continues to imprison political prisoners from Crimea in Russia, including Andriy Kolomiyets, who has reportedly been held in isolation since March 9, and Oleksandr Kostenko, who has remained in custody for over four years. Mr. Chair, both men are incarcerated on absurd charges related to events that occurred before Russia began its invasion and occupation. And we once again urge Russia to release all the unjustly imprisoned Ukrainians it holds.

The United States again calls upon Russia to end its campaign of repression in occupied Crimea, and to return control of Crimea to Ukraine. The United States is resolute in its support for Ukraine's sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity within its internationally-recognized borders. We do not, nor will we ever, recognize Russia's purported annexation of Crimea. Crimea-related sanctions on Russia will remain in place until Russia returns full control of the peninsula to Ukraine. We join our European and other partners in restating that our sanctions against Russia for its aggression in eastern Ukraine will remain until Russia fully implements its commitments under the Minsk agreements.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.