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Permanent Mission of Ukraine
to the International
Organizations in Vienna

Statement on Russia's ongoing aggression against Ukraine and illegal occupation of Crimea

As for delivery by Ambassador Ihor Prokopchuk,
Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the International Organizations in Vienna,
to the 1229th meeting of the Permanent Council,
23 May 2019

Mr. Chairperson,

On Monday this week the newly elected President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelensky took the oath of office in a democratic transition of power after the conduct of free and fair elections. While Ukraine, its people and leadership have been changing in the past 5 years since the Revolution of Dignity, unchanged remains the policy of Kremlin regime and its leader of fuelling violence in Donbas, maintaining illegal occupation and attempted annexation of the Crimean peninsula, bringing new casualties and destruction of infrastructure, and violating human rights and fundamental freedoms in the occupied territories. All these years, Ukraine spared no effort to cease the conflict, where it had become a victim of aggression, and to restore its territorial integrity and sovereignty by peaceful politico-diplomatic means, starting from cessation of fire in Donbas. The urgency of this objective was reaffirmed by President Zelensky in his inaugural address. In his meetings with foreign dignitaries who arrived to inauguration, President Zelensky thanked international partners of Ukraine for the support provided in the fight against Russian aggression and called for continuation and increasing sanctions against the Russian Federation.

Cessation of fire, withdrawal of heavy weapons, withdrawal of armed formations, reinstatement of full control of the state border by the government of Ukraine – all these commitments undertaken by Russia remain unfulfilled by the Russian side. The SMM continues to register increasing number of ceasefire violations, including from the Minsk-proscribed weapons, increasing number of weapons in violation of their respective withdrawal lines, and increasing number of

severe restrictions of the SMM's freedom of movement, most notably in Russia-occupied border areas of Ukraine. The weekly report of 14 May refers to a 58 per cent increase of ceasefire violations, 180 weapons in violation of their respective withdrawal lines (only 35 of which – in government-controlled areas) and 17 cases of the Mission's freedom of movement restrictions, all in Russia-occupied parts of Donbas. It should be remembered that these numbers give only a glimpse of Russia's military invasion force in Ukraine, which remains the source of the conflict and related hostilities, causing casualties on the daily basis. A single flight of the SMM's long-range UAV on 14 May, shortly after these activities had been resumed, revealed 36 pieces of heavy weapon in violation of withdrawal lines and 163 heavy weapons outside of designated storage sites in Russia-occupied territories. I stress: two hundred howitzers, tanks, anti-tank guns, MLRS, mortars and surface-to-air missile systems were spotted in one single flight covering a very small part of Ukraine's territory occupied by Russia. Armed with Russian weapons and uninterrupted supplies of ammunition of all calibers, the Russian proxies maintain violence and continue putting the lives of civilians under risk. The people living in the occupied areas are deprived of basic rights and face a constant threat of personal attacks and intimidation. Last week, a 33-years old man was moving from the Russia-occupied parts of Donbas to the government-controlled areas, when he was stopped by the armed formations at the checkpoint and accused of "treason". When he tried to escape, the Russian fighters opened fire and wounded him, despite many civilians present at that time at the checkpoint. This man managed to cross the contact line and reach the crossing point of Hnutove, where he received medical assistance from the Ukrainian authorities.

Seeking to strengthen its control of the occupied parts of Donbas, the Russian side maintains the policy of creeping annexation of these territories. Following introduction of the Russian currency, tax system, and ideology, the Russian Federation started issuing Russian passports to legitimize its presence in Donbas and effectively strengthen its position of ultimatums to Ukraine. As the SMM continues to observe queues of people applying for Russian Federation passports in the occupied parts of Donetsk and Luhansk regions, we together with other participating States urge Russia to immediately stop implementing its decision and to revoke it. We again strongly condemn this decision of the Russian authorities, which violates Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity and ruins the Minsk agreements.

Russia's aggressive actions against Ukraine continue to be accompanied by a forceful propaganda campaign in the occupied territories, including with the involvement of children. On 19 May, the Russian occupation authorities held in the city of Sevastopol a children's parade imitating military parades with the use of military hardware and military uniforms. We remind the Russian Federation of its responsibility to uphold all of its obligations under applicable international law as an occupying Power, including the norms of international humanitarian law protecting the rights of children under 15 years of age. Dozens of Crimean Tatars and Ukrainians continue to be illegally held in custody or in prisons, often without proper medical assistance, and persecuted for their views on the unacceptability of Russia's occupation and atrocities in the Crimean peninsula. We draw, in particular, the

attention of the Permanent Council to the rapidly deteriorating health condition of a disabled Crimean Tatar Edem Bekirov, who urgently needs a qualified medical care to prevent the irreversible fatal consequences for his health. Fundamental freedoms of opinion and expression, peaceful assembly, religion or belief, and many others, are severely abused in the occupied Crimea for those who do not support illegal actions by the Russian Federation.

Mr. Chairperson,

Russia's actions place it squarely in a position of clear, gross and uncorrected violation of OSCE principles and commitments. We call on the participating States to pay their utmost attention to this fact and to react with strengthened sanctions as the demonstration of politico-diplomatic resolve to make Russia comply with its international commitments and obligations.

We again urge the Russian Federation to reverse its illegal occupation of Crimea and to stop its aggression against Ukraine, including by withdrawing its armed formations from the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine and fully implementing its commitments under the Minsk agreements.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.