



Permanent Mission of Ukraine
to the International
Organizations in Vienna

Statement on russia's war of aggression against Ukraine

As for delivery by Ambassador Yevhenii Tsymbaliuk, Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the International Organizations in Vienna,
to the 1415th meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council
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Mr. Chairperson,

Nine years ago, on March 16, russia held a so-called referendum in Crimea.

This was the first step in moscow's efforts to dismember the Ukrainian state.

Even then, an attempt to change borders by force was enough to challenge russia's participation in the OSCE.

As warned, this gross violation of the Helsinki Final Act has entailed many more crimes.

Eight years after, we saw the repetition of the same scenario in the other four Ukrainian regions – Zaporizhzhia, Kherson, Donetsk and Luhansk.

And russia still remains a participating State of the OSCE.

We all remember Reşat Ametov, a Crimean Tatar, who was tortured to death, on the eve of the so-called "Crimean referendum".

Unfortunately, he was just the first in a long list of victims of russian aggression.

Without taking into account previous years of the hybrid aggression, only from 24 February 2022, when the large-scale armed attack of the russian federation began, to 12 March 2023, OHCHR recorded 21,965 civilian casualties in the country: 8,231 killed and 13,734 injured.

At the same time, the real numbers are much higher.

In addition, the occupation of Crimea has been accompanied with illegal detention of activists, journalists, and just pro-Ukrainian citizens.

The same fate is witnessed by the newly occupied territories of Ukraine today.

russia's political terror has progressed over the past years and now affects the OSCE itself, since three OSCE SMM members have been kept hostage for a year.

It is time to repeat our demand that all political prisoners, illegal detainees and civil hostages must be immediately released by moscow, including Maksym Butkevych, a human rights defender and journalist, who was sentenced to 13 years in prison last week, as well as Ametkhan Abdulvapov, a Crimean Tatar, sentenced yesterday to 10 years of imprisonment.

On the other hand, for many years, the occupation of Crimea and its militarization threatened the freedom of navigation in the Black Sea. But the situation is getting worse.

As a result, the international community must address the risks to global food security and to consolidate its efforts to keep the "grain corridor" running in the face of russia's blackmailing.

Neither should we forget about more than 170,000 square kilometers of our territory peppered with russian mines and unexploded ordnance.

A significant part of this territory is the land of our farmers, and this land has been contaminated largely due to the invasion from the occupied Crimean peninsula.

Crimea has been also a testing ground for forced demographic changes.

In Crimea we witnessed both – the deportation of Ukrainian citizens and the transfer of russian citizens into the occupied territory. Both are war crimes under international law.

Even according to russia's so-called official data, about 500 000 russians were resettled to Crimea.

So, should we be surprised that the same tactics are applied to newly occupied territories?

Already in 2014, we were confronted with first cases of children's abduction and their transfer to russia from Donetsk and Luhansk regions.

However, today we are appalled by the scale of this genocidal and assimilation campaign by the aggressor-state.

As we see, events of March 2014 predetermined many developments we are currently facing.

As Minister Kuleba said during the reinforced PC meeting on the 24th of February – and I quote – “the Crimea 2014 lesson teaches us: when aggression is not stopped it becomes larger in scale. When the aggressor is not punished, he becomes more blood-thirsty”.

Dear colleagues,

Two days ago, on March 14, russian diplomats called the UN Security Council meeting to discuss the so-called “russophobia”.

And we are really grateful to professor Timothy Snyder for his thoughtful briefing before the UN Security Council.

It is important that we hear this testimony from a historian of eastern Europe, specifically known as a historian of mass killing and political atrocity.

Thanks to him, we have a well-tailored definition for the “russophobia”.

So let me quote – “russophobia” has been exploited during this war as a form of imperial propaganda in which the aggressor claims to be the victim.

It has served this last year as a justification for russian war crimes in Ukraine”.

Here in the OSCE we observed these russian efforts for a year.

And I believe that today we will hear from kremlin's envoys new attempts to portray russians as a victim. At the same time, there was also something else that deserves our attention.

As professor Snyder rightfully pointed out, “the sustained training or education of russians to believe that genocide is normal. We see this in the president of russia's repeated claims that Ukraine does not exist. We see this in genocidal fantasies on russian state media. We see this in a year of state television reaching millions or tens of millions russian citizens every day [...] We see this when people appear on russian state television and say: “They should not exist at all. We should execute them by firing squad.” We see this when someone appears on russian state television and says “we will kill one million, we will kill five million, we can exterminate all of you,” meaning all of the Ukrainians”.

Today propaganda, disinformation and dehumanization are russia's weapons.

And this is true – propaganda kills. Coward execution of an unarmed Ukrainian prisoner of war for merely saying “Glory to Ukraine” is a chilling reminder that genocidal speech claims innocent human lives.

Disinformation campaigns are aimed to help the aggressor to distract our efforts to bring the perpetrator to account as well as to disrupt our unity in defending rules-based order.

I am grateful to the delegations of Lithuania, Poland and Latvia for co-organizing an important event yesterday and shedding additional light on this problem.

And wide-spread dehumanization of the Ukrainians results into voluntarily executions and mass graves, sexual violence and rape, indiscriminate shellings and destroyed cities, deportation and assimilation.

One of the symbols of moscow’s cruelty and impunity is the Drama Theater in Mariupol which was deliberately bombed by russia precisely a year ago.

Next to it was the inscription “Children”. It was impossible to overlook it.

This must be a stark reminder for us that once the war is over there would not be business as usual next day.

And the terrorist state must be brought to account for what it has done. Side-effects of propaganda would not evaporate overnight. One should not allow the perpetrator to be victimized. Because there is only one aggressor and one victim.

In order to come back to the family of civilized countries, russia and its people have to acknowledge what damage they have inflicted and to reflect on the scale of crimes committed by current leadership and ordinary soldiers.

Such an acknowledgement of crimes committed by the russian state, society and army is one of guarantees of the non-repetition of the aggression and its atrocities.

No more blank checks for russia once the war is over. Otherwise, we would face a new putin’s russia in the future. Just with new people in power but with the same neo-imperialistic intentions.

That is why we strongly believe that accountability for the crime of aggression needs to be ensured including through the establishment of a special tribunal for this purpose.

Ukraine is grateful to the Netherlands for the decision to host the International Center for Criminal Prosecution of the Crime of Aggression Against Ukraine in The Hague.

This is an important step towards ensuring accountability for the crime of aggression against Ukraine.

We call on all states to join the Core Group on the establishment of the Special Tribunal which currently includes 32 countries.

The next meeting of the Coalition will be held on March 21-22 in Strasbourg, and Ukraine is firmly convinced that by then the number of participants will further increase.

And last but not least. March 16 is yet another reminder that impunity emboldens perpetrators and undermines prospects for peace.

Furthermore, March 16 is yet another reminder that an attempted annexation of Crimea was a starting point for the brutal war we are witnessing these days.

Therefore, only the restoration of Ukraine's sovereignty over the Crimean peninsula would mean that the respect for the principles of the Helsinki Final Act is restored as well.

I thank you, Mr Chairperson.