



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 Michele Siders
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
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Mr. Chair, violence in the Donbas -- Russia-manufactured and Russia-perpetuated violence -- continues despite the supposed "Easter ceasefire." While we commend the leaders of the Trilateral Contact Group for their determination to quiet the guns, we understand that these efforts will only work when Russia reverses its policy of aggression. Russia remains isolated within the international community for igniting and sustaining this conflict. Russia -- and its proxies in eastern Ukraine -- must enforce a true ceasefire, disengage from the line of contact, withdraw proscribed weapons, and begin to implement the commitments of the Minsk agreements.

Russia-led forces continue to inflict considerable harm on the civilian population of the Donbas. Although Russia portrays itself as the *protector* of the Russian-speaking minority of eastern Ukraine, these very people are the ones shouldering the burden of Russia's aggression, and the death, destruction and isolation it has brought, even though Russia cynically claims to be acting in their interests. The only place where Ukraine's Russian speaking people are suffering is in the areas where Russian soldiers and their proxies have instigated a conflict.

In the March 27 SMM weekly report, the Mission notes that since the departure of the Russian Joint Centre for Control and Co-ordination (JCCC) contingent last December, repairs to essential civilian infrastructure have slowed, with only one quarter of the requested security guarantees receiving follow-up. Russia's unilateral withdrawal from the JCCC also has exacerbated water shortages, ongoing disruption of mobile phone service, and electricity outages. To mitigate this suffering, the United States urges Russia to return to the JCCC and play a responsible role in brokering temporary "windows of silence" to allow repair of essential civilian infrastructure.

Russia asserts that it provides for Donbas residents by regularly delivering humanitarian aid through over 70 humanitarian convoys, including one that entered into the non-government controlled areas on April 3. The SMM, however, was again blocked from observing the content of the vehicles, leaving us to doubt what was really inside. If those convoys truly are carrying humanitarian assistance, why wouldn't Russia want such assistance to be seen by the international community? The United States joins other voices in this Council and calls for an end to these unverified, illegal convoys, which disrespect Ukraine's sovereignty and violate its territorial integrity. Aid should be delivered in accordance with internationally

recognized standards, transparently and in full respect of Ukraine's internationally recognized border.

Harassment and threats against our SMM monitors also continue. On March 24, SMM monitors on patrol heard bursts of small-arms fire nearby, and rounds impacting five meters from their position. On April 6, a so-called "DPR" militant charged his weapon and threatened to shoot if an SMM patrol did not pack up its mini-UAV and leave the area. The harassment takes other forms, as well. Since March 20, SMM patrols have been restricted 43 times – all but three of those were caused by Russia's proxies, in what the SMM has labeled "systematic restrictions."

Violent actions have also been directed against SMM equipment. Since March 31, SMM patrols report small-arms fire being targeted against their mini-UAVs six times, with twenty such incidents this year. On March 30, Russia-led forces downed a UAV flying over a training area. Most regrettably, deployment of the SMM's new long-range UAV has been met with consistent jamming across the conflict area. Threats to the SMM, and the targeting of its technical monitoring assets, are categorically unacceptable. We view these actions as deliberate attempts to prevent the SMM from fulfilling its mandate, and we condemn such behavior.

Mr. Chair, Russian occupation authorities continues to harass Tatars and Ukrainian activists. We are deeply concerned about the deteriorating health of Volodymyr Balukh, who has been on a hunger strike in a Simferopol prison since March 19. He is serving a three year and seven month sentence on bogus terrorism charges in retaliation for flying the Ukrainian flag. We call on Russia to release him immediately. On April 6, two activists from the Ukrainian Cultural Center, Olena Popova and Olga Pavlenko, were interrogated by the occupying Russian prosecutor's office for their activities. Also on April 6, FSB occupation authorities raided a mosque in the village of Pavlivka in what has become an increasingly common form of harassment under the false pretext of fighting so-called "extremism". Ihor Krynychny, a Ukrainian national in Russia-occupied Crimea who refused to give up his Ukrainian passport, was assaulted by unknown assailants on April 3 simply for displaying pro-Ukrainian stickers on his car. A recent media monitoring report by the respected NGOs Crimean Human Rights Group and the Human Rights Information Center concluded that "Russia is deliberately creating an atmosphere of fear and aggression in occupied Crimea, with Ukraine and Ukrainians pitched as 'the enemy'."

In closing, Mr. Chair, Russia's conduct in Ukraine violates the core principles, values, and ideals of the OSCE, and poses a threat to the OSCE, its participating States, and our common security. Let me reiterate that the United States fully supports 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. And 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.