



United States Mission to the OSCE

The Russian Federation's Ongoing Aggression Against Ukraine

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires Courtney Austrian
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
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Colleagues. One year ago today, Russia bombed Ukraine's Mariupol theater despite the word "children" being clearly written in Russian around the building, not just once but twice, in letters so large they could be read from space. Evidence points to over 600 people, including many children, killed in this attack. Nearly nine years ago this week, the Kremlin responded to Ukraine's decision to chart an independent path and build closer ties with the European Union and the trans-Atlantic community by invading and seizing Crimea in violation of the UN Charter and in contravention of Helsinki Final Act principles.

Since then, the authorities Russia installed in Crimea have targeted for repression Crimean Tatars, Jehovah's Witnesses, ethnic Ukrainians, and all those who oppose Russia's occupation. The Crimean Tatar people have faced the worst of Russia's repression. They have endured an endless stream of raids on mosques, homes, and workplaces. Crimean Tatar community leaders have been banished from the peninsula, their media outlets shuttered, and their peaceful self-governing bodies criminalized as "extremist organizations." There has been no justice for the many Crimean Tatars who disappeared in the early days of the occupation, nor for the dozens of others who have reportedly been tortured, imprisoned on politically motivated charges, or otherwise abused by Russia's authorities.

These abuses continue to be an everyday reality in Crimea. Hundreds have been imprisoned for simply expressing their opposition to Russia's war of aggression. One of those found guilty was a 70-year-old woman. Her crime? Carrying flowers and a handmade sign that said "no to war" towards a monument to Ukraine's national poet Taras Shevchenko. Or consider the case of 60-year-old Dzhemil Gafarov, a Crimean Tatar held by Russia since March 2019 on false politically motivated charges. Dzhemil was unjustly sentenced earlier this year to 13 years in prison. Tragically, he died in custody shortly after his sentencing when guards reportedly denied him medical treatment. Or take the case of Raim Ayvazov who was sentenced to 17 years in prison for his activism on behalf of Crimea's Tatar population. As he said to Russia's kangaroo court before his sentencing, "I have no doubt that you will convict me. But remember, you will reap the fruits you have sown. I am sure history will remember us as martyrs of a criminal regime and you as tools in the hands of tyrants."

As we've seen, the Kremlin's willingness to flout international principles in one place rarely stops there. That's what Russia's actions in Crimea have taught us. Indeed, since 2014 in Crimea, we've seen the blueprint for much of Putin's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. We see it in the unelected puppets installed by the Kremlin in an attempt to impose its will in the other cities

of Ukraine Russia has seized. Just like the Kremlin did in Crimea. We see it in the sham referenda the Kremlin organized to purportedly annex parts of Ukraine's territory. Just like the Kremlin did in Crimea. And we see it in the atrocities and abuses carried out by Russia's forces in territories they temporarily occupy, including in connection with the filtration process. These include extrajudicial killings, rape, and torture of civilians, just like the Kremlin's repression in Crimea.

Mr. Chair, since 2014, we have seen the Kremlin use its cruel Crimea playbook in other parts of Ukraine's territory. The United States will continue to state the obvious fact that Crimea is Ukraine, just as Donetsk and Luhansk are Ukraine, and just as every other part of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders is Ukraine. That was our position in 2014, and it remains our position today, nearly a decade later. The United States will continue to provide Ukraine with humanitarian, defense, and diplomatic support as it continues to bravely defend itself against Russia's war of aggression. We will continue to work with Ukraine's many international partners until all of Russia's forces are withdrawn from Ukraine and Ukraine once again has control over all of its territory.

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