



**Permanent Mission of Ukraine**  
to the International  
Organizations in Vienna

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## **Statement on “Four years of illegal occupation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol by the Russian Federation”**

As delivered by Ambassador Ihor Prokopchuk,  
Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the International Organizations in Vienna,  
to the 1177<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Permanent Council,  
1 March 2018

**Mr. Chairperson,**

Four years ago, on 20 February 2014, the Russian authorities enacted their plans of military invasion into the territory of a neighbouring state. The so-called “little green men”, in full military gear and heavily armed, seized the building of the parliament of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, blocked the Ukrainian military compounds, Ukrainian navy and boarder guard bases and check-points, administrative buildings and infrastructure, and lined up the streets across the peninsula. The date of 20 February as the beginning of the invasion has been engraved on the medal of the Russian Ministry of Defense for so-called “return of Crimea” awarded to military and civilian personnel of the Russian Armed Forces who took part in the armed seizure of Crimea four years ago. Russia used its military units stationed in the Crimean peninsula under the respective agreements with Ukraine on temporary deployment of the Black Sea fleet and sent additional troops into Crimea by air and by sea to reinforce to the levels necessary for a full-scale military invasion. While at that time Russia denied that “the little green men” belonged to the Russian Federation armed forces, in 2015 Russian President Vladimir Putin publicly acknowledged that they were the Russian soldiers. Part of the scenario of attempted annexation was the show of so-called “people’s referendum” under the barrels of Russian guns.

Russia resorted to an act of aggression, flagrantly breaching the norms of international law, the fundamental OSCE principles, enshrined in the Helsinki Final Act, including on the inviolability of international frontiers and respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of states, as well as bilateral and multilateral treaties and agreements, including the Budapest Memorandum on security assurances to Ukraine. Russia’s use of force to change borders in Europe is the most glaring challenge to rules-based security order and remains the root cause of the ongoing security crisis and degradation of trust and confidence.

## **Distinguished colleagues,**

Four years of Russia's illegal occupation of Crimea have turned the Crimean peninsula into the territory of fear, repression and impunity. Once a popular tourist destination, under Russian occupation Crimea has been turned into a military stronghold threatening security and stability in the entire Black Sea region. The numbers of Russian troops increased from 12 thousand to 31 thousand, of military warplanes – from 22 to 113. Forty tanks, almost six hundred IFVs and 162 artillery systems are currently stationed in a once peaceful peninsula. Russian sea-launched cruise missiles deployed to Crimea cover the area with a radius of up to 2500 km, demonstrating Russia's aggressive military posture. The Crimean residents were forced into the Russian citizenship and are now made subject to compulsory military conscription by the occupying State.

The Russian occupation authorities, acting in disregard of international law, perpetrate large-scale and serious human rights violations in Crimea in an attempt to eliminate resistance and silence those who oppose Russia's occupation. The latest report of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights clearly pointed out that the human rights situation in Crimea "significantly deteriorated" under Russian occupation, with "multiple and grave violations" committed by Russian state agents.

There are continuing reports of civil society organizations and testimonies of human rights defenders, such as those that we heard last Thursday and this Tuesday at the thematic side-events here in Hofburg, which detail arbitrary detentions, enforced disappearances and tortures. The main targets of repressive measures have largely been Crimean Tatars, ethnic Ukrainians and those who speak out against the Russian occupation. The representative body of Crimean Tatars – Mejlis has been declared an extremist organization, its activities have been banned. Ukrainian TV channels and independent media in the Crimean Tatar and Ukrainian were shut down and replaced by Russian ones. The number of children receiving education in Ukrainian fell 34 times, from more than 12 thousands in 2013 to less than 4 hundred in 2017, the number of Ukrainian schools dropped from 7 to 0. The situation concerning preservation of Crimean Tatar and Ukrainian culture became virtually catastrophic.

The deliberate character of those repressions has made the International Court of Justice to order in April 2017, in Ukraine's case against Russia under the Convention on the Eradication of all Forms of Racial Discrimination, that the Russian Federation must, in accordance with its obligations under the Convention, to refrain from maintaining or imposing limitations on the ability of the Crimean Tatar community to conserve its representative institutions, including the Mejlis, and to ensure the availability of education in the Ukrainian language. As we have this debate today nearly one year later, Russia has not fulfilled the Court order.

Nearly 40 thousand Ukrainian citizens (including over 20 thousand Crimean Tatars) were forced to leave the occupied Crimea and settle in other areas of Ukraine. Those who stayed live now in the atmosphere of fear, intimidation, physical and psychological pressure from the Russian occupation authorities. Over 60 Ukrainian citizens are kept behind bars in Russia and in the occupied Crimea under trumped-up politically motivated charges and are used as hostages by Russian authorities in their

hybrid warfare against Ukraine. We call upon Russia to immediately release these citizens from captivity.

**Mr. Chairperson,**

The human rights situation in Crimea requires constant international attention and response. Russia continues to ignore the demands of the international community, contained, inter alia, in three UN General Assembly resolutions and in numerous decisions of parliamentary bodies of the OSCE, the Council of Europe and other international organizations. It is unacceptable that Russia continues to deny access to the peninsula for permanent international monitoring, thus preventing an independent assessment of the human rights situation. We urge Russia to stop violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms in Crimea and allow full and unhindered access of international monitoring missions to the peninsula.

**Distinguished colleagues,**

We are grateful to the international community for the solidarity with Ukraine in the face of Russian aggression and for the clear stance in defense of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity within internationally recognized borders. It is essential to maintain a strong and effective non-recognition policy concerning Russia's occupation of the peninsula, to maintain and strengthen the sanctions regime to make Russia move out of the Ukrainian territory.

As Russia remains in clear, gross and uncorrected violation of the OSCE principles and commitments, it is critically important not only to demonstrate political unity and persistence, but also to act accordingly in seeking restoration of Russia's respect to these principles and commitments and de-occupation of the Crimean peninsula. As the OSCE is founded on norms and principles, it should prompt the executive structures of this Organisation to consider additional measures that could be taken to safeguard the agreed norms and protect the rights and freedoms of the people under occupation.

Ukraine will continue to use international legal instruments at our disposal to take Russia to account. On 19 February, Ukraine proceeded in arbitration against the Russian Federation under the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, in view of Russia's violation of Ukraine's sovereign rights in the Black Sea, Sea of Azov, and the Kerch Strait. To indicate the scale of the violations, I would only mention on one account that more than 7 billion cubic meters of natural gas have been illegally exploited by the Russian Federation from the Crimean offshore since 2014.

Ukraine strongly condemns Russia's aggression, illegal occupation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and Sevastopol and numerous gross human rights violations and violations of international humanitarian law in the occupied territory. We urge Russia to reverse the illegal occupation and return to the tenets of international law.

**Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.**