



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, a.i. Harry Kamian
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
October 11, 2018

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to begin by noting the uptick in fighting along the line of contact, particularly near the Donetsk Filtration Station. Last night, the SMM reported an incident in which small arms fire came within 50 meters of an SMM patrol in the area despite prior coordination and assurances of security. The United States expects a full investigation of the incident and a report of follow-up steps taken to prevent an action such as this from happening again. We repeat our calls for the sides to disengage and withdraw their forces from the immediate vicinity of critical humanitarian infrastructure.

Mr. Chair, the conflict in Ukraine appears to be worsening. The Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine noted a 71 percent increase in ceasefire violations in the Donbas in its October 2 weekly report. Volatile and dangerous spikes in violence are now endemic to this conflict, a conflict manufactured by Russia and perpetuated in direct contravention of our shared OSCE principles and commitments. Russia's wanton disregard for international norms and laws has resulted in four years of military engagement that has left more than ten thousand dead, many of whom are civilians, and forced over 1.5 million Ukrainians to flee as internally displaced persons.

The United States views the Minsk agreements, *in their entirety*, as the only path forward to a peaceful resolution of this conflict. The agreed upon formula for implementing Minsk remains easy to understand: security first, then political action. Countless times Russia has demonstrated the ability to ratchet up and down at will the level of violence in eastern Ukraine. Unfortunately, Russia never follows up on these demonstrations of sponsorship and control with disengagement and withdrawal. We are therefore left with stale Russian rhetoric and without a single, tangible sign of its commitment to the Minsk process.

Mr. Chair, Moscow is also undermining the Minsk process with political measures. Its proxy authorities in eastern Ukraine plan to hold so-called “elections” on November 11 in contravention of the Minsk agreements. Article 9 of the Minsk Protocol and Article 9 of the Minsk Package of Measures plainly state that local elections in the Donbas must be held in accordance with Ukrainian law.

Meanwhile, the Ukrainian government has again proved its goodwill towards Minsk implementation. On October 4, the Ukrainian Rada extended the so-called “Special Status Law.” This is the second time Ukraine extended this law even though the Russian side has never responded with serious steps on its Minsk commitments. Instead, Russia continues to backslide on its obligations while actually stoking the embers of the conflict it created. Mr. Chair, until Russia makes sincere and lasting efforts to improve the security situation in the conflict zone, Minsk will remain but an aspirational plan. Russia is the aggressor in the conflict and so we, along with the rest of the world, will continue to insist that Moscow must take the first steps to improve security conditions on the ground and to end the conflict.

Mr. Chair, as several delegations have noted, there has been no change in Russia’s disrespect for the SMM mandate. Monitors continue to be blocked, harassed, and sometimes threatened with violence for fulfilling their mandate. These actions happened almost exclusively in areas controlled by Russia’s proxies. In the October 2 weekly report, the SMM noted that its freedom of movement was restricted 23 times -- 22 times in areas controlled by Russia-led forces. The United States repeats its calls on the sides to allow the SMM monitors to carry out the Mission’s mandate, a mandate that has been agreed upon by every participating State.

The United States applauds the actions taken by the Ukraine Defense Ministry, in cooperation with humanitarian mine action organizations including HALO Trust, to publish an interactive map of areas under Ukrainian government control that are contaminated with mines and unexploded ordnance. We also note the October 7 SMM report citing new mine hazard signs in government-controlled areas south of Donetsk. These are two encouraging signs of progress in humanitarian mine action coming after the September 29 tragedy that claimed the lives of three boys in an area controlled by Russia-led forces.

Mr. Chair, the United States joins others in urging the Russian Federation to allow Ukraine’s Ombudswoman and independent medical personnel access to Ukrainian filmmaker Oleh Sentsov, who, as others have noted, ended his 145-day hunger strike to avoid being forcibly fed by his Russian jailers. Sentsov, who is unjustly serving a 20-year prison sentence on bogus charges of terrorism for opposing Russia’s occupation of Ukraine’s Crimean peninsula, began a hunger strike on May 14 to protest the dozens of other Ukrainian political prisoners who are languishing in Russian or Crimean jails for supporting their homeland and for opposing Russian occupation. Mr. Chair, we follow with concern the case of Crimean farmer Volodymyr Balukh, who also ended his lengthy hunger strike this week upon the tragic news

that he is to be illegally transferred from Crimea to Russia, as so many political prisoners have been. The United States calls for the immediate release of Sentsov, Balukh, and all other Ukrainian political prisoners who are unjustly held in Russia or on the Crimean peninsula.

The United States continues to fully support 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. We join our European and other partners in affirming that our Minsk-related sanctions against Russia will remain in place until Russia fully implements its Minsk commitments. The separate, Crimea-related sanctions will remain in place until Russia returns full control of the peninsula to Ukraine.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.