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auprès de l'OSCE

**STATEMENT BY CHARGÉ D'AFFAIRES DANIEL BARBARIE
ON THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION'S ONGOING AGGRESSION AGAINST UKRAINE
1385th MEETING OF THE PERMANENT COUNCIL
9 August 2022**

Mr. Chair,

Russia's war of choice against Ukraine is increasingly a war of terror. Since the beginning of the war, Russia has consistently gone out of its way to instil terror in Ukrainian civilians, submitting them to all sorts of inhumane and barbaric treatment. Russia has aimed to inspire such fear globally as well, as it threatens serious food and energy scarcity and deprivation. These tactics, however, have not weakened the resolve of Ukrainians, and have instead strengthened the unity of the international community. In the face of Ukrainian resistance, Russia is intensifying its attacks on civilians, causing the deaths of dozens of prisoners of war, and threatening the world with a potential nuclear disaster.

Mr. Chair,

Russia seized the Chernobyl nuclear site during the first days of the war, and, before they retreated five weeks later, had terrorized the workers, looted the facility, and churned highly radioactive dust into the atmosphere in the exclusion zone. After inspection of the site, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) declared that the presence of Russian troops had increased the level of radiation in the area. Fortunately, the Agency assessed that this increase did not pose any danger to the surrounding communities.

These actions in Chernobyl appear to have been a preview of what was to come, as the situation today at the Zaporizhzhia power plant, the largest nuclear power plant in Europe, is grave. In their reckless attack on the facility in March, Russia stormed the building, stocking heavy military equipment, and firing their weapons from inside the plant. Taking cover in a nuclear plant and firing heavy artillery is dangerous and utterly irresponsible, as was proven on Saturday with shelling of the power plant causing fire and shutting down one of the reactors. Yesterday, the UN Secretary General called any attack on a nuclear facility "suicidal" and demanded that international inspectors be given access to the Zaporizhzhia power plant. Rafael Grossi, Director General of the IAEA, has commented extensively on the situation in Zaporizhzhia. On August 3rd he stated that, "Every principle of nuclear safety has been violated" and on Saturday, he expressed extreme concern at the shelling of the power plant, noting that it "underlined the very real risk of a nuclear disaster that could threaten public health and the environment in Ukraine and beyond."

Mr. Chair,

On July 29th, a building in correctional centre #210, in Olenivka in eastern Donetsk, exploded killing more than 50 Ukrainian prisoners of war, and wounding more than 70 others. Reportedly, the building destroyed in the explosion was not part of the sleeping quarters of the prisoners, and according to the so-called DNR authorities, all the casualties of this explosion were prisoners. None of the guards or the soldiers was injured. The killed prisoners were members of the Azov Regiment, who defended Mariupol against the Russian siege for over two months. It is worth noting that on August 2nd, the Russian Supreme Court designated the Azov Regiment as a terrorist organization, and that on July 29th the Russian Embassy in the UK tweeted: “Azov militants deserve execution, but death not by firing squad but by hanging, because they’re not real soldiers. They deserve a humiliating death”.

The International Committee of the Red Cross has requested access to the facility since July 29th but has not been granted access. The ICRC offered medical assistance in the early hours to treat the injured and see that the dead receive a proper burial, but Russian officials refused that support. The UN offered to send independent investigators to shed light on what happened, but Russia did not follow up yet. Ukraine’s ombudsperson has requested a joint visit with the Russian ombudsperson, but this request has gone unanswered.

In what is now a familiar pattern, Russia has baselessly accused Ukraine of the attack, claiming that the HIMARS artillery system was used, despite the fact that the location is less than 20km from UAF positions, and open source assessment indicates that the explosion was due to an internal cause, and not caused by shelling. Independent experts could verify such claims, but, unsurprisingly, Russia has rejected the opportunity to have UN investigators and an ICRC mission assess and report on the event.

Mr. Chair,

The Olenivka prison was well known for its poor conditions of detention before February 24th, at the hands of the Russia-backed armed groups. Severe beating of prisoners, lack of proper medical care and nutrition, and poor sanitation, are some of the reported issues. Article 13 of the Third Geneva Convention states: “Prisoners of war must at all times be humanely treated. Any unlawful act or omission by the Detaining Power causing death or seriously endangering the health of a prisoner of war in its custody is prohibited, and will be regarded as a serious breach of the present Convention.”

Granting ICRC access to prisoners of war is an obligation of parties to conflict under the Geneva Convention relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War. Especially after the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs admitted and recognized that these detainees were, in fact, POWs. As we all know, however, this is not the first time Russia fails to abide by international law. In its ongoing invasion of Ukraine, Russia has failed to uphold its responsibilities under the UN Charter, International Humanitarian Law, the Helsinki Final Act, and the Budapest Memorandum.

Mr. Chair,

By terrorizing Ukrainian civilians and threatening the world with food shortages, energy scarcity, and now a nuclear accident, Russia is behaving as a pariah state, with utter disrespect for law, humanity, and decency.

We call on Russia to abide by its OSCE commitments, especially in respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of others, and we reaffirm our unwavering commitment to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders, including Crimea.

Thank you Mr. Chair.