



STATEMENT IN RESPONSE TO AMBASSADORS APAKAN AND SAJDIK

Delivered by Ambassador Steffen Kongstad at the Permanent Council
Vienna, 26 April 2018

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

I join colleagues in welcoming ambassadors Sajdik and Apakan back to the Permanent Council. Norway remains grateful for your efforts in monitoring the conflict and brokering a sustainable ceasefire. Unfortunately, there continues to be a lack of willingness between the sides to engage constructively. As a result, this reporting period can be summarised in three words: lack of progress. Lack of progress for the civilians in the affected areas, in demining, in security talks in the Trilateral Contact Group, and for the freedom of movement of the Special Monitoring Mission (SMM).

The security situation in eastern Ukraine continues to deteriorate. Our SMM monitors, operating in the non-government controlled areas, continue to face a high level of threats and intimidation from the *de facto* authorities. There are indications that SMM UAVs are targeted from both sides of the contact line. This continues to impair the SMM's ability to carry out its mandate. In the Permanent Council and elsewhere, participating States have repeatedly, but unsuccessfully, called on the parties to the conflict immediately to halt acts of aggression and implement their commitments under the Minsk agreements. Nonetheless, the pattern of the conflict remains a pattern of disregard for the provisions of these agreements.

There is a continuing lack of compliance with the ceasefire provisions of the Minsk agreements. As Ambassador Apakan has pointed out, the constant cycle of breach of the ceasefire, followed by renegotiation, recommitment, and then immediate breach, undermines the possibility of agreeing on a comprehensive, lasting ceasefire. So too does the continued presence of heavy weapons in violation of the agreements.

The civilian population is suffering the consequences of the conflict. For the first time, the report states that the SMM has discovered mines close to populated areas. Under international law, civilians enjoy, at all times and in any place, protection against violence to their lives, health, physical and mental well-being. The civilian population and individual civilians shall enjoy general protection against the dangers arising from military operations.

The recent discovery of these mines indicate disregard on the part of the parties for the obligation to protect civilians. It is also a compelling reason to comply with the SMM's request to share information about, and maps of, areas suspected to be contaminated with mines or unexploded ordnance. The parties have committed to conducting and facilitating effective demining. This discovery has put into question the ability of the parties to uphold this commitment. Norway repeats its call on the parties to ensure the respect for and the protection of civilians and civilian objects. The parties must refrain from placing military hardware in or near residential areas.

Mr. Chair,

One year ago on Monday, Joseph Stone, a U.S. citizen and paramedic in service of the SMM, was killed when his vehicle struck a landmine while on patrol in a non-government controlled area of eastern Ukraine. While the tragic loss of Mr. Stone's life serves as a stark reminder of the importance of the demining commitments, it has also led to a necessary review of the safety and security of the SMM and its members.

The SMM has now started strengthening its systems for security and operations as well as management. Norway welcomes and appreciates these efforts. We also appreciate the engagement of Ambassador Apakan and his staff with Norwegian authorities to address specific security concerns. Norway will continue to engage with the SMM on the issue of safety and security of the mission and its members.

While recognising and appreciating the tenacity and importance of the efforts of the SMM, we must remember that the key to the fulfilment of the SMM's mandate is in the hands of the parties to the conflict.

Thank you