



Permanent Mission of Ukraine
to the International
Organizations in Vienna

Statement on Russia's ongoing aggression against Ukraine and illegal occupation of Crimea

As delivered by Ambassador Yevhenii Tsymbaliuk,
Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the International Organizations in Vienna,
to the 1262nd meeting of the Permanent Council,
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Mr. Chairperson,

Last few days were marked by serious aggravation of the security situation along the contact line in Donbas. On 8 March, the Russian armed formations hit a Ukrainian military truck, leaving one serviceman dead and three wounded. Next day, they dropped grenades from the UAV on a medical truck, which had an explicit marking of red cross on its roof. On 10 March, the Russian proxies launched an anti-tank guided missile to hit another Ukrainian military truck, killing two people and eight wounded. The attack was carried out of the residential area, using civilians living in it as a human shield to prevent possible response by the Ukrainian Armed Forces. Overall, in those only three days, Ukrainian military losses reached 4 servicemen killed and 16 wounded.

Civilians also continue to bear the brunt of hybrid war led by the Russian Federation in eastern Ukraine: on 9 March, residential area of the village of Verkhniotoretske was shelled by Russian proxies from grenade launchers. Earlier, the SMM reported on a shelling, which took place on 2 March in Krasnohorivka, when a woman was injured. I wish to draw a particular attention of participating States to the incident reported by the SMM on 6 March, on a 57-year-old man who reportedly stepped on an antipersonnel mine in Russia-occupied Pionerske: the man had passed away from heavy bleeding before the ambulance arrived. We have urged so many times before the Russian side to stop using strictly banned anti-personnel mines in the parts of Donbas it occupies. We severely condemn the ongoing violations of the norms of international humanitarian law, including fire at medical vehicles, use of anti-personnel mines, shellings from residential areas, and many others, which are widespread in Russia-occupied parts of Donbas. Regrettably, we remain far away from the ceasefire regime agreed at the political level of N4 and confirmed by the TCG.

The absence of political will of the Russian Federation to implement its own commitments is also clearly visible in the disengagement areas. On 1 March, inside the disengagement area near Zolote, an SMM mini-UAV again spotted at least

300 mines, assessed as belonging to the Russian armed formations. Next day, an SMM mid-range UAV spotted eight boxes of probable multiple launch rocket system ammunition about 2km north of Petrivske and within a position of the armed formations. On 10 March, the Russian proxies delivered three provocative shellings inside of Petrivske disengagement area, hoping to provoke a response fire, which did not follow.

Another provision of the most recent N4 Summit agreed conclusions, on ensuring ability of the SMM to use all possibilities of its mandate, including safe and secure access throughout Ukraine, remains unfulfilled as well, due to the ongoing severe restrictions imposed by the Russian occupation authorities in Donbas. I would not stop on them, as they are well known and present in all daily and weekly reports issued by the Mission. Let me only underline that these restrictions seriously distort statistical data provided by the SMM for your consideration. For instance, the most recent weekly report of 10 March informs on 102 heavy weapons outside their designated storage sites, all but ten in Russia-occupied parts of Donbas. On 9 March, a member of the Russian armed formations denied the SMM access to a permanent storage site in Donetsk region, citing “orders from superiors”. Imagine what numbers could be, if the access had not been denied. The SMM underlines that numerous restrictions it faces, continue to significantly hinder monitoring with which it is tasked, especially in southern Donetsk region and along the uncontrolled segment of the border. In some cases, these restrictions to SMM’s activities pose serious threats to their safety and security: in the weekly report of 4 March, the Mission referred to a situation, in which while a patrol was monitoring the localized ceasefire in Russia-occupied Krasnyi Yar, two men, one of whom was holding a knife, threatened SMM monitors.

We fully support the SMM’s activities, and we are grateful for its findings, highlighting Russia’s aggressive actions against Ukraine. We would also appreciate additional efforts by the Mission to implement a part of its mandate related to establishing and reporting facts concerning alleged violations of fundamental OSCE principles and commitments. Sovereignty of states is one of such principles, and we ask the SMM to verify and establish facts on alleged violations of Ukraine’s sovereignty by the Russian Federation in the parts of Donbas it occupies, such as Russian currency, legislation and tax system imposed by the occupation authorities. We took note of the recent media reports on the cancellation of Ukrainian language status in the occupied part of Donetsk region last Friday, on 6 March. If confirmed, this will be another violation of the principle of sovereignty of states. We ask the SMM to fulfil its mandate, to verify these alleged violations and to present its findings to the participating States.

We condemn Russia’s continued reluctance to allow the SMM access to the occupied Crimean peninsula. If allowed, the Mission would be able to report on the massive grave violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms in Crimea. Meanwhile, we rely on the independent and well-proven sources of information. The most recent Freedom House report “Freedom in the World 2020” provides quite a comprehensive picture of developments in Crimea, including silencing independent media, use of antiterrorism and other laws against political dissidents, deportations, acute repressions of members of the indigenous Crimean Tatar minority, and many

others. I wish to draw your special attention to the part of report on the situation on political rights, including electoral process, political pluralism and participation. It gives us some insight into the current political environment in the Russia-occupied parts of Donbas as well. We would ask you to keep that in mind while thinking on the proper free, democratic and safe environment, which must be established in those areas before the local elections could be organized in accordance with the Minsk agreements.

The ongoing pressure on Crimean Tatars and Ukrainians by the Russian occupation authorities is not an empty word.

On 5 March, citizens of Ukraine Serhiy Filatov and Artem Herasymov were illegally condemned by the Russian so-called “courts” in Crimea for exercising their fundamental freedom of religion. Both of them belong to “Jehova Witnesses”, which, under Russia’s repressive legislation, is considered to be an extremist organization. This represents another case of illegal imposition of its own laws by the occupying Power, in contradiction to the international law.

On 11 March, the Russian occupation law enforcement agencies have again held searches in the houses of Crimean Tatars, some of whom belong to the civic movement “Crimean Solidarity”, a community of people supporting each other and monitoring the illegal court proceedings. At least four of them – Amet Suleimanov, Seitumer Seitumerov, Osman Seitumerov and Rustem Seitumerov – are reported to have been detained. In this context, let me draw your attention to the respective statement of the MFA of Ukraine on a new wave of searches and detentions in the occupied Crimea, which was released yesterday, on 11 March. We severely condemn the ongoing campaigns of intimidation and pressure held by Russia in the occupied Crimea.

We again urge the Russian Federation to reverse its illegal occupation of Crimea, militarization of the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov, and to stop its aggression against Ukraine, including by withdrawing its armed formations from the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine and fully implementing its commitments under the Minsk agreements.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.