



Permanent Mission of Ukraine
to the International
Organizations in Vienna

Statement on Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine

As for delivery by Ambassador Yurii Vitrenko, Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the International Organizations in Vienna, to the 1510th meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council

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Mr. Chairperson,

I would like to start with thanking the CIO for convening a special reinforced PC meeting to mark three years of Ukraine's resistance to Russia's unprovoked, unjustified and illegal war of aggression. My words of gratitude also go to the participating States for their sharply defined statements in support of my country.

The outcome of this meeting could not be clearer. A lasting and comprehensive peace in Europe is possible only on the basis of the principles of international law, as enshrined in the UN Charter and Helsinki Final Act. This means due respect for Ukraine's territorial integrity, sovereignty and political independence. It includes Ukraine's right to a self-determined future. This also demands that the aggression must not be rewarded but that justice must be restored while the perpetrator is held to account. And last but not least, this peace must be underpinned by strong security guarantees to deter the aggressor from future attacks.

Excellencies,

Yesterday Ukraine marked the Day of Resistance to the occupation of Crimea.

Eleven years ago, thousands of people, including Crimean Tatars, Ukrainians and other nationalities, gathered in front of the Crimean Parliament to protest against Russia's attempts to take over the peninsula. From the very first day Russia's legend fell apart. People simply didn't want Russia on the peninsula.

And this resistance lasts to this day.

The reports about searches and raids, introduction of discriminatory and repressive legislation, forced demographic changes, harassment, intimidation, alleged tortures, ill-treatment, arbitrary detentions, arrests and sentencing under bogus charges even after 11 years of the occupation, all this shows how much Russia is afraid of people. Moscow understands that it can conquer the country, but it can never break the will of the people.

We must not let down those people. They still believe in the strength of the OSCE principles and in the spirit of Helsinki, thanks to which human rights have become the core of comprehensive security. We expect the OSCE and its autonomous institutions to pay special attention to Crimea and other occupied territories.

As of 1 January 2025, 221 people remain in Russia's custody, including 137 Crimean Tatars. Since the beginning of 2024, at least 12 political prisoners have been unlawfully transferred – or effectively deported – from Crimea to prisons on Russian territory. Some of them are in remote regions known for its severe conditions.

At least 60 Crimean political prisoners, including Iryna Danylovykh, Tofik Abdulhaziiiev, Server Zekiriaiev, Ruslan Nahaiev, Enver Ametov, Rustem Osmanov, Yashar Muiedinov, Rustem Huhuryk, Vadym Bektemirov, Teimur and Uzeir Abdullaiev, are in urgent need of medical assistance.

But the occupation of Crimea itself also remains a stark reminder of why a compromised peace cannot be sustainable and leads to even bigger wars.

So-called “peace times” were used by Russia to re-deploy forces and to heavily militarize the peninsula. Later, it became a launching pad for an attack on mainland Ukraine.

To this day, Russia continues to strike from Crimea, destroying homes and infrastructure across Ukraine and causing more and more civilian casualties.

No doubts, Russia will again try to apply the same militarization blueprint to the newly occupied territories.

Moreover, the Black Sea Fleet stationed in Crimea was used to blockade Ukrainian ports, with significant negative consequences for global food security.

This is Russia's attempt to weaponize food, not just against Ukraine but against many countries in need.

Russia's illegal activities in the Black Sea create not only military, energy and food security threats, but also impede freedom of navigation posing a significant risk to all regional countries.

The crash of the two Russian tankers in the Kerch Strait last December is very illustrative in this regard.

Meanwhile, the illegal establishment of control by Russia over the former nuclear weapons storage sites in Crimea not only poses a security threat but also undermines the credibility of the non-proliferation regime. Will the disarmament efforts be effective in the face of attempts by the nuclear state to dismember another non-nuclear sovereign state?

Dear colleagues,

This Russian war is the existential one for the Ukrainians. It began with Putin's claims that Ukraine was not a real country. Nothing has changed. Our statehood and freedom are at stake.

Unfortunately, Russia has failed to learn a historical lesson. The time of empires is over. That Ukrainians value democracy, human rights and freedoms above all. This is what unites us. This is what my fellow citizens have regained with the restoration of the independence of the Ukrainian state.

It is precisely these values that are so dear to the free people of every OSCE participating State. Every, except for the aggressor and his accomplices.

We also know the price of losing freedom. We have learned this in Moscow's concentration camp during the soviet occupation. That's why, by defending Ukraine's borders, we are defending our rights.

But Moscow knows nothing about the will of the people. The Kremlin believes that it can be imposed, including by illegally changing the constitution and simulating the elections to prolong the one-man's rule. That's why Russia made a strategic mistake when it decided to invade Ukraine in 2014. And repeated it in 2022.

At the same time, today's tenth anniversary of the murder of Borys Nemtsov in front of the Kremlin walls is a stark reminder of how Russia's impunity has grown over these years.

At a time when naming and shaming of Russia was not widely practiced, Nemtsov spoke openly about the presence of regular Russian troops in Ukraine and demanded accountability for Putin to give peace a chance. So, let's ask ourselves.

If in 2014 Russia had been named as the aggressor, with all the consequences that entails? What if the Kremlin's regime had been isolated already then? And if Moscow had been punished for its attempt to redraw the borders in Crimea at least to the same extent as it was after the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022? Would we still have 12,654 civilians killed and 29,392 injured since 24 February 2022, as verified by the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission?

Unfortunately, history knows no "ifs". But we have the privilege of testing different future scenarios, including those based on the wisdom of hindsight.

And each of these scenarios says that as long as Putin is rewarded for his aggression, there will be no hope for internal change in Russia and no peace and stability in Europe. Instead, there will be more internal repression and external aggression.

The Kremlin's actions are still driven by attempts to subjugate Ukraine. Vladimir Putin says that the invasion of Ukraine three years ago was part of "God's will". His foreign minister threatens that Russia will not stop its atrocities.

And the Russian regime continues to blatantly lie about not attacking civilian critical infrastructure, while we have seen a repetition of such attacks in recent days. Like on the night of 20 February 2025, when Russia launched a missile attack on critical infrastructure in the Kharkiv region. Or the day before, when Russia's attack on Odesa left at least 160,000 people without heat and electricity.

Do we need any more proof that without comprehensive pressure Russia will not negotiate in good faith but will only try to legitimize its ultimatum?

But as President Zelenskyy recently said, "we didn't accept these ultimatums in our most difficult moment, why would anyone think we would accept them now?"

In conclusion, let me reiterate that Ukraine is committed and is ready to work on achieving a just, lasting, comprehensive peace, which will defend and promote interests of freedom-loving nations.

So, let's give this peace a chance by upholding and reinforcing our adherence to the principles. And by supporting Ukraine and the Ukrainians who have proved to be a real deterrent to Russia's expansionism.

The developments of the last 11 years have shown that there will be no lasting peace at the expense of the security of people living in the occupation and the territorial integrity of others. That's why, the words – Crimea is Ukraine – like Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson regions, matter not only to my country. This matters to the whole international community.

I thank you, Mr. Chairperson.