



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on Current Security Challenges in the OSCE Area and OSCE Engagement with Ukraine

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires Gary Robbins
to the Special Permanent Council, Vienna
April 28, 2014

Mr. Chairman, we witnessed an alarming escalation of the situation in Ukraine in recent days when pro-Russia militants abducted the German-led Vienna Document inspection team and their Ukrainian escorts in Slovyansk. In addition, yesterday two members of the Special Monitoring Mission's Donetsk team were detained in the eastern city Yenakiyev. They were released a few hours later; however, these actions which are an outrageous violation of this Organization's integrity are unacceptable and must be denounced in the strongest terms by each and every participating State, including the Russian Federation.

As our own organization faces a hostage crisis, we commend the Chairmanship's timely work at the counter-terrorism conference in Interlaken on relevant issues, such as kidnapping for ransom. We fully support President Burkhalter's remarks earlier today that we need to implement UNSCR 2133, particularly with regards to securing the release of hostages without any political concessions. We are encouraged by the release of the Swedish observer for medical reasons, but call on Russia to secure the unconditional and immediate release of the entire German-led team and the Ukrainian escorts.

While we welcome Ambassador Kelin's public expression of concern regarding the Vienna Document team, indicating that Russia thinks "that these people need to be freed as soon as possible" and that Russia was taking "all possible steps" to free the military observers, we remain disappointed that senior officials in Moscow have not condemned the abduction – nor have they demanded the team's immediate release. Moreover, Russian-language press reports continue to mischaracterize the work of the team. It is critical for Russian authorities to immediately correct the record and state clearly what we all know to be true: Vienna Document inspection teams are not clandestine; the members are not "spies." This team was operating fully in the open, consistent with Vienna Document provisions that Russia, as well as all other OSCE participating States, has agreed to, and implemented, for decades.

Ten days ago, the United States, the European Union, Russia, and Ukraine met in Geneva and jointly agreed to initial steps to de-escalate tensions, improve security conditions, and find political solutions to the conflict threatening the sovereignty, unity, and territorial integrity of Ukraine. As Secretary Kerry and EU High Representative Ashton made clear in Geneva, both Russia and Ukraine needed to take concrete actions in order to meet their commitments.

Almost immediately – and despite the ongoing illegal so-called annexation of Crimea – the Ukrainian government took significant steps to fulfill the commitments it made in Geneva. These included the suspension of its counterterrorism operations over the Easter holiday weekend, the introduction of an amnesty bill to parliament, a pledge to provide the Russian language special status in areas of Ukraine where it is widely spoken, and a reaffirmation of an inclusive process of constitutional reform that will take into account the views of all Ukrainians, from all regions of Ukraine.

In the meantime, Russia has not lifted a finger to help, and Russia's hand can be seen behind further destructive and destabilizing acts. The simple reality is you cannot resolve a crisis when only one side is willing to do what is necessary to avoid a confrontation. Every day since Geneva the world has witnessed as two countries, Ukraine and Russia, demonstrated vastly different understandings of what it means to uphold their international commitments.

So, while the Government of Ukraine is working in good faith to fulfill the aspirations of the Geneva Joint Statement, Russia continues to deceive and destabilize its neighbor. Despite its propaganda attempting to hide the truth, Russia continues to fund, coordinate, and fuel a heavily armed separatist movement in Donetsk. As Secretary Kerry said on Friday, "The world knows that peaceful protesters don't come armed with grenade launchers and automatic weapons, hiding the insignias on their brand new matching military uniforms, and speaking in dialects that every local knows comes from thousands of miles away. The world knows that the Russian intelligence operatives arrested in Ukraine didn't just take a wrong turn on the highway."

Ten days after the meeting in Geneva, it is clear that, to compare the two signatories, Ukraine and Russia, only one side, only one country, is keeping its word. And for anyone who wants to create gray areas out of black, or find in the fine print crude ways to justify crude actions, let's get real – the Geneva agreement is not open to interpretation. It is not vague. It is not subjective. What was signed in Geneva is as simple as it is specific.

The United States has repeatedly called on the Russian Federation to pursue a diplomatic solution to this crisis. We have heard from the distinguished representatives of Ukraine and the EU again this afternoon about their continued commitment to the near-term implementation of the Geneva Statement. The United States shares that commitment. However, this is impossible without the Russian Federation. Russia must stop destabilizing Ukraine, start respecting its OSCE commitments, and join other participating States in contributing to a solution to the ongoing crisis.

The window to change course remains open, but it is closing. If Russia chooses the path of de-escalation, the international community – all of us – will welcome it. Today President Obama's announcement of additional sanctions has come because Russia has not yet chosen to move forward. There is a path here to resolve this. If Russia does not take immediate steps to implement the Geneva agreement, the world will make sure that the cost for Russia will only grow. - Thank you, Mr. Chair.