



United States Mission to the OSCE

Ongoing Violations of International Law and Defiance of OSCE Principles and Commitments by the Russian Federation in Ukraine

As delivered by Deputy Political Counselor Darren Perdue
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
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Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The conflict in the Donbas seems to have returned to an established pattern as we enter the fourth winter since Russia-led forces violated the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine. Similar to last year, the positive effects of the so-called “back to school” recommitment to the ceasefire have abated, and violations recorded in 2017 will likely soar to past 300,000 – an increase of more than 70,000 recorded violations than at this time last year. Key civilian infrastructure, including tanks of deadly chlorine gas, has come under regular fire. Particularly alarming is the increasingly volatile use of large caliber weapons proscribed by the Minsk agreements. The November 8 SMM Weekly Report noted a twofold increase in the use of these weapons, 95 percent of which were recorded during the last three days of the reporting period. This unpredictable use of destructive weapon systems presents a grave danger to Ukrainian civilians caught on both sides of the line of contact.

Mr. Chair, the civilian costs of this unnecessary and tragic conflict continue to mount. The November 8 SMM Weekly Report corroborated reports of nine civilian casualties, including two deaths and seven injuries, as a result of shelling, gunfire, and explosions of ordnance. One of those killed was a nine-year-old boy. As of November 10, the total number of civilian casualties in 2017 was greater than over the same period in 2016.

Shelling and firing continues dangerously close to water filtration stations that contain chlorine gas which, if released, would threaten the lives of hundreds of thousands of people. The SMM recorded violations throughout the week near the Donetsk Filtration Station. Shelling the previous week landed just 70 meters away from the Station’s chlorine gas storage unit. On November 13, a bullet hole was found in a window of the Donetsk Filtration Station itself. Our position is clear – shelling around the Donetsk Filtration Station and other key civilian infrastructure must stop. We call on Russia and its forces to implement a genuine ceasefire, especially to cease shelling around the filtration plant, and withdraw heavy weapons to the agreed lines.

Regrettably, it's not just the use of heavy artillery and multiple launch rocket systems that pose a threat to civilians in the Donbas. On November 8, the SMM reported that electricity to a water pumping station in the so-called "Luhansk People's Republic" had been cut, causing water shortages in large parts of Luhansk city and its vicinity. This report, as well as other similar anecdotes – including the shelling of civilian infrastructure sites – underscore the vulnerability of residents who remain in the area. Winter is upon us, and yet civilians along the line of contact are subject to the whims of those in Moscow to dial up and down the level of violence in this conflict.

Mr. Chair, it is clear what Russia needs to do to adhere to the Minsk agreements – the agreed upon path to peace in this conflict; namely: cease hostilities, pull back or "disengage" from the line of contact, remove proscribed weapon systems from the battlefield, and return control of the Donbas to Ukraine. Only when security is established is it appropriate to make further steps on the political measures of Minsk. As Special Representative on Ukraine Negotiations Ambassador Kurt Volker has said, elections in the Donbas would be "impossible to hold as long as Ukraine does not have the necessary access to its territory."

The United States regrets the continued interference with SMM operations. On November 5, while patrolling in areas near so-called "DPR"-controlled Roza, the SMM experienced technical difficulties with its VHF radio system, likely attributable to jamming. On November 8, while in so-called "DPR"-controlled Pikuzy, a militant threateningly fired his rifle into the air just 30 meters from an SMM patrol's vehicles. On November 10, while conducting UAV flights near the Petrivske disengagement area, the SMM reported forces from the east engaging the UAV with small arms fire. A simple look at the map informs us that the fire came from the direction of Russia's forces. These unacceptable actions, along with the regular restrictions to SMM movement that occur in the areas of Ukraine outside of government control, continue with no discernable follow-through from the JCCC or militants in the Donbas. The United States again calls upon Russia to allow full, complete, and unfettered access for SMM patrols throughout Ukraine, up to and including its internationally-recognized border with Russia, as stated in the SMM mandate Russia itself supported.

Mr. Chair, once again we must draw attention to the deplorable situation in Russia-occupied Crimea. Russian propagandists falsely portray Crimean Tatars, and anyone speaking out against Russian occupation, as terrorists or extremists. On November 8, Russian border services detained and questioned the wives of Crimean Tatar political prisoners about alleged association with ISIS as they tried to enter Russia-occupied Crimea. Russian security forces continue to search homes and detain Crimean Tatars throughout the Ukrainian peninsula. We are also concerned that Crimean filmmaker Oleg Sentsov, who was sentenced to 20 years imprisonment in Russia on bogus charges of terrorism, and was placed into two weeks of punitive solitary confinement at a penal colony in Yamal, Russia for unknown reasons. This abuse is unconscionable and must cease immediately.

Mr. Chair, during the current session of the UN General Assembly Third Committee, the Russian delegation once again introduced its annual resolution, "Glorification of Nazism: Inadmissibility of certain practices that contribute to fueling contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and related intolerance." The United States has long-standing concerns about this resolution, which exploits the emotive issues of Nazism for a

narrow political purpose, and calls for significant, unacceptable limitations on the freedom of expression. Furthermore, the United States is alarmed at Moscow's more recent efforts to vilify others by loosely using terms such as "Nazi" or "Fascist." The government of Russia has used this rhetoric recently against the government of Ukraine. This is a gross misuse of history that should not be sanctioned. It is clear that Russia's efforts at the UN, via this resolution, are aimed at criticizing Russia's opponents, rather than at promoting human rights. As we reiterated in our Explanation of Vote last year, the United States is disgusted by any attempt to glorify or attempt to otherwise promote Nazi ideology. We remain a staunch supporter of the UN's efforts to remember the victims of the Holocaust.

In closing, Mr. Chair, the United States again calls upon Russia to end its campaign of repression in occupied Crimea and to return control of Crimea to Ukraine. As the occupying power in Crimea, on a daily basis Russia demonstrates to all nations just how difficult and cruel life would be under Russian control. With its abhorrent behavior in Crimea and eastern Ukraine, Russia is causing its near neighbors to value and defend their independence like never before. The United States fully supports Ukraine's sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity within its internationally-recognized borders. We do not, nor will we ever, recognize Russia's purported annexation of Crimea. Crimea-related sanctions on Russia will remain in place until Russia returns full control of the peninsula to Ukraine. We join our European and other partners in reiterating that our sanctions against Russia for its aggression in eastern Ukraine will remain until Russia withdraws its forces from the Donbas and fully implements its commitments under the Minsk agreements.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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