



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 Ambassador James S. Gilmore III
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
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Last week, the *Special Monitoring Mission* released its most recent thematic report on civilian casualties in the conflict-afflicted areas of eastern Ukraine. This report paints a vivid picture of the impact of Russia's continued aggression towards its sovereign neighbor over the past three years.

On a weekly basis, we discuss civilian casualties in this *Permanent Council*. The Russia-fomented and fueled conflict in Ukraine continues to rank among the highest concerns of the participating States. We have consistently called upon Russia to adhere to its *Minsk* commitments and withdraw its forces and materiel from eastern Ukraine. Regrettably, the bloodshed continues, as we have heard already today, and civilians continue to pay the price for Russia's ongoing aggression against Ukraine. While the SMM report covers only the past three years, I remind you this Russia-led conflict is currently in its seventh year, and has caused the deaths of more than 13,000 Ukrainians.

Between January 2017 and September 2020, the SMM reported 946 civilian casualties, including 161 deaths. Over this period, nearly one thousand men, women, and children have been wounded by small arms fire, shelling, or explosives, all due to the Kremlin's decision to wage a multi-year campaign to destabilize Ukraine.

Make no mistake: these 946 victims fall directly at Russia's feet. Attempts to frame this conflict as "internal", or to assert that Ukraine intentionally targets its own citizens are absurd. Russia caused this conflict, and the Kremlin alone holds the responsibility for the suffering, chaos, and destruction it has wrought.

Russia continues to impede the daily activities of civilians in eastern Ukraine by its efforts to control their ability to travel within their own country. The planned November 10 opening of two new entry-exit crossing points for the *Line of Contact* was obstructed by Russia's proxies, despite the fact that Ukraine took all the necessary agreed-on steps to open these crossings on the government-controlled side. As of now, six of seven crossing points remained closed on the Russia-controlled side, with limited exceptions made on humanitarian grounds. Pedestrian-only traffic is ongoing at Stanytsia Luhanska, where Ukraine delivered on its promise to lift temporary restrictions.

With winter approaching, the risks are increasing for the vulnerable civilians of eastern Ukraine, particularly the elderly and the infirm, who are stranded for hours, sometimes days, at these crossing points. Several times a year, we learn that a civilian has died from health issues that arose while making the arduous journey across the *Line of Contact*. If Russia were to end its aggression in Ukraine, the circumstances under which these civilians die would not exist. The United States calls upon Russia to cease obstructing progress in the peace negotiations, to take the necessary steps to allow for the opening of these new entry-exit crossing points, and to reopen all other crossing points that are currently closed.

Now, Mr. Chairperson, let me take up the issue of occupied Crimea. For nearly seven years, my delegation and many others have spoken out in this Council against the relentless abuses committed against Crimean Tatars, ethnic Ukrainians, and others for their peaceful opposition to Russia's occupation of Crimea, which is part of Ukraine. Some 46,000 Crimean residents have fled from the peninsula to mainland Ukraine. Opponents of the occupation still residing in Crimea confront the chilling prospect that at any moment they could be subjected to reprisal by the occupation authorities:

- they could meet the same fate as so many others, who have been disappeared, or are being held as political prisoners, or who have been expelled and banned from Crimea, their families ripped apart;
- they, too, could be pressured to inform on their friends;
- their homes or houses of worship could be next in line to be raided; or,
- they could be charged and convicted as terrorists, criminals, or extremists just for expressing their views or practicing their religion.

The plight of Crimean Tatars is particularly poignant, Mr. Chairperson. Nearly half the Crimean Tatar population perished as a direct result of Stalin's mass deportations. Those who survived, having endured more than four decades of bitter internal exile deep in the Soviet Union, were finally allowed to return to their ancestral homeland in the late 1980s. They re-established their communities on the peninsula, which, after the USSR dissolved, became an integral part of sovereign, independent Ukraine. For thirty years Crimean Tatars lived in peace as citizens of Ukraine, free to go about their lives and enjoy and develop their culture. Then, in 2014, occupation, the Kremlin's cruel joke, descended.

Crimean Tatars have borne the brunt of Russia's repressive occupation of the peninsula. Today, Crimean Tatars constitute the vast majority of the 90-plus citizens of Ukraine held as political prisoners by Russia. Two weeks ago, in Rostov-on-Don, Russia's Southern Military Regional Court sentenced three Crimean Tatars, Rustem Emir-Huseinov, Arsen Abkhaitov, and Eskender Abdul-Ganiyev, to unjustified, excessive terms of 12 to 17 years in prison. Like dozens of other Crimean Tatars, they were convicted for alleged "involvement" with Hizb ut-Tahrir, a pan-Islamic organization that is lawful in Ukraine.

As we reminded the *Council* in July when their trial began, none of these men was even alleged to have planned or perpetrated any act of violence. Emir-Huseinov, an activist in *Crimean Solidarity*, had monitored trials and participated in protests against Russian repression in occupied territory. In September, the coordinator of *Crimean Solidarity*, Server Mustafayev, and six other *Crimean Solidarity* activists were sentenced to draconian prison terms ranging from 13 to 19 years. Credible human rights organizations have alleged that Mustafayev and his co-defendants were charged in retaliation for their work with *Crimean Solidarity* providing support to Crimean Tatars facing repression and voicing opposition to Russia's occupation of Crimea. As you can see,

Mr. Chairperson, we're very concerned about this issue here today, and are speaking about it in some detail.

Russia seized Crimea in violation of international law. Its abuses on the peninsula have been widely highlighted in this forum and across other international fora like the United Nations. Russia's militarization of Crimea, in addition to its abuses against Crimean Tatars and others who oppose the occupation, threatens all of our common security. Think of these brave Crimean Tatar activists languishing in Russia's harsh prisons. Think of the nearly 200 children of these political prisoners, growing up without their fathers. This behavior is being conducted on behalf of the Russian people. Are the people of Russia happy that this oppression is being done in their name? We again call on Russia to cease its abuses against the Crimean Tatars, to release all Ukrainians it unjustly imprisons, and to stop its oppression of civil society and efforts to silence opposition voices.

Mr. Chair, the United States fully supports Ukraine's sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity within its internationally-recognized borders, including its territorial waters. We do not, nor will we ever, recognize Russia's purported annexation of Crimea. We join our European and other partners in affirming our Minsk-related sanctions against Russia will remain in place until Russia fully implements its Minsk commitments. The Crimea-related sanctions will remain in place until Russia returns full control of the peninsula to Ukraine.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.

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