



**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 1269<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Permanent Council,  
28 May 2020

**Mr. Chairperson,**

I wish to start by underlining the point which has been mentioned by our distinguished Chairperson quoting the first sentences of the most recent SMM weekly report issued yesterday, on 27 May: “Compared with the previous week, the SMM recorded about 50 per cent more ceasefire violations in Donetsk and Luhansk regions. The Mission observed increased military and military-type presence in the security zone in both Donetsk and Luhansk regions. In areas outside government control, it observed new mobile checkpoints and increased staff at checkpoints, fresh tracks of heavy armoured vehicles and members of the armed formations being transported in military-type trucks”, end of quote.

Vast majority of weapons in violation of their withdrawal lines and outside designated storage sites (76 out of 97) were again spotted by the Mission in Russia-occupied parts of Donbas. Those numbers would be considerably higher, if the Russian side had not violated the SMM's mandate by restricting its freedom of movement, 34 occasions in the course of the week, compared to zero in government-controlled areas.

As heavy fighting continued, last week Ukrainian servicemen lost 1 man killed and 11 wounded.

Faced with this serious deterioration of security situation in Donbas, the Ukrainian side initiated extraordinary meeting of the TCG Working Group on Security through video conferencing, which took place on 22 May. As Special Representative Heidi Grau informed following the meeting, all participants presented their proposals for additional measures to strengthen the ceasefire and agreed to continue working on them as soon as possible.

Ensuring full and comprehensive ceasefire remains critical for implementing N4 Paris Summit Agreed conclusions, which continue to be violated by Russia.

Instead of establishing new disengagement areas, it resorts to reengagement: the SMM spotted ongoing excavation and construction works to former positions of the Russian armed formations in Petrivske disengagement area.

Demining remains problematic, as the Russian proxies continue planting new mines, including banned anti-personnel ones. On 22 May, the SMM UAV spotted two additional anti-personnel mines (MON-100 or MON-200), one of them for the first time, in a field between Russia-occupied Petrivske and Styla.

Further progress on mutual release of detainees is undermined by Russia's denial of access of international organizations including ICRC to the persons kept behind bars in Russia-occupied parts of Donbas.

Zolote crossing point at the line of contact, which could significantly contribute to humanitarian situation on the ground, is still non-operational because of unconstructive position of the Russian side.

Safe and secure access of the SMM remains, as you all know very well, only on paper in the Russia-occupied areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions. Since N4 Paris Summit, the situation has only deteriorated when the Russian proxies started since 21 March denying SMM's crossings of the contact line under the pretext of COVID-19-related restrictions. Last week, aiming to conceal military activities, the Russian armed formations, I quote the SMM weekly report, "threatened to shoot or target SMM UAVs".

On 20 May, near Ozerianivka, the SMM patrol was allowed to launch a mini-UAV only in the presence of members of the Russian armed formations and only over a certain area to follow up on reports of damage in the settlement. On 22 May, an SMM patrol located at the eastern edge of Vesela Hora had to immediately leave the area after its mini-UAV had been twice fired by the Russian proxies. In the second case, the shots of small-arms fire passed only 10m above the heads of the monitors. Russia's threat "to shoot or target SMM UAVs", which is implemented in practice, directly endangers the lives of civilian monitors.

That was the list of immediate measures to stabilize the situation in the conflict area, agreed in Paris at the N4 Summit, which continue to be undermined by Russia. Without their implementation, it will be hardly possible to move to the second stage agreed in Paris, that is measures to implement the political provisions of the Minsk agreements.

Release of conflict-related persons remains utmost priority for the Ukrainian side. Over the past year, three stages of their release were held. Over 130 citizens of Ukraine returned back to their homes from the Russian prisons. Still, dozens of them continue to be illegally held by Russia on political grounds and sentenced under far-fetched accusations for opposing occupation of Crimea and parts of Donbas. This continues despite numerous call by the international community to Russia to implement its commitments under the Minsk agreements and obligations as an occupying Power.

With the aim to reinvigorate respective international efforts, on 22 May the MFA of Ukraine launched a “Platform to Coordinate Actions on Release of the Ukrainian Political Prisoners by Russia”. We expect that representatives of the state institutions dealing with support, protection of rights and release of the illegally detained citizens of Ukraine; human rights NGOs and associations of political prisoners’ relatives; and the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar people will join this initiative. The Platform will not duplicate the work of authorized state institutions.

Russia’s politically motivated persecutions continue. The same day, on 22 May, Ukrainian Crimean Tatar journalist Ayder Muzhdabaev, deputy director general of the Crimean Tatar TV channel “ATR”, informed that he had been charged with so-called “public calls for committing terrorist activities, public acquittal or propaganda of terrorism”. Foreign Minister Kuleba stressed that this demonstrates Russia’s continued abuse of anti-terrorism legislation for political means, which undermines real international anti-terrorism efforts and discredits their toolbox. We urge OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media to pay close attention to this case, as well as many other cases of Russia’s violation of the fundamental freedoms of media and expression, directed against Ukrainian citizens.

Finally, I wish to inform participating States that on 22 May, the Ukrainian side signed its memorial to the UNCLOS Arbitral tribunal in the Hague, outlining Ukraine’s arguments in the case of detention of Ukrainian naval vessels and servicemen in November 2018. This issue has been widely highlighted in the meetings of the Permanent Council. We need to hold Russia accountable for its flagrant violations of international law. The delegation of Ukraine will continue to keep participating States informed on further developments in this case.

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, militants and their hardware from the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine and fully implementing its commitments under the Minsk agreements.

**Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.**