



Permanent Mission of Ukraine
to the International Organizations in Vienna

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Statement on “Russia’s ongoing aggression against Ukraine and illegal occupation of Crimea”

As delivered by Ambassador Ihor Prokopchuk,
Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the International Organizations in Vienna,
to the 1170th meeting of the Permanent Council,
21 December 2017

Mr. Chairperson,

We thank Ambassador Apakan for his timely report to the Permanent Council on the deteriorating security situation in Donbas. We fully share his deep concern on the ceasefire violations reaching levels not recorded since February this year. In the week from 11 to 17 December, the SMM registered almost 16,000 ceasefire violations, including from the Minsk-proscribed weapons, a 35 per cent increase on the week before. These numbers reflect the unpredictability of Russia’s military intentions and its persistence in maintaining a “hot” armed conflict which it started and continues to fuel. While the Russian Federation flags are installed in the areas of Donbas under Russia’s effective control, this time in Rovenky at a former administration building, as registered by the SMM in its weekly report of 13 December, the Russian weapons and manpower keep moving through the uncontrolled segment of the Ukrainian-Russian state border, aiming at consolidating the gains of Russia’s invasion in the sovereign territory of Ukraine.

We welcome the recommitment to ceasefire for the holiday season, reached yesterday at the Trilateral contact group meeting and effective from midnight of 23 December 2017. We expect Russia to make sure that its hybrid forces in Donbas fully respect this commitment.

Distinguished colleagues,

Throughout this year, instead of taking responsibility for fulfilling Russia’s commitments on peaceful resolution of the conflict, the Russian Federation has resorted to a variety of unilateral steps undermining the implementation of the Minsk agreements and violating Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity. The most recent such unilateral step took place on Tuesday this week, when the Russian side withdrew its officers from the JCCC – a bilateral Ukrainian-Russian arrangement set up after signing the Minsk documents in September 2014 and designated to contribute to establishment of a comprehensive and sustainable ceasefire regime as the first provision of the Minsk agreements and the basic step to further progress in

their security and political tracks. Whereas the position of the Ukrainian side regarding this unilateral decision of Russia was clearly expressed in the statement of the MFA of Ukraine, circulated by the delegation of Ukraine among the participating States and Partners for Co-operation on Monday, I wish to emphasise that the Ukrainian part of the JCCC will continue to function as before, will maintain interaction with the SMM and take all possible efforts to ensure the security of the Mission's personnel. The Ukrainian side continues to strongly support the SMM activities. For its part the Russian Federation, by using again its usual tactics of blackmail, further significantly decreases the Mission's security in the non-government controlled areas and impairs the ability of the Mission to perform the mandated tasks without threats, intimidations and even direct attacks by the Russia-led forces in Donbas. Russia's unilateral withdrawal from the JCCC will also further worsen the humanitarian situation in the conflict-affected region, making it even more difficult to carry out the necessary repair works of critical civilian infrastructure.

We urge the Russian side to take responsibility for enabling the OSCE to play the role agreed to by Moscow as defined in the Minsk agreements, and not to block the activities of the bodies designated to facilitate the implementation of these agreements, including the SMM, the JCCC and the Trilateral Contact Group which comprises Ukraine, Russia and the OSCE. We remind the Russian delegation that the TCG is tasked with facilitating implementation of the provisions of the Minsk agreements, assisted by the work of its working sub-groups that reflect the composition of the TCG, i.e. Ukraine, Russia and the OSCE.

Russia's ongoing failure to implement the undertaken commitments produces significant and systematic restrictions affecting the SMM patrols in the areas controlled by the Russian hybrid forces and depriving the OSCE community of the full picture on the ground. The Mission reported again in its weekly report of 13 December that its freedom of movement had been restricted nine times, all of them in non-government-controlled areas of Donetsk region (in addition to restrictions due to mines and UXO). The SMM "continued to note ongoing, pervasive restriction of its freedom of movement in the southern part of Donetsk region outside government control" and also pointed out the incident at the non-government controlled checkpoint north of Horlivka where the "armed persons" told the SMM "to leave the area, saying that the Mission's job was "to observe and not to ask questions."

We consider as outrageous the incident that took place on 6 December, when two SMM monitors were forcibly held and taken to a facility by a group of unidentified militants in Donetsk city. Although the monitors were released a few hours later, no clear explanations followed. We request the Russian Federation to clarify this unacceptable situation and take measures to prevent anything similar happening in the future. So far Russia's proxies in Donbas refuse, as reported by the SMM, "any responsibility for a wide range of restrictions – including those occurring at checkpoints, weapons storage sites, and the "closed" settlements of Novoazovsk and Siedove, as well as incidents involving SMM UAVs". The irresponsible behaviour of Moscow and its proxies in Donbas steadily increases the security risks to civilian OSCE monitors, who were seconded by the OSCE participating States to

fulfil the SMM mandate agreed by all participating States, including Russia. We urge Russia to immediately put an end to this behavior.

Mr. Chairperson,

While the Russian Federation continues its cynical attempts of justifying the aggression as “protection of Russian-speakers”, the Russia-led forces in Donbas continue to indiscriminately shell residential areas and Ukrainian positions without a single care for the people, regardless of their ethnic or cultural background or the language they speak. On 18 December, they used MRLS “Grad” to subject to massive shelling the people in the government-controlled settlement of Novoluhanske. At least 40 missiles were launched. 8 civilians were wounded, 47 houses, a school, a kindergarten and a hospital were damaged. Electricity and gas supplies were disrupted. We strongly condemn this barbaric act of violence targeting civilians. The Ukrainian authorities promptly provided assistance to the affected people and meticulously document the consequences of this crime to bring the perpetrators to account. The markings found on the shells of the used ammunition indicate that they had never been on the inventory of the Ukrainian Armed Forces. On 19 December the Russia-led forces fired 20 MRLS “Grad” missiles at the government-controlled settlement Zaitseve.

The villages of Travneve and Hladosove, which were mentioned in the previous meetings of the Permanent Council, continue to be shelled by the Russian hybrid forces almost on a daily basis, including from 120mm mortars. In the night from 12 to 13 December, as reported by the SMM, the “residents of Travneve either did not stay there overnight or spent the night in the basement of their houses because of shelling”. Meanwhile, as registered by the SMM, the Ukrainian authorities ensured the access of international humanitarian organizations and restored electricity, resumed regular bus service and repaired a number of damaged houses. Regrettably, the ongoing shellings of Russia-led forces prevent the Ukrainian military-civil administration and State Emergency Service from completing the necessary repair works.

There is no progress in opening the entry-exit crossing point Zolote, which remains to be blocked by the Russian proxies since March 2016. The repairs of the bridge in Stanytsia Luhanska two weeks ago served to alleviate the passage of civilians, but cannot decrease the overload of traffic in a single crossing point in the Luhansk region. It is a humanitarian necessity to ensure the opening of Zolote crossing point and we underline the special responsibility of the Russian side to allow it happen.

Working to finalise on the eve of winter holidays the exchange of hostages and unlawfully detained persons within the agreed mechanism, we expect that Russia will stay committed to this process.

Distinguished colleagues,

Last week, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights released its regular Report on the human rights situation in Ukraine, this time for the period of 16 August to 15 November 2017. As regards the temporarily

occupied Crimea the report states, in particular, that “practices by the authorities which resulted in serious human rights violations, and which disproportionately affected Crimean Tatars, persisted in this reporting period. Further, the exercise of freedoms of opinion and expression, religion or belief and peaceful assembly also continued to be curtailed through verdicts criminalizing criticism and dissent.” The most recent wave of such verdicts by the Russian occupation “courts” took place on Monday this week, when more than 60 Crimean Tatars were found guilty and fined on charges of staging single-person pickets on 14 October this year in a protest against being labelled as terrorists.

The Russian Federation must not be allowed to distract attention of the international community from grave violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the Crimean peninsula under Russia’s illegal occupation. We are grateful to all OSCE participating States and Partners for Co-operation which gave their votes of support for the United Nations General Assembly resolution “Situation of human rights in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol (Ukraine)” adopted in this Tuesday. It urges the Russian Federation, inter alia, to bring an immediate end to all violations and abuses against residents of Crimea, and to immediately release Ukrainian citizens who were unlawfully detained and judged without regard for basic standards of justice. It also calls upon the Russian authorities to fulfill the provisional measures ordered by the UN Court of Justice in the case of Ukraine against the Russian Federation on 19 April 2017, which remain unimplemented by Russia. It is evident that breach by Russia of its international obligations and commitments is pervasive, which requires further consolidation of international efforts and pressure to make Russia abide by its obligations.

We strongly urge the Russian Federation to return to the tenets of international law, to reverse the illegal occupation of Crimea and Sevastopol, and to stop its aggression against Ukraine, including by withdrawing its troops from the Ukrainian territory and fully implementing its commitments under the Minsk agreements.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.