



**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 1218<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Permanent Council,  
28 February 2019

### **Mr. Chairperson,**

In the two weeks since the last meeting of the Permanent Council, the security situation in the conflict-affected areas of Donbas remained volatile, unpredictable and worsening. The Russian armed formations continued to defy their commitments on the agreed line of contact, ceasefire regime and withdrawal of weapons. The SMM recorded increase in ceasefire violations including the use of the Minsk-proscribed weapons, and new Russian military positions west of Pervomaiske, moving closer to the Ukrainian Armed Forces. Since the latest recommitment to ceasefire of 29 December 2018 and to 24 February 2019 10 Ukrainian servicemen were killed and 84 were wounded.

Civilians along the contact line continue to bear the burden of the ongoing attacks by the Russian armed formations, using different weapons. On 14 February they shelled Novoluhanske with 152mm artillery, when a direct hit reduced a residential building to rubble, as reported by the SMM. Last Monday, Zolote and Novooleksandrivka were targeted by artillery shells originating from Russia-occupied Pervomaisk. Four residential buildings were destroyed in this attack. Russia's defiance of its obligations on demining and fencing led to the killing of two civilians in a mine explosion on 23 February, near Olenivka, 200m south of the forward position of the Russian armed formations on the road, regularly used by civilians. On 14 February, a repair team of Luhansk energy company, working on restoring electricity in the Popasna district, was fired at by the Russian fighters. Two days ago, on 26 February, the Russian fighters again opened fire at repair workers from close distance, this time near Russia-occupied Zolote-5/Mykhailivka, putting also at direct risk the lives of SMM monitors who were there to accompany the repairs. We strongly condemn these attacks by the Russian forces and urge Russia to start immediately the implementation of its commitments on security provisions of the Minsk agreements.

**Distinguished colleagues,**

The SMM's ability to provide a comprehensive assessment of the security situation remains severely undermined by the systematic restrictions imposed by the Russian side and the threats to the safety of monitors posed by Russia's continuous shelling of Ukrainian military positions and residential areas as well as fire directed at the SMM. Notably, when the SMM returned for full-time monitoring to its forward patrol base in Popasna, from where the monitors had been relocated a year ago due to security concerns, the Mission immediately recorded the highest number of ceasefire violations in the respective area since August 2017. This proves that only physical 24/7 presence of the SMM enables full objective monitoring and reaffirms why the Russian forces are keen to keep the SMM away.

Under the circumstances of significant breaches by Russia of the SMM's mandate, especially in the border areas in the conflict-affected zone, the SMM continues to heavily rely on the use of its technical assets and data of aerial imagery. Only from the air, the Mission has been able to register dozens of tanks, mortars, and pieces of artillery near Russia-occupied Myrne, Kruhlyk, Buhaiivka, Shymshynivka, Ternove and other locations. Indicative of the strength of the Russian invasion force are the facts that only on two days of 17 and 18 February at five locations in Russia-occupied parts of only Luhansk oblast of Ukraine the SMM spotted 88 battle tanks, as registered in the report of 20 February 2019. Only from the air, the SMM was able to spot illegal convoys with military supplies, which the Russian Federation sent to its armed formations in Donbas through the segment of the Ukrainian-Russian state border controlled by Russia on both sides. This is what makes the SMM's technical assets to be the target of the Russian armed formations who remain devoted to their strategy of "blinding" the SMM and enjoy impunity.

On 18 February, another long-range UAV was lost while flying over the Russia-occupied parts of Donbas. Awaiting for the speediest results of the SMM's investigation on the causes of this loss of the UAV, I would remind that, despite regular requests by delegations in the Permanent Council, no explanations were provided by the Russian delegation concerning the downing of the long-range UAV in October last year. The lack of consequences for Russia's attacks on SMM assets further worsens the operational environment for the mission. In the last few days the SMM lost two mini-UAVs near the Russia-occupied locations of Sarabash on 23 February and Makiivka on 24 February, in both cases as a result of "external interference, most likely caused by jamming of the control link". I remind that the Russian delegation has not provided explanations about how the modern and highly sophisticated Russian jamming systems like "TORN" or "Zhytel", earlier registered by the SMM, made their way to the occupied parts of Donbas. We again urge Russia to provide explanations. On 15 February, the Russian fighters near Zolote fired about 60 shots at an SMM mid-range UAV that was flying in the area in the presence of SMM monitors who had earlier informed about belonging of the UAV to the Mission. On 17 February, a mini-UAV was fired at and damaged when flying over occupied Zhovte in Luhansk region. We strongly urge Russia to take responsibility and put an immediate end to all these attacks.

**Mr. Chairperson,**

In earlier meetings of the Permanent Council, we drew attention to the efforts of the Ukrainian authorities to improve conditions for crossing entry-exit checkpoints located along the contact line in Donbas. This contact line is the consequence of the Russian armed invasion into Ukraine's territory affecting the lives of millions of people. In the weekly report of 12 February, the SMM highlighted the situation in EECPs, pointing out to improved facilities and renovations, including underground shelters for people to take cover in case of shelling, expansion of the processing and pedestrian area, new sanitary facilities, and new water stations in government-controlled parts of the entry-exit checkpoints. But conditions for crossing the contact line will remain challenging for civilians until Russia delivers on its responsibilities, as the occupying power, leading to unblocking the opening of additional EECP in Zolote and improving the infrastructure at existing ones. We also urge the Russian side to proceed to humanitarian demining and fencing to prevent further loss of civilian lives as was the case near Olenivka.

**Mr. Chairperson,**

It was welcome news last week from the Chairman-in-Office, Minister M.Lajcak that he had raised during his visit to Moscow the issue of immediate release of Ukrainian sailors, who are in Russia's captivity as prisoners of war, and of Ukrainian hostages incarcerated in prisons on the Russian territory. We encourage the Chairmanship to vigorously pursue this humanitarian priority. We reaffirm the proposal of Ukraine to exchange 25 citizens of Russia, who were convicted for their crimes on the Ukrainian territory and who appealed to Russia's President to seek their return to Russia, for 25 Ukrainian hostages in Russian jails. We ask other participating States to attach utmost priority to this issue.

We again urge the Russian Federation to reverse its illegal occupation of Crimea and to stop its aggression against Ukraine, including by withdrawing its armed formations from the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine and fully implementing its commitments under the Minsk agreements.

**Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.**