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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 Chargé d'Affaires, a.i. Harry Kamian
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
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Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The so-called renewed “Back to School” ceasefire effort in eastern Ukraine appears to be collapsing. On October 27, a 25-year-old civilian was killed in the fighting near Donetsk-city. From October 18 to 24, the SMM recorded over 1,000 ceasefire violations on average per day – a significant increase from the prior week’s average of 658. It also reflects a general trend of worsening conditions and a return to sustained levels of fighting, just as the hardships of winter return. The United States is particularly concerned with the fighting around Svitlodarsk, where the SMM recorded 3,723 ceasefire violations. This exceeds the average of recorded violations along the entire line of contact during the past three weeks.

SMM reports indicate that the use of proscribed weapons has reached a level not recorded in the area since mid-May. Ceasefire violations continue near the Donetsk Filtration Station, despite indications last July that the sides intended to create a “safety zone” around the facility. The United States fully supports the creation of such zones to avoid a humanitarian crisis and to protect the area’s civilians. We encourage the signatories of the Minsk agreements to work with the SMM on making these protective measures a reality.

The presence of weapons that should have been withdrawn, according to the Minsk agreements, remains an issue as well. Heavy armaments, including multiple launch rocket systems, remain on the field of battle, despite pledges to withdraw these indiscriminate weapons from the security zone. The United States repeats its call for the sides to adhere to their commitments made in the Minsk agreements. We call again on Russia, as the initiator of the conflict, to use its leverage and cease the hostilities, and to begin the disengagement of forces and withdrawal of weapons.

Mr. Chair, under the backdrop of worsening violence, restrictions on SMM patrols continue – restrictions that come almost exclusively at the hands of the Russia-led forces and are described by the SMM themselves as “ongoing” and “pervasive.” And these restrictions often turn out to be violent. On October 24, shots were fired from “DPR”-controlled territory at an SMM UAV. On October 25, so-called “DPR” militants at a checkpoint loaded and pointed a heavy machine gun at an SMM vehicle as its occupants attempted to conduct a patrol well within the Mission’s mandate. Mr. Chair, threats to, and restrictions of, SMM patrols are categorically unacceptable. The Permanent Council sent those monitors to the Donbas with a clear and unanimously supported mandate. It is our shared responsibility to

ensure their safety. We strongly call upon Russia to use its influence over the forces that it leads, arms, trains, and fights alongside to immediately stop its intimidation and restriction of SMM patrols.

Considerable evidence of Russia's involvement in the conflict remains. On October 26, a 17-truck convoy crossed the internationally-recognized border from Russia to Ukraine without proper control or inspection by Ukrainian authorities. These convoys continue in clear violation of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and without fundamental international humanitarian principles being observed. On October 19 and October 23, SMM imagery revealed the presence of military-type trucks and trailers near railway facilities in territory controlled by Russia-led forces. The ongoing campaign to prevent SMM access, up to and including its internationally-recognized border with Russia, prevents the SMM from fulfilling its mandate. We further call for unimpeded SMM access throughout Ukraine, in full accordance with its mandate, to include its internationally-recognized border.

The United States again calls upon Russia to end its repressive actions in occupied Crimea and return control of Crimea to Ukraine. The United States welcomes the release of Akhtem Chiygozand Ilmi Umerov, Deputy Heads of the Crimean Tatar Mejlis, who had been wrongfully convicted on politically-motivated charges in connection with their opposition to Russia's attempted annexation of Crimea. We again call on the Russian Federation to end the ongoing campaign of politically-motivated legal action against the Mejlis and release the dozens of Ukrainian political prisoners it holds in Russia and in occupied Crimea.

Mr. Chair, 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 restating clearly that our sanctions against Russia for its aggression in eastern Ukraine will remain until Russia fully implements its commitments under the Minsk agreements.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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