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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 Ambassador James Gilmore
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
July 11, 2019

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.

We commend the sides for the disengagement of forces at Stanytsia Luhanska that began on June 26, as forces pull out of the zone and undertake demining activities. And we encourage the sides to use this success to make progress on full disengagement at the two other sites that were designated.

Despite this positive development, fighting in eastern Ukraine remains volatile and deadly. For over five years, Russia has armed, trained, led, and fought alongside its proxy forces in eastern Ukraine. The result - some 13,000 people have been killed as a result of Moscow's ongoing aggression.

The only way to end this conflict is through the implementation of the Minsk agreements. This entails Russia withdrawing its heavy weapons, removing its forces, and disarming its proxy forces in eastern Ukraine. Only when Russia takes concrete steps to de-escalate its armed attacks on Ukraine can there be significant progress towards a sustainable ceasefire. The core principles of the *Helsinki Final Act* that are the foundation of this organization are respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of States, as well as human rights and fundamental freedoms. These tenets are enduring, as is the OSCE. The contempt that Russia demonstrates for these principles and commitments – through repression at home and aggression abroad – should concern all of us. I call on Russia to respect Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders, extending to its territorial waters.

During last week's Permanent Council meeting, the United States and several other participating States mourned the July 1 deaths of a Ukrainian medic and her driver near the *Line of Contact*. In a tragic reminder of the brutal ways in which this conflict impacts local civilian populations, the Special Monitoring Mission this week reported the death of a man killed by an unknown explosive device, and that civilians – including seven children – were injured by unexploded ordnance, shelling, and gunfire. Others suffered damage to their homes from shelling. The monitors also observed unexploded ordnance and anti-tank mines on roadways. The use of

heavy weapons and mines in the vicinity of schools, residences, and other civilian infrastructure endangers lives and is unacceptable.

On July 4 and 5, monitors reported heavy machine gun and small-arms fire directed at or near their position.

These incidents imperil the lives of our monitors and are unacceptable. We call upon both sides to respect the safety of the monitors of this organization deployed to assist in de-escalating this conflict.

The Special Monitoring Mission serves as the world's eyes and ears in eastern Ukraine, performing crucial tasks under difficult and often dangerous circumstances. Our monitors face near-daily restrictions in carrying out their duties. Again this week, forces outside government-controlled areas denied monitors access to checkpoints and other key areas. This body gave the SMM a mandate of full access throughout Ukraine, and we urge all sides to uphold that mandate.

The Special Monitoring Mission's Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) provide monitors and the participating States critical insights into the conflict on the ground. On multiple occasions UAVs have spotted military convoys crossing into Ukraine from Russia on roads far from the OSCE Border Observation Mission. This week the mission again reported several instances of small-arms fire and jamming targeted at UAV assets, with several lost in recent weeks and another long-range UAV lost in late June. Restrictions on SMM movements and hostile actions against the mission's technical equipment cannot be tolerated.

Respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms is an essential aspect of security. The United States remains concerned about abuses in Russia-occupied Crimea. Russian occupying forces – on a daily basis – target Crimean Tatars, ethnic Ukrainians, journalists, political activists, civil society members, and others opposed to Russia's occupation, subjecting them to harassment, arrest, and detention. We were relieved to learn on July 5 that Volodymyr Balukh ended his hunger strike after Russian prison authorities dropped their absurd claim that he is a Russian citizen, allowed him access to the Ukrainian consul, and transferred him out of the isolation ward where he had been held for three months on no apparent legitimate basis. We will continue to follow his case closely, as well as that of imprisoned disabled Crimean Tatar activist Edem Bekirov. We call upon Russian occupation authorities to implement the June decision of the European Court of Human Rights that ordered his release so he can receive medical treatment. We further call upon Russia to cease its campaign of repression and to provide the SMM full access to Crimea.

Russia has yet to return the 24 Ukrainian crew members and three vessels captured during the attack near the Kerch Strait on November 25. These Ukrainian service members have languished in Russian detention centers for more than seven months. Russia's actions in the Kerch Strait – and subsequent detention of these crew members – have been overwhelmingly and repeatedly condemned in the Permanent Council. We call upon Russia to immediately return them to their homes and families.

The United States fully supports Ukrainian 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. This clear violation of the

principles of the Helsinki Final Act is not legitimate. Also, I don't see how this disruption of the Russian-American relationship is good for Russia, for the United States, or for any OSCE country. We join our European and other partners in affirming that our Minsk-related sanctions against Russia will remain in place until Russia fully implements its Minsk commitments. The separate, Crimea-related sanctions will remain in place until Russia returns full control of the peninsula to Ukraine in its sovereign ability.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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