



Permanent Mission of Ukraine
to the International
Organizations in Vienna

**STATEMENT BY THE DELEGATION OF UKRAINE
ON RUSSIA'S WAR OF AGGRESSION AGAINST UKRAINE**

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Agenda Item 2, General Statements

Mr Chairperson,

On behalf of the Delegation of Ukraine, allow me to deliver a statement on the subject of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine.

On 2 March Ukraine was once again appalled by a brutal attack carried out by Russian forces in Odesa. On that day, a Russian UAV targeted a residential building severely damaging it. As a result of the drone crash, 12 people, including 5 children aged from 4 months to 9 years were killed. 7 other people were wounded.

The relentless war of aggression waged by Russia and its blatant disregard for the rules and principles of warfare continue to inflict devastating consequences upon Ukrainians, particularly the most vulnerable social group - the children. In total, according to the information from Ukrainian law enforcement agencies, since the beginning of the full-scale invasion, at least 534 children were killed and 1233 wounded.

Those children who live in the frontline-adjacent territories continue to experience isolation, separation from their families, loss of loved ones and disrupted schooling and healthcare. According to UNICEF, children in cities in frontline areas have been forced to spend between 3,000 to 5,000 hours – equivalent to four to seven months of their childhood – sheltering in basements as air raid alerts sound above.

The reason for that is that the Russian forces fully ignore the requirements of International Humanitarian Law and persist in their deliberate strategy of destroying Ukraine by targeting the civilian population.

We strongly believe that these actions of the Russian Federation will not go unpunished. And it was demonstrated yesterday, on 5 March 2024, when the International Criminal Court issued warrants of arrest for the former commander of the long-range aviation of the Russian aerospace force Sergei Kobylash and former commander of the Russian Black Sea fleet Viktor Sokolov within the framework of investigations of Russian strikes against the civilian population and Ukrainian critical infrastructure.

This decision of the ICC is an important milestone in the efforts to hold accountable all perpetrators of violations of International Humanitarian Law for their crimes. Taking into account all atrocities, the Russian Federation committed in Ukraine, there should be no doubt that this list of suspects will only grow.

Esteemed colleagues,

The Russian Federation does not consider international law as a guideline for its troops but rather sees it as a tool for gaslighting the international community and diverting the world's attention from its violations. One of the topics the Russian propaganda exploits regularly is the issue of chemical weapons.

Fully in line with its well-known propaganda playbook the Russian Federation continues to accuse everyone but itself in violations of the chemical weapon ban. Even despite the numerous pieces of evidence, including those revealed by Russia itself, the Kremlin persists in spreading its false narratives.

Let me provide some illustrations of when the Russian representatives acknowledged the use of chemical weapons.

In April 2022, Eduard Basurin, an official representative of the Russian occupation forces in the Donetsk region, openly called for the use of chemical weapons against the defenders of Mariupol to facilitate the assault of the Azovstal plant.

On 2 May 2023, state-controlled Channel 1 reported that the Russian troops had used riot control agents (RCA) as a method of warfare. In the video broadcasted by the channel, the

battalion commander claimed to have used drones to drop K-51 grenades containing “Cheryomukha” RCA onto Ukrainian positions.

On 22 December 2023, the Russian 810th Naval Infantry Brigade acknowledged in its post on the Telegram channel that the brigade deliberately used chemical weapons by dropping K-51 grenades from drones onto Ukrainian positions to force Ukrainian defenders to leave the fortifications near Krynky in the Kherson region.

Be it an unintentional leak of information or a part of a deliberate campaign to test the ground for further, more serious chemical attacks, this information unequivocally demonstrates that the Russian Federation is not limiting itself to the use of conventional arms in its war of aggression against Ukraine.

It is important to highlight that chemical weapons are employed by the Russian forces with the assumption that it will not be possible to take samples of contaminated substances, due to continued shelling. However, radiological and chemical reconnaissance groups of the Armed Forces of Ukraine are present in all areas of the frontline and upon receiving information about the use of this type of weaponry, they are deployed to the location. They take samples of soil, vegetation and ammunition debris and send them for analysis which results can be used for further investigations of Russian war crimes.

It is a matter of particular concern that the number of cases of the use of chemical weapons by Russian troops continues to rise. Just a month ago, when our Delegation raised the issue of Russian forces employing chemical weapons in this Forum, we reported about 626 registered instances. According to most recent estimates from the Armed Forces of Ukraine, this number has since escalated to 950 cases. The majority of them were registered in the Zaporizhzhia region. For example, on 2 March alone, the Russian forces 9 times dropped onto Ukrainian positions grenades with irritant substances in this area.

The use of chemical weapons by the Russian Federation is a flagrant violation of international law, in particular of the Chemical Weapons Convention of 1993. This practice creates a dangerous precedent that undermines the very foundation of weapons of mass destruction non-proliferation. The international community must respond to Russia's use of weapons. And it is crucially important to ensure that this response will not be limited to political condemnation.

Negative public opinion does not seem to concern the Kremlin and those who turn a blind eye to the violations of international law by the Russian forces. Only strong practical steps aimed at weakening the Russian autocratic empire and ensuring the defeat of its war machine can change the situation and restore the rule of law.

As President Zelenskyy recently said in his address to the nation: “All leaders and international organisations must respond to Russia's actions. And the response must be tough. Putin does not want any peace – he only wants war and death. He does not care whom he kills. The main goal is to destroy.”

Indeed, the Russian Federation pursues no other goal but to destroy Ukraine and the international rules-based order. And being at the forefront of this fight, Ukraine calls on all responsible states to take decisive actions and stop further deaths and destruction. It will be in the interest not only of Ukraine but the entire international community.

Thank you, Mr Chairperson.