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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
April 19, 2018

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chair, Russia's policies of aggression and disregard for OSCE commitments and international law continue. In eastern Ukraine, Russia laid the foundation for a humanitarian crisis that drags into a fourth year. As you, other delegations, and the U.S. Department of State spokesperson have noted, on Tuesday, a bus carrying workers from the Donetsk Filtration Station on a shift change came under fire, leaving five employees injured, one critically. Voda Donbasa, the owner of the station, has evacuated staff following a series of attacks on its vehicles. The station provided water to nearly 350,000 residents. Over the last three years, Russia-led forces have steadily encroached on this civilian infrastructure, in violation of the 2014 agreed line of contact. We again repeat our calls for the establishment of safety zones around critical civilian infrastructure.

Mr. Chair, several delegations have noted reports from the conflict zone indicate that the so-called "DPR" authorities planned on April 14 to stop pumping water from the YunKom coal mine, deciding instead to let the mine flood. Soviet authorities initiated a nuclear explosion within this mine, leaving radioactive remnants behind. If Russia's proxies turn off the pumps, water will fill the shafts and eventually flood the mine, potentially leading to a contamination of the water table and water basin with radioactive waste. The effects could go well beyond the immediate locality of the site and eventually harm a large number of civilians. Russia, which controls the so-called "authorities," must take action to keep the pumps running and avoid severe environmental harm.

Mr. Chair, the SMM Weekly Report from April 10, and the Daily Report from April 14, captured the unfortunate and frequent occurrence of shelling in civilian areas that you've mentioned. This practice stems from the continued presence of military-type positions and hardware in and around residential areas. Countless casualties and untold damage to homes and to other facilities are the result. The United States calls on the sides to refrain from placing military positions in the vicinity of civilian homes, property, and key civilian infrastructure.

Mr. Chair, our SMM monitors continue to operate under challenging conditions where their ability to carry out their mandate is regularly restricted. On April 16, an SMM UAV met with interference and went down near the Petrivske disengagement area. Upon trying to

recover the UAV, our monitors heard machine gun fire nearby. The patrol left the area without recovering its asset. On April 14 the SMM reported that Russian proxies in the village of Uzhivka fired a warning shot at the SMM patrol when the patrol observed two armored personnel carriers and two tanks parked near civilian houses. Mr. Chair, threats to the SMM and the targeting of its assets are unacceptable. These actions are deliberate attempts to prevent the SMM from fulfilling its mandate. Russia must end this practice immediately.

Russia's oppression of those opposing its occupation of Crimea continues unabated. We call on the Russian Federation to permit Ukrainian doctors to visit Volodymyr Balukh who has been on a hunger strike since March 19 while incarcerated in Simferopol on fabricated charges. Mr. Balukh should be released immediately. The United States is also following the trial, which began this week, of Ukrainian Yevhen Panov. Human rights organizations have called the case politically-motivated and expressed concern about the apparent use of torture against him in order to coerce a confession. Panov was targeted for founding an organization to support Ukrainian war veterans, including those, like himself, who fought against Russian aggression in the Donbas.

In closing, Mr. Chair, let me reiterate that 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. And we join our European and other partners in restating 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.