



## **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 Daniel B. Baer  
to the Permanent Council, Vienna  
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Before beginning, Mr. Chair, let me join you in welcoming the news of the exchange that led to the release of Yuri Soloshenko and Gennadiy Afanasyev. Like many others still in Russian custody, these two individuals were convicted on trumped up, politically-motivated charges, and their release is a step in fulfilling Russia's commitments under the Minsk agreements, and should now provide impetus for the complete implementation of those agreements, including releasing all other hostages and unlawfully detained persons.

The United States remains deeply concerned by the surge in violence in eastern Ukraine and efforts by combined Russian-separatist forces to mask their increasing aggression and the weaponry that facilitates their attacks. Over the last several days, the Special Monitoring Mission (SMM) has found four surface-to-air missile systems in Russian-separatist controlled Donetsk city, in clear violation of the withdrawal lines. While following up on reports of shelling in separatist-held Horlivka, the SMM saw fresh traces of a tracked vehicle, and a resident said he had seen a military-type vehicle with a "barrel pointing up" during the June 10 shelling. The presence and use of such weapons raises the risk of a further escalation in the fighting, as we have seen several times over the course of the past week. On June 12 alone, combined Russian-separatist forces shelled Ukrainian forces over 348 times, claiming the lives of four soldiers and wounding eight more.

Even more troubling is growing evidence of combined Russian-separatists apparently attempting to use civilians as human shields. The SMM reports – including its first-hand accounts from residents – evidence that combined Russian-separatist forces have stationed and fired prohibited heavy weapons from civilian areas, including a 152 mm self-propelled howitzer. The SMM has even reported evidence that the separatists were firing mortars and sniper rifles from the roofs of apartment buildings. The United States underscores the importance of upholding international humanitarian law in the conflict and emphasizes that the sides should protect the local population from harm to the fullest extent possible. All forces must strictly avoid positioning heavy weapons near civilian locations, particularly if they are prohibited by agreement, and uphold the ceasefire by only firing defensively.

Ukrainians in the conflict zone pay the highest price for Russia's ongoing aggression. Checkpoints remain subject to closure as a result of the violence, and new crossing points remain blocked, like Zolote, which the separatists pledged to open months ago in the Humanitarian Working Group. Fighting has claimed over 21,000 civilian deaths and injuries

since the conflict began over two years ago, and trauma is widespread among children in the conflict zone. Last week, the SMM documented the story of a four-year old boy who stopped speaking after fighting broke out in his village in separatist-held Donetsk over a year ago. Even though children like him do not have access to psychological support in separatist-held areas, Russian-backed separatists continue to block access for international aid organizations. Russia previously stated that humanitarian organizations should be given the opportunity to work in Donbas, but the separatists Russia backs continue to limit access. Indeed, on April 23 the UN's registration expired in areas of Luhansk oblast under separatist control, despite repeated efforts by the UN to maintain its status. Russia and the separatists must end, once and for all, the restrictions against the aid organizations that help save lives in the communities bearing the brunt of the conflict.

We urge Russia and the separatists to implement their Minsk commitments, including granting the OSCE full access, and guaranteeing the safety of the monitors. Implementing the ceasefire will also require nothing less than full transparency throughout the conflict zone, which means combined Russian-separatist forces must immediately cease their efforts to blind the SMM. All threats and attacks against SMM monitors and its assets must cease. The SMM must be given unhindered, unrestricted, and safe access throughout the entirety of Ukraine and be allowed to station monitors, cameras, and other technical means of observation in the conflict zone without interference.

In addition to the steps above, Russia must implement the other elements in the Minsk agreements: elections must be held under Ukrainian law that meet OSCE standards and are monitored by the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights; foreign forces and equipment must be withdrawn; and Ukrainian control over its international border must be restored. Sanctions imposed for the Russian aggression in eastern Ukraine will remain in place until Russia fully implements its commitments in the Minsk agreements.

Russia must also stop obstructing international monitoring of the situation in Crimea and ensure that abuses end immediately. Occupation authorities have harassed and intimidated Crimean Tatar activists and others who oppose the occupation, conducted intrusive and unwarranted searches at Tatar mosques, schools, and homes, and initiated unwarranted administrative and criminal proceedings against scores of Crimean Tatars. We are concerned by reports that a judge in Crimea sentenced Euromaidan activist Andrei Kolomiets to 10 years in prison on charges that human rights activists have called politically motivated. This is unacceptable and we call on Russia to stop these practices. We remind the Russian Federation that Crimea-related sanctions will continue until it ends the occupation and returns this Ukrainian land.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.