



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 Harry Kamian
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
January 25, 2018

I wish to begin by joining other colleagues in extending our deepest sympathies to our Moldovan colleagues and the family of Colonel Vitaliy Zara, an SMM monitor who died in a tragic auto accident on January 18. Regardless of nationality, these are *our* OSCE monitors. Therefore, a loss borne by one is a loss shared by all.

Mr. Chair, regrettably, as we again discuss the conflict in eastern Ukraine, we are forced one more time to recount the civilian toll of the conflict. The SMM documented a January 21 incident in which shots were fired into a civilian bus traveling through an entry-exit point near the line of contact. This incident left one civilian dead and another badly wounded. There should be no firing in these essential civilian areas. The SMM also reported on January 18 and 19 two separate incidents of civilians who died while handling explosive remnants. In addition, last week the SMM reported that two civilians suffered heart attacks and died while waiting in vehicles at checkpoints. These are unfortunate and unnecessary losses. We call upon the sides to prioritize measures to ease the suffering of civilians on both sides of the line of contact. Measures such as the opening of a crossing point at Zolote and steps to improve operations at existing checkpoints would ease the hardships experienced by civilians caught in the conflict zone.

The United States commends the positive role of the SMM in the restoration of Vodafone’s mobile telecommunications services, which were disrupted on January 11 in areas of Donetsk and Luhansk that are controlled by Russia-led forces. Unfortunately, for all of the SMM’s successes, it is constrained in its mandated activities by Russia-led forces. The SMM was forced to cancel a January 16 visit to the Donetsk Filtration Station due to the absence of security guarantees from Russia’s proxies, the so-called “DPR” forces. This lack of cooperation continues in other areas as well. For example, the SMM’s January 17 weekly report details how the so-called “DPR” and “LPR” forces refuse to provide security guarantees that would enable the SMM to open additional forward patrol bases closer to Ukraine’s internationally-recognized border, further hindering its mandated monitoring.

Mr. Chair, regrettably, movement restrictions also continue unabated. The SMM notes in the January 17 weekly report that, in addition to restrictions due to the observed or potential presence of mines and unexploded ordnances, the Mission’s freedom of movement for

members of the SMM was restricted on 15 occasions as a result of direct action by militants, 13 of which occurred in areas outside of Ukrainian Government control in the Donetsk region. The United States calls upon Russia and its proxies to end restrictions on, and interference with, SMM patrols, equipment, and monitoring capabilities. We once again call for the full, free, and safe access for the SMM throughout Ukraine to fulfill its mandate.

The United States also encourages the Russian Federation to return to the Joint Center for Control and Coordination, an important body used to broker temporary windows of silence, ceasefires, and safety zones around critical infrastructure, which it abruptly left on December 19. The January 11 proposal from the so-called “LPR” and “DPR” forces to establish a self-styled contingent to liaise with the SMM is unacceptable.

Mr. Chair, the situation in Crimea is flat-out appalling. The respected NGO Freedom House ranks Russia-occupied Crimea among the areas with the worst conditions for the exercise of fundamental freedoms in the world. In Russia and Russia-occupied Crimea, those voicing opposition to the occupation are targeted for repression. The United States is troubled by the ongoing court verdicts against individuals who individually and peacefully protested the authorities’ repression of Crimean Tatars on October 14, of which there are now at least 65. We also note that, according to data compiled by the Crimea Human Rights Group, at least 10,000 Crimean residents have been conscripted into the Russian army. We call on the Russian Federation to end this practice. The United States also calls on Russia to abide by its international obligations and commitments, to allow for full access to Crimea by international monitors, to cease the persecution of Crimean Tatars and others who dissent, and to end the occupation of Crimea.

Mr. Chair, in closing, our speaker this morning hit the nail on the head: our principles and commitments are the foundation this organization is based on. And, as you noted, as a leader of an organization that represents not just parliamentarians throughout the OSCE organization but the views and the beliefs of our citizens, those views carry a tremendous amount of weight, and those are views we share. It is important that we note, as our speaker made crystal-clear this morning, that responsibility for the situation in eastern Ukraine rests squarely and solely with the Russian Federation. This is not, as some may argue, an internal or civilian conflict. Mr. Chair, let’s be clear: this is a conflict that was initiated and perpetuated by one participating State: the Russian Federation.

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 occupation and 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.