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Délégation du Canada
auprès de l'OSCE

**STATEMENT BY AMBASSADOR JOCELYN KINNEAR
ON THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION'S ONGOING AGGRESSION AGAINST UKRAINE
1409th MEETING OF THE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

2 February 2023

Mr. Chair,

Last night another brutal Russian attack almost completely destroyed a residential building in Kramatorsk, killing three and injuring 18, according to preliminary reports. Canada continues to strongly condemn Russia's explicit targeting of Ukraine's civilian centres and critical civilian infrastructure. As we have borne witness over the past year in this Council, including just last week, Russia's conventional forces regularly launch waves of shells, drones, and missiles at Ukrainian roads, bridges, power plants, schools, hospitals, and residential housing, with no purpose but to try and kill Ukrainians, damage morale and destroy the economy. Mr. Chair, I would like to focus today on the Putin regime's commission of some of its most heinous crimes, including the destruction of civilian infrastructure, through the Wagner Group.

Over the past 7 months, Putin has used the Wagner Group to slowly gain ground near Bakhmut at a huge cost in human lives. During the time Wagner has undertaken its more than 7-month campaign to try to take this village, Ukrainian forces have managed to retake large swaths of territory in its Kharkiv, Luhansk, Donetsk, Mykolaiv, and Kherson oblasts. Wagner's slow war of attrition around Bakhmut, measured in metres per day, has reportedly been at the cost of thousands of lives, mostly among the reported tens of thousands of convicts recruited by Wagner from Russia's prison system.

Former Wagner commander Andrei Medvedev, who escaped to Norway, has claimed in an [interview](#) with his lawyer that prisoners recruited by Wagner were subjected to "incredibly horrible treatment" and that he personally witnessed "the shooting of his comrades [...] because they tried to flee from the battlefield". This reported use of barrier troops forces lower-ranking members to attack Ukrainian positions, being used as decoys to determine firing locations. These men are poorly trained and ill-equipped to fight or face winter conditions as they are destined to be used as targets. Medvedev reported further that they would round up those who did not want to fight and shoot them in front of newcomers.

It comes as no surprise to us that Yevgeny Prigozhin would devalue human life in this manner as this has been the Wagner Group's calling card in Africa for years, with its members having been found by UN experts to have committed numerous human rights abuses throughout the Central African Republic, Libya, and Mali. Wagner's modus operandi in Ukraine seems to very much reflect this profound disrespect for IHL and human rights; and Putin's reliance on Wagner should be viewed for what it is: a tool of the Putin regime to commit crimes on its behalf.

Mr. Chair,

The real number of Russian lives lost may never be known as Russia appears to go to great lengths to conceal its losses. Putin spokesperson Peskov said last week that the decree on partial mobilization remains in force. Following significant losses in Eastern Ukraine, Russia is quietly recruiting and training replacements and we can therefore expect, sadly, that thousands more Ukrainian and Russian lives will be lost.

Here I would like to reiterate the point made by our Ukrainian colleague in his statement today: that respect for human lives is a fundamental redline, which has been crossed by Russia so many times. We see this every week, and we heard it yesterday very movingly from victims who came to Vienna to speak about their experiences of detention and torture, as our colleagues from the United States and Türkiye have also described.

Mr. Chair,

We reiterate our call upon Russia to end this war of aggression and to withdraw all troops and military equipment from the internationally recognized territory of Ukraine. We call on Russia to release all SMM staff, to promptly return SMM assets to the OSCE, and to abide by the principles and commitments it has signed on to. The Putin regime will not be victorious in the goals of its supposed "Special Military Operation", and as reiterated Tuesday by my Prime Minister, Canada will continue to support Ukraine for as long as it takes.

Thank you.