



Permanent Mission of Ukraine
to the International
Organizations in Vienna

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Statement on “Russia’s ongoing aggression against Ukraine and illegal occupation of Crimea”

As delivered by Ambassador Ihor Prokopchuk,
Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the International Organizations in Vienna,
to the 1184th meeting of the Permanent Council,
3 May 2018

Mr. Chairperson,

This Monday, 30 April 2018, President and Supreme Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine Petro Poroshenko signed the Decrees and Orders which changed the format of antiterrorist operation in Donbas introduced four years ago to the Joint Forces Operation on ensuring the national security and defense, rebuffing and deterring Russia’s armed aggression in the territory of Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine. The antiterrorist operation is completed; its tasks of containing the Russian hybrid offensive in 2014 and ruining Russia’s plans in Ukraine have been recognized as fulfilled. From now on, it will be the military operation led by military command in coordination with other law-enforcement structures to ensure the defence of the territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence of Ukraine.

As underscored by President Poroshenko, “the liberation of Donbas is meant to be accomplished in a politico-diplomatic way, forcing Russia to comply with the Minsk agreements”. He added that ensuring implementation of the security package of the Minsk agreements, including the guaranteed ceasefire regime, withdrawal, preferably to the territory of the Russian Federation, of artillery, tanks, MLRS, and mortars prohibited by the Minsk agreements, remains a primary task.

Ukraine is a victim of armed aggression, not its instigator. We are interested in a peaceful resolution of the conflict, which was started by external aggressor who occupied part of Ukraine’s territory. The changed format of the operation will strengthen Ukraine’s defensive capabilities and deter the aggressor from further advances and provocations. We rely upon the international community to be firm and consistent in urging the Russian Federation, including by strengthened multifaceted pressure, to start fulfilling the Minsk agreements. For now, Kremlin ignores its commitments. Priority should be attached to deployment of full-fledged peace-keeping operation in occupied parts of Donbas to create the necessary conditions for real progress on Minsk agreements implementation.

Mr. Chairperson,

Speaking in the Permanent Council last week the Chief Monitor of the SMM Ambassador E. Apakan again pointed out, as he did on numerous occasions before, to volatility and unpredictability of the security situation in Donbas. We observe that the Russian armed formations continue to maintain their usual tactics of variable intensity of attacks and increase the use of proscribed weapons. As stated in the last SMM weekly report of 1 May, the Mission recorded a 42 per cent increase of ceasefire violations and a three-fold increase in the recorded use of Minsk-proscribed weapons during the reporting period. In one week of 23-29 April 44 Ukrainian servicemen were wounded. Russia fuels the armed conflict by sending constant resupplies to its armed formations in the occupied territories of Donbas through the Russia-controlled segment of the Ukrainian-Russian state border. In April, 43 railway cisterns with fuel and lubricants were spotted crossing Chervona Mohyla, Donetsk and Rovenky railway stations. On the other hand, there are also large flows from the occupied territory into the Russian Federation, both by cargo trains and trucks. On 26 April, the SMM saw 38 covered cargo trucks exiting Ukraine through Uspenka border checkpoint within only 15 minutes, which can serve as an indication of the scale of Russia's illegal transfers from Russia-occupied territory.

The Russian occupation administration in Donbas is backed up by a formidable invasion force, which is fully integrated into the Russian chain of command and control. Hundreds of tanks, howitzers and MLRS brought by Russia into the sovereign territory of Ukraine remain largely unaccounted for and are often found masked and hidden to enable unpredictability and further deadly violence. The SMM daily report of 26 April informed about the presence of 178 pieces of heavy weapons near well-known spots of Myrne, Buhaiivka, Shymshynivka, Miusynsk, Kruhlyk, and Manuilivka. These places are often mentioned in the SMM reports, while the mission continues to face significant restrictions to its freedom of movement. Big numbers of weaponry continue to be maintained by Russia as a permanent threat to independence, territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine. Those numbers should be kept in mind when discussing the withdrawal of heavy weapons, disengagement of troops and works on demining. Russia must fully deliver on its Minsk commitments.

Distinguished colleagues,

Russia's persistent denial of its responsibilities as a party to the conflict has a continuous negative impact on the operational environment for the SMM whose civilian monitors are subjected to restrictions and intimidation in violation of the mandate, agreed by all OSCE participating States, including Russia. Last week, the safety and security of SMM monitors was again in the focus of discussion in the Permanent Council with participation of Ambassador Apakan. However, the same day, "an armed member of the armed formations allowed the SMM to proceed only after checking its trailer" near Russia-occupied Kreminets. Two days later, "six armed members of the armed formations" at a checkpoint north of Horlivka demanded to inspect the trunks of the SMM vehicles and threatened to call a "special forces team" to take the SMM patrol to another location for inspection. Last week, for the tenth consecutive week, the SMM continued to encounter restrictions of its

freedom of movement “at four border areas outside of government control in Luhansk region”. We continuously observe that such incidents take place on a daily basis, without any reaction from Moscow and the Russian occupation administration in Donbas. We urge Russia to put an end to such incidents, bring the perpetrators to account and lift any restrictions imposed on the freedom of movement and access of the SMM.

We also urge Russia to exercise responsibility with the aim of preventing occurrence of an ecological disaster in Donbas. We expect Russia to stop immediately the shootings carried out by its armed formations in the vicinity of the Donetsk filtration station, which would enable a normal operation of this critical infrastructure facility. We also call upon Russia to quit the plans of its occupation administration on the shut-off of pumps at the Yunkom mine in Bunhe which risks radioactive contamination of drinking water. We encourage the SMM to continue reporting about developments at the mine.

Mr. Chairperson,

The illegal Russian occupation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol continues to be characterised by gross violations of international humanitarian law, suppression of opposition to occupation and systematic persecution of Ukrainians and Crimean Tatars as the most vulnerable communities who suffered most when the Russian troops seized the peninsula four years ago. Against the background of Russia’s attempts to hide its wrongdoings, brave human rights defenders, journalists, lawyers and families of political prisoners unite their efforts in monitoring the on-going flagrant violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms in Crimea and try to bring them to the attention of the international community. These people undertake a real risk in their commitment to freedom, justice and human rights. I invite the participating States to review the respective monitoring reports prepared by the “Crimean Human Rights Group”. The latest report was issued last week with the data collected in March this year (https://crimeahrg.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Crimean-Human-Rights-Group_Mar_2018_EN.pdf). It provides a highly disturbing and detailed factual overview of enforced disappearances, tortures, detentions and searches, politically motivated criminal prosecution, restrictions of fundamental freedoms, and violations of international humanitarian law.

In April, four people, among them two Crimean Tatars, were reported to have died an unnatural death in the remand centre of the city of Simferopol. There are no coherent explanations of the Russian occupation administration on the circumstances of those deaths and they do not seem to be likely. These are instances where only international human rights presence can help establish facts on the ground, but Moscow denies it.

On 26 April, the Russian occupation security forces searched production bases, warehouses and offices of food distribution company “KrymOpt”, as well as homes of the company’s employees in Bilohirsk. This company is owned by and employs Crimean Tatars. The owner of the company has been detained and reported to have been transferred to a Lefortovo prison in Moscow. We strongly urge Russia to stop

this glaring persecution of the people under Russia's occupation in Crimea and end the blatant violation of binding norms of international humanitarian law.

We again urge the Russian Federation to reverse the illegal occupation of Crimea and Sevastopol, and to stop its aggression, including by withdrawing its armed formations from the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine and fully implementing its commitments under the Minsk agreements.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.