



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 1162nd meeting of the Permanent Council,
2 November 2017

Mr. Chairperson,

Despite the efforts of the international community, the Russian Federation continues its armed aggression against Ukraine. The numbers of military provocations and shellings are mounting to pre-ceasefire levels with the Russian hybrid forces resorting to the Minsk-proscribed weapons more and more often. Due to restrictions the SMM can register only some of those violations, as it was on 26 October, when it reported about “uncountable explosions assessed as a probable outgoing salvo of MLRS” between the two non-government controlled localities of Khreshchatytske and Zaichenko 26km north-east of Mariupol. The shellings by the hybrid Russian forces constantly keep the toll of casualties on the rise: in one single day of 24 October, 4 Ukrainian servicemen were killed and another 4 were wounded. The civilians continue to suffer in this Russia-inflicted conflict, including in the residential areas of Donetsk city, where the SMM “observed indications of the presence of armed formations”, while “Mission’s freedom of movement – and consequently, its ability to establish facts – has been systematically restricted” by the hybrid Russian fighters.

Large concentrations of heavy weapons continue to be regularly revealed by the SMM aerial imagery at various locations in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine, which are under Russia’s effective control. The observations include 14 MLRS, 22 howitzers, 19 tanks and almost 100 military-type armoured vehicles in violation of the respective withdrawal lines near Miusynsk in one single day of 25 October; several infantry fighting vehicles and almost 40 military-type cargo vehicles and trucks in Kalmiuske, in a zone within which deployment of heavy armaments and military equipment is proscribed according to Point 5 of the Memorandum of 19 September 2014, on 18 October; 90 military-type armoured vehicles, 70 military-type trucks, 24 tanks, and 6 surface-to-air missile systems south-east of Buhaiivka, outside designated storage sites, on 19 October; 45-50 tanks (T-72) parked in a fenced-in abandoned industrial compound south-west of Manuilivka on

30 October. These are only a few illustrative cases of the weaponry, amassed by Russia in Donbas in pursuit of its aggression against Ukraine.

Russia continues to use the uncontrolled segment of the Ukrainian-Russian state border, railway and roads to maintain the flow of military personnel, weapons and ammunition into the Ukrainian territory. Telling in this regard are the findings of the SMM on the presence of military-type trucks, trailers, open cargo and tanker wagons at the railway stations in non-government controlled Dovzhansk, Sukhodilsk and Rovenky. The delegation of Ukraine has regularly drawn attention of the Permanent Council to the role of main railway hubs and transport routes in Russia's logistical support of its forces in Donbas.

Whereas Russia continues to cover up its direct involvement in the conflict, which it started in Donbas, it continues to maintain secrecy over its losses. But these are exposed by OSCE observation at a 40 metres stretch of the uncontrolled segment of the Ukrainian-Russian state border (over 400 km) in Gukovo and Donetsk checkpoints and respective reports about vans with Russian licence plates and the inscription "Ritual" crossing these checkpoints towards the Russian Federation.

Distinguished colleagues,

I would remind the OSCE participating States why the aerial imagery has in fact become the main source of information for the SMM in the areas of Donbas effectively controlled by Russia. It is due to the fact that the Mission continues to encounter severe restrictions of its freedom of movement while implementing its mandate agreed by all 57 participating States, including the Russian Federation. In the last three weeks, the SMM reported on 27 cases of restrictions of its freedom of movement (in addition to those due to the observed or potential presence of mines and UXO) in the Russia-controlled areas of Donbas, whereas none of such cases took place in the areas controlled by the Government of Ukraine. As before, Russia has a lot to hide not only about its presence, but also intentions.

The deliberate character of such restrictions receives clear indication in the SMM reports. For instance, on 20 October "armed men in military-type attire" denied SMM's access in non-government controlled Samiilove and Boikivske, while "other civilian cars were granted passage into and out of the area". Or, as reported by the SMM, the Russia-backed illegal "armed formations in parts of Donetsk and Luhansk regions frequently deny the SMM access to areas adjacent to Ukraine's border outside control of the Government, citing orders to do so". Russia and its proxies establish no-go areas for the SMM, including Siedove, where the "armed men" aggressively proclaimed it to be "a closed village".

We strongly condemn the continued resort by Russian fighters to life-threatening intimidation of the SMM patrols which perform their mandate. The last such outrageous incident took place on 25 October at a checkpoint near non-government-controlled Verkhnohyrokiivske, where the armed men "approached the heavy machine-gun, reloaded its ammunition and pointed it directly at the first SMM patrol vehicle. They then repeated this action." We urge Russia to exercise responsibility, to observe the undertaken commitments and put an end to these continuing threats and intimidations of the SMM. We also urge Russia to stop

deliberate targeting of the SMM's technical assets, as it was the case on 23 October in Petrovskyi district of the Donetsk city. The Russian persistence in "blinding" the SMM grossly breaches the Minsk commitments undertaken by Russia.

Distinguished colleagues,

The recent agreement of the Trilateral Contact Group on the opening on 20 October of an additional crossing point in Zolote to ease the movement of people in Luhansk oblast across the contact line did not come to fruition. The Russian proxies have once again sabotaged the opening of this crossing point, which had been ready since March 2016. The SMM has highlighted in its report how the illegal armed forces denied the civilians passage by citing orders not to allow them to pass through and without providing any explanation. Thus, Russia prefers to maintain a situation when thousands of people will continue to stay daily in long queues in Stanytsia Luhanska, which remains the only entry-exit checkpoint in the Luhansk region of Ukraine.

The absence of any sympathy on the part of Kremlin to humanitarian considerations is also clearly visible in Russia's on-going unwillingness to take any steps towards the release of all illegally detained persons as envisaged by the Minsk agreements. Four months have passed since Ambassador Sajdik announced after the TCG meeting in Minsk on 5 July about the "completion of additional checks on the free will of detainees in relation to the conflict", which had been requested by the Russian proxies as the prerequisite for further progress in this process. Yet until now all Ukrainian proposals on the release are denied. We share the appeal of Ambassador Sajdik "to demonstrate compassion and do everything possible to release the detainees until the New Year and Christmas holidays" which he made after the recent TCG meeting on 27 October 2017. We urge the Russian Federation to stop using hostages for its political aims and to unblock the release process without delay.

We encourage the OSCE participating States to keep focus on this matter and to strengthen political and diplomatic pressure on Russia to make it implement the Minsk agreements, including on the humanitarian track. The impact of a consolidated pressure by international community has been demonstrated in the case of Deputy Chairs of the Mejlis, Akhtem Chyigoz and Ilmi Umerov, who were released by occupation authorities in Crimea on 25 October and have now arrived to Kyiv from Ankara. We are grateful to our Turkish friends for the valuable role in making this release possible. Yet in Crimea severe repressions of Crimean Tatars, Ukrainians and all those opposed to Russian occupation continue. Having flagrantly breached the UN Charter and the Helsinki Final Act by illegally occupying part of Ukraine's territory, Russia, as an occupying power, maintains defiance of applicable international humanitarian law and the provisional measures ordered by the International Court of Justice. It remains incumbent on the international community to show unity and firmness in seeking Russia's compliance with international law and correction of violations. We are grateful to the OSCE participating States and Partners for Co-operation who became co-sponsors of the draft UN General Assembly resolution "Situation of human rights in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of

Sevastopol (Ukraine)," which was submitted by Ukraine in New York two days ago, and invite other states to join.

We again urge the Russian Federation to return to the tenets of international law, to stop its aggression against Ukraine, including by withdrawing its troops from the Ukrainian territory, and to reverse the illegal occupation of Crimea.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.