



**Permanent Mission of Ukraine**  
to the International  
Organizations in Vienna

## **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 1230<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Permanent Council,  
30 May 2019

**Mr. Chairperson,**

Last Saturday, on 25 May, the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea issued an order, which prescribed provisional measures ordering the Russian Federation to immediately release three Ukrainian naval vessels and 24 Ukrainian servicemen unlawfully seized by Russia near the Kerch Strait in November 2018. Whereas the arbitration tribunal continues to hear Ukraine's case against Russia, the provisional measures had been requested by Ukraine to protect against further irreparable prejudice to Ukraine's rights. As emphasised by the MFA of Ukraine, this order sends a strong message to Russia that it cannot violate international law with impunity. The Ukrainian side now expects Russia to comply promptly and in full with the Tribunal's order and to release servicemen and vessels. We are grateful to all delegations of OSCE participating States, who held in their focus the issue of Ukrainian prisoners of war in Russia's captivity. It remains incumbent to make Russia release all the crew members and return their vessels unconditionally and without delay.

Immediately after the Tribunal's order Ukraine sent a note verbale to the Russian side with a request to indicate exact time and place of release of Ukrainian sailors and vessels and their return to Ukraine. Until now this note is without response from the Russian authorities.

The Russian Federation has now become ill-famed for its disregard of the international law, bilateral and multilateral treaties to which it is a party, and OSCE commitments. More than two years passed since the International Court of Justice recognized in April 2017 the validity of Ukraine's claims in the submitted case "Ukraine against Russia" and ordered provisional measures with a view to ceasing violation of the Convention on the Eradication of all Forms of Racial Discrimination. Until now, the Russian side continues to ignore this order with regard to the situation in the occupied Crimea, according to which it must refrain from maintaining or imposing limitations on the ability of the Crimean Tatar community to conserve its representative institutions,

including the Mejlis, and to ensure the availability of education in the Ukrainian language. Against the backdrop of this glaring defiance of international law, Kremlin must not be allowed to ignore the order of the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea. It is necessary to maintain and strengthen the politico-diplomatic pressure on the Russian Federation to make it respect its obligations under international law, the OSCE principles and commitments, which form the foundation of the rules-based security order.

**Mr. Chairperson,**

Russia's unwillingness to implement its commitments remains a key impediment to further progress in resolving the Russian-Ukrainian conflict with full respect for the norms of international law, including sovereignty and territorial integrity within the internationally recognized borders. As repeatedly underlined in this hall, the situation on the ground in the area of the conflict is a consequence of acts of aggression by the Russian Federation against Ukraine. We do not need Russia's instructions or guidance on how to proceed with establishing peace in Ukraine. What we need, instead, is that Russia stops these acts of aggression and honours its own commitments on the politico-diplomatic track of peaceful resolution. The Russian armed formations in Donbas have to cease shellings of Ukrainian military positions, residential areas and objects of critical civilian infrastructure. Even under these circumstances, Ukraine has fulfilled achievable political provisions of the Minsk agreements, and expects the Russian side to ensure a comprehensive and sustainable ceasefire. This is the very first provision of the agreements and an essential prerequisite for any further progress. The Ukrainian Armed Forces remain bound by the Minsk agreements and deliver only a response fire and only in the cases, when it is vitally necessary to suppress the shellings by the Russian proxies.

Withdrawal of all Russia's military equipment from the territory of Ukraine under monitoring of the OSCE, in full accordance with the Minsk agreements: Protocol, Memorandum and Package of Measures, is directly linked to ceasefire, stabilization and peaceful resolution. Instead, the SMM continues to report on large-scale Russia's military presence: in one single day of 19 May, an aerial imagery available to the SMM revealed the presence of 324 pieces of heavy weaponry near Miusynsk, Shymshynivka, Buhaiivka, Myrne, Ternove, and Kruhlyk (daily reports of 23 and 25 May). Some of the Russian weapons were observed in and near residential areas, where they pose direct risk to the civilians: three howitzers in Donetsk city, three tanks in Stepanivka, and an IFV parked 5m from residential houses near Sofiiivka. The Russian Federation continues massive supplies of fuel and lubricants to the occupied parts of Donbas to support operations of its weapons: in less than three weeks between 25 April and 13 May, 54 cisterns with fuel and lubricants, 60 ton each, were delivered through the Russian-Ukrainian state border to the railway station in Rovenky. Transparency at the border remains a critical task and a part of the Minsk agreements unfulfilled by the Russian side. Five minutes, which the Russian fighters at pedestrian border crossing points near Sievernyi and Izvaryne allow the SMM patrols to stay before ordering to leave the area, is not the transparency we need. We again urge the Russian side to start implementing its Minsk commitments and to lift all restrictions to SMM's freedom of movement.

**Mr. Chairperson,**

In the last meeting of the Permanent Council, we devoted considerable time and attention to dismantling Russia's propaganda narrative and false accusations in

connection with the Law of Ukraine “On ensuring the functioning of Ukrainian as the state language”. The Russian Federation uses the issue of language as a part of its hybrid multifaceted aggression against my country, denying Ukraine’s right as a sovereign state to promote its state language to the benefit of all Ukrainian citizens. What the Russian delegation in this hall wishes to divert attention from, is the plight of Ukrainians willing to use their native language in the Russia-occupied parts of Ukraine. Tellingly, on 19 May, at the checkpoint of the Russian armed formations south of Stanytsia Luhanska bridge, “the SMM saw that a member of the armed formations took away a newspaper from an elderly man (aged about 70), who was travelling from government- to non-government-controlled areas, asking why he had been carrying it with him. The SMM noted that the newspaper was written in Ukrainian language”. This incident reminds of the dire consequences of Russia’s occupation, where civilians were deprived of Ukrainian mass media, Ukrainian church, Ukrainian education system and everything else, that was forcefully replaced by Russia’s substitutes. As emphasised on numerous occasions by the delegation of Ukraine, the situation with observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms in occupied parts of Donbas and in Crimea is deeply glaring and must remain in the centre of the monitoring activities by the SMM.

It is only a continued focus of the international community, which is able to constrain to some extent Russia’s violations of the human rights and fundamental freedoms, which include illegal detentions and persecutions of Ukrainian citizens. Unless light is shed on Russia’s actions, it will have a free hand to attack Crimean Tatars and Ukrainians, to intimidate their families and to torture them by keeping in unbearable conditions of detention. Edem Bekirov, in particular, continues to suffer from the absence of a qualified medical care. He is forced by the Russian occupation authorities to make a choice, either to die in jail, or to plead guilty of the actions he had never done. Dozens of Ukrainians and Crimean Tatars remain in custody and in jails as political prisoners of the Kremlin’s regime. They face inhumane treatment and spend years behind bars on untenable charges. The fates of many of them remain unknown. Three years ago, on 24 May 2016, Crimean Tatar Ervin Ibrahimov, member of the Executive Committee of the World Congress of Crimean Tatars and member of regional Mejlis, was kidnapped in Bakhchysarai by uniformed persons and went missing. Three years later, his whereabouts remain unknown.

The occupied Crimean peninsula continues to be a lawless territory, in which rule of law, observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms, and respect for international law are missing. In flagrant violation of Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity, the Russian officials continue their illegal visits to the territory of Ukraine without the consent of Ukrainian authorities. We strongly condemn, in particular, the recent trip of the Chairman of the State Duma of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation V.Volodin to Crimea. As emphasised by the MFA of Ukraine, none of such visits will alter the status of Crimea as a part of the territory of Ukraine.

We again urge the Russian Federation to reverse its illegal occupation of Crimea and to stop its aggression against Ukraine, 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.**