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Delegation of Canada

**STATEMENT BY
AMBASSADOR VÉRONIQUE PEPIN-HALLÉ, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE
OF CANADA TO THE OSCE, AT THE 1556th MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

5 March 2026

The Russian Federation's ongoing aggression against Ukraine

Mister Chair,

We remain deeply concerned by the Russian Federation's ongoing war of aggression against Ukraine and the immense human toll it continues to inflict each and every day, now for a fifth year in a row.

The scale and intensity of Russia's attacks remain alarming. In February of this year alone, Russian forces launched 288 missiles at Ukraine; the highest number of missiles launched at night in a single month since Ukraine began publishing such statistics in 2023. Behind these figures are human lives. As on every day since the start of this full-scale invasion, civilians are killed and injured as a direct result of Russia's aggression. Homes, schools, energy infrastructure, and medical facilities continue to be struck.

As discussions and diplomatic efforts aimed at ending this war are ongoing, what we see from the Russian side is contradictory to its stated commitment to peace. A genuine commitment to peace and a diplomatic solution is demonstrated through restraint, not expanded missile barrages. Negotiations remain essential and Russia needs to engage in meaningful compromise.

Mr. President,

These concerns sadly extend beyond our region. Russia has consistently portrayed itself as a partner to countries in the Global South. In November 2025, in an article about the 2025 Russia-Africa Summit, Foreign Minister Lavrov quoted President Putin "we have never been involved in the exploitation of African peoples."

However, reports emerging from several African governments and testimonies from affected individuals paint a different picture. They indicate that recruitment networks have lured thousands of African men to Russia with promises of civilian employment, only for them to be deployed to the front lines in Ukraine. Accounts suggest that visa arrangements were facilitated through official Russian channels, and that recruits signed contracts in a language they did not understand, in some cases receiving little or no military training before being sent into combat.

Authorities in Kenya have raised concerns that significant numbers of their citizens were recruited and exploited under false pretences. At least 8 have been confirmed to have died, while 18 have been repatriated. Ghana's Foreign Affairs Minister has publicly stated that several hundreds of Ghanaians have been drawn into the war since 2022 through similar deceptive practices, and underlined that at least 55 died while fighting, and two are currently held as prisoners of war. Nigeria's foreign ministry has likewise expressed grave concern over what it described as a rising and alarming trend of its citizens being unlawfully recruited.

In Bangladesh, authorities are investigating networks with alleged ties to Russian actors regarding similar practices with at least one returnee reporting that upon raising concerns about deployment to the front line, he was told by a Russian commander that he had effectively been sold and had no choice.

Mr. Chairperson,

Credible partners do not deceive their vis-à-vis.

A credible partner does not take advantage of the economic vulnerabilities faced by the populations of partner countries in order to swell the ranks of its armed forces.

A credible partner does not attack its neighbour and seek to overturn by force the legitimate choice made by that country's people.

Throughout our region, Russia, by choosing to invade Ukraine, has undone years of hard-earned progress, stability and prosperity.

This record should inform our assessment of the Russian Federation's claims as to the partnership, reliability and credibility that it has to offer.

This is the behaviour of a troublemaker who is undermining the very foundations of our security.

We deeply regret that Russia chose the path of confrontation over that of dialogue. Responsibility for putting an end to this war rests wholly with the State that unleashed it.

Mr. Chairperson,

Allow me to conclude by highlighting International Women's Day, which will take place this Sunday, 8 March.

I should like to express our solidarity with the women of Ukraine, who are supporting their country on the battlefield, in public office, as part of civil society and within their families.

We commend the work of the women belonging to Ukraine's delegation to our Organization – Viktoriia, Iryna, Tetiana, Olha and Karina – whose professionalism and resilience awaken our profound admiration.

We also wish to pay tribute to the fortitude and perseverance of the female family members of the detained OSCE officials. We salute Margaryta Shabanova, who has been tirelessly campaigning for the release of the three OSCE officials illegally held by Russia, including her husband Dmytro. We call upon Russia to release the three illegally detained OSCE staff members.

Their courage reminds us that this conflict continues to have far-reaching human consequences, including for our own Organization and its staff, and it confirms the essential role of women's leadership in implementing our commitments and preserving peace.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.