



Delegation of Canada
to the OSCE

Délégation du Canada
auprès de l'OSCE

**STATEMENT BY CHARGÉE D'AFFAIRES ESTHER VAN NES
UNDER AGENDA ITEM:**

The Russian Federation's ongoing aggression against Ukraine

1565th MEETING OF THE PERMANENT COUNCIL

21 May 2026

Mister Chair,

Canada reaffirms its unwavering support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders.

Canada does not recognize, and will not recognize, the Russian Federation's attempted annexation of any part of Ukraine.

Canada remains gravely concerned by the devastating impact of the Russian Federation's aggression in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine.

Reports continue to document harm to civilians and significant restrictions on human rights and fundamental freedoms. Canada condemns efforts to impose Russian administrative, legal, and educational systems in these territories in violation of international humanitarian law. This includes efforts by the Russian Federation to unlawfully deport and/or forcibly transfer, indoctrinate, and militarize Ukrainian children in the occupied territories of Ukraine and in the Russian Federation.

Mister Chair,

Canada continues to follow developments in Crimea with deep concern. We recall with solemnity the dark chapters in the history of the Crimean Tatar people under Soviet rule, which remains a powerful imperative to protect their rights today.

In May 1944, under orders from Josef Stalin, Soviet authorities forcibly deported more than 200,000 Crimean Tatars from their ancestral homeland to distant parts of the Soviet Union. This mass deportation was conducted over the span of just a few days, in brutal and inhumane conditions. Families were transported in overcrowded cattle cars, and deprived of adequate food, water, and medical care. It is estimated that nearly half of the deported population perished in the years immediately following due to starvation, disease, and exposure.

This Soviet campaign of erasure included the dismantling of Crimean Tatar cultural and religious life, destruction of mosques and cemeteries and renaming of their villages.

It is therefore a troubling echo of history that, since Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014, members of the Crimean Tatar community once again face serious and systematic human rights violations at the hands of Russian authorities.

Canada notes with concern credible and consistent reports from the United Nations, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, and other monitoring mechanisms documenting ongoing abuses in the temporarily occupied territory of Crimea. These include arbitrary arrests and detention, enforced disappearances, dispossession of property, and prosecutions on politically motivated charges, often directed at Crimean Tatars, human rights defenders, journalists, and activists.

Fundamental freedoms, including freedom of expression, peaceful assembly, and religion or belief, are being severely restricted. Reports also indicate the unlawful transfer of detainees from Crimea to the territory of the Russian Federation, in violation of international humanitarian law.

Particularly concerning is the continued repression of the Mejlis, the representative institution of the Crimean Tatar people. This measure which strikes at the heart of the Crimean Tatars' ability to exercise their political rights.

We are also troubled by reports of restrictions on education in the Crimean Tatar and Ukrainian languages, as well as broader efforts to alter the demographic composition and cultural landscape of the peninsula. Such actions further undermine the ability of the Crimean Tatars to preserve their language, culture, and identity in their native land.

We call upon the Russian Federation to fully comply with its obligations under international law, including international human rights law and international humanitarian law and heed the calls contained in UNGA resolution 79/184 on this matter.

Finally, Mr. Chair,

We note positively the recent prisoners' exchange between the Russian Federation and Ukraine. Every reunification is welcome.

However, these developments also serve as a reminder of the continued arbitrary detention by the Russian Federation of three OSCE officials Vadym Golda, Maksym Petrov, and Dmytro Shabanov - who should never have been detained.

We call on the Russian Federation to immediately and unconditionally release our colleagues and ensure their safe return to their families.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.