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PC.DEL/386/26
27 April 2026

ENGLISH
Original: as delivered

Delegation of Canada

**STATEMENT BY
AMBASSADOR VÉRONIQUE PEPIN-HALLÉ, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE
OF CANADA TO THE OSCE, AT THE 1561st MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

23 April 2026

The Russian Federation's ongoing aggression against Ukraine

Mr. Chairperson,

Every week at the Permanent Council, our Russian colleagues deliver remarks that are not borne out by the established facts and that are reminiscent of narratives that we believed to be a thing of the past. And this despite the facts established and recognized by everyone in this room.

In 2022, Russia affirmed that it would not invade Ukraine and made fun of those who claimed otherwise.

After its large-scale invasion, Russia then tried to rewrite history by presenting its actions as a necessary and predictable response to its security concerns.

We are now in the fifth year of Russia's illegal, unprovoked and unjustifiable war of aggression against Ukraine.

Ever since the start of this aggression, Russia has been systematically denying any atrocities, though these are amply documented, by describing them as fake or staged. Even going so far as to shift the blame back to Ukraine and even to other participating States.

It is in this context that, last week, my Russian colleague accused Canada of claiming without proof that Russia was seeking to erase Ukrainian identity.

Let us, therefore, look at the facts, well documented as they are, on which Canada bases its case.

Mr. Chair,

Last year, Russia's own Ministry of Education issued an order removing Ukrainian language instruction from schools in illegally occupied Ukrainian territory, citing "changes in the geopolitical situation." It followed years of pressure, threats, and punishment aimed at parents and teachers who tried to keep Ukrainian education alive.

Human Rights Watch documented parents being threatened if they refused to enroll their children in Russian run schools or continued Ukrainian education remotely.

The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights documented the confiscation of Ukrainian books and artwork, the removal of Ukrainian cultural symbols from public spaces, and the forced enrollment of children into Russian youth organizations designed to inculcate loyalty to the Russian state and denigration of all things Ukrainian. People expressing Ukrainian identity were detained and abused.

The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly documented children being forced to speak Russian, sing Russian patriotic songs, and undergo military training.

Amnesty International documented families and teachers living under Russian occupation risking reprisals for continuing with Ukrainian education, with some parents choosing to hide their children to avoid them being taken to “re education” institutions or for adoption in Russia.

This is what Russia calls “de-nazification.” In reality, it is a clear and documented attempt at erasing a Ukrainian national identity.

Russia also claims to be a defender of Russian speakers. This claim was made, in part, to justify the illegal annexation of Crimea and the subsequent full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Russia then went on to level predominantly Russian speaking cities such as Kharkiv and Mariupol. Is this how Russia protects language rights?

This illustrates a broader point.

Canada does not make accusations without facts. Russia does.

Our position is straightforward. We respect international law. We respect borders and sovereignty. We expect others to do the same.

This approach also extends to language.

In Canada, the protection of our official languages is constitutional. We also invest in Indigenous language revitalization because we recognize the damage caused by forced assimilation policies. Internationally, we promote our languages legitimately, without coercion.

Nevertheless, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs labeled us “two-faced double-dealers” for our said “duplicity in language policy” by accusing Canada of eradicating bilingualism in Ukraine.

We categorically reject these serious and unfounded allegations.

Our support for Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity is consistent with international law and our international obligations.

This being said, Canada remains open to addressing credible concerns of human rights violations, raised in good faith; however, we will not engage with accusations that fail to meet basic standards of accuracy.

Mr. Chair,

Canada supports Ukraine's right to defend itself against Russia's illegal, unprovoked, and unjustifiable war of aggression. We will continue to do so in words and deeds.

Thank you.