



Permanent Mission of Ukraine
to the International Organizations in Vienna

**Statement by the Delegation of Ukraine
on the catastrophic humanitarian situation in the Ukrainian city of Oleshky,
temporarily occupied by the Russian Federation**

as delivered by Yuriy Vitrenko, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Ukraine to
the International Organizations in Vienna,
to the 1579th meeting of the Permanent Council,
01 October 2026

Mr. Chairperson,

Let me begin by tracing the origins of the name Oleshky. The name Oleshky derives from the ancient Rus' port city of Oleshshia, which existed along the lower reaches of the Dnipro River in the 11th–13th centuries.

According to one of the main scholarly theories, the name is related to the word “olkha” (alder) or “yeloha”, terms historically used to describe marshy or alder-covered areas, densely overgrown with vegetation and moisture. Oleshshia was first mentioned in chronicles as early as 1084 as an important trading centre, known as the “maritime gateway of Rus” and as a port on the “route from the Varangians to the Greeks.” In 1711, the Zaporozhian Cossacks established the Oleshkivska Sich, a military and administrative centre, on the site of what is now the eastern outskirts of Oleshky. In 1928, the Soviet authorities renamed Oleshky to Tsiurupynsk, after Soviet official Oleksandr Tsiurupa, who was born there. The historical name Oleshky was restored in 2016 as part of Ukraine’s decommunization process.

And today, Ukraine brings before this Council an emergency that this Organisation has already documented in clear terms: the humanitarian catastrophe in the temporarily occupied by Russia city of Oleshky.

We have already referred to the situation in Oleshky in the Permanent Council on numerous occasions. It has also been documented by a number of independent sources, most recently in the 9th ODIHR’s Interim Report. Yet, the situation has deteriorated to such an extent, that it now requires our separate and urgent attention.

Before Russia’s full-scale invasion, around 24,000 people lived in Oleshky. Ukrainian authorities estimate that around 2,000 civilians remain in the city today, including approximately 50 children. Oleshky remains fully blocked by Russian forces, leaving civilians effectively trapped.

People are forced to live amid mines, shelling, and drone attacks, without reliable access to electricity, water and gas. Without access to medical care. Without sufficient food. The last regular food delivery reached Oleshky on 26 May. After running out of the vegetables they had managed to grow over the summer, many residents have resorted to cooking and eating garden weeds.

Fully understanding the gravity of the situation, the Russian armed forces, still prevent residents from leaving the city, and use them as human shields around military positions.

Ukraine has on numerous occasions called for a safe evacuation, and is ready to facilitate it. The ICRC has publicly confirmed that it is in contact with both sides, and stands ready to support an evacuation when security conditions allow.

Yet, time and again, the Russian side has blocked attempts to alleviate the suffering of the civilian population, refusing to provide the security guarantees required to make such an operation possible. On 26 September, the UN Humanitarian Coordinator in Ukraine, confirmed that the Russian Federation had still not ensured safe access to Oleshky and other settlements in the area for humanitarian organisations, including the UN.

Those who try to reach the city without these guarantees are becoming targets of Russian forces. This was the case on 1 September, when four vehicles belonging to volunteers came under attack by Russian forces.

Mr. Chairperson,

Ukraine continues trying to reach our people by the only means available – using drones. On 27 September, Ukrainian heavy drones delivered around four tonnes of food and medical supplies to 100 locations across Oleshky.

That operation saves lives. It also exposes the absurdity and cruelty of the situation: in 2026, food and medicines have to be lowered from unmanned aircraft into an occupied European town.

Drone deliveries can buy time. Yet they cannot replace safe humanitarian access and evacuation.

In addition, according to Ukrainian intelligence, Russia is preparing to stage dozens of propaganda videos in occupied Oleshky, forcing local residents to claim on camera that they are well-fed and grateful to Russian occupiers. This is part of a broader Russian campaign to deny the humanitarian catastrophe in the town.

Mr. Chairperson,

Three days ago, ODIHR Director Maria Telalian spoke publicly about Oleshky stating: “The situation is now critical. Humanitarian access and safe passage for all civilians who wish to leave is urgently needed.” We thank Director Telalian for this clear and timely message.

But as Minister Sybiha stated recently: international concern must now be translated into practical action.

The Russian Federation must immediately provide the security guarantees required for a local humanitarian pause and the safe and voluntary evacuation of all civilians who wish to leave.

It must grant immediate, safe, sustained and unhindered access to the UN, the ICRC and other humanitarian actors.

It must comply fully with its obligations as an occupying power.

We call on participating States to use every available bilateral and multilateral channel to press for these practical steps.

We ask the Chairpersonship, the Secretary General and ODIHR, to remain seized of the situation, to keep it high on international agenda, and to ensure that the

facts already documented by this Organisation are followed by sustained diplomatic action.

International reports can establish the facts. Public statements can mobilise attention. But only coordinated pressure can open the road for aid and evacuation.

With winter approaching, people in Oleshky urgently need help. The world must unite - the OSCE must unite - to save the civilians trapped there.

Thank you, Mr Chairperson.