



United States Mission to the OSCE

The Russian Federation's Ongoing Aggression Against Ukraine

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires Courtney Austrian
to the Special Permanent Council, Vienna
April 12, 2023

I would like to join my colleagues in welcoming to the Permanent Council Commissioner for Children's Rights and Children's Rehabilitation Herasymchuk. I welcome your participation and contribution. This is timely information that we needed to hear.

Today's Special Permanent Council marks 412 days since the start of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and 3,331 days since Russia's forces illegally seized Crimea. It also marks one year since a Mission of Experts, organized by 45 participating States through this organization's Moscow Mechanism, delivered its findings examining the human rights and humanitarian impacts of Russia's invasion and acts of war on the people of Ukraine.

What was chillingly apparent to the expert mission after just the first five weeks of Russia's full invasion has become exponentially more horrifying in the 365 days since that initial report. The experts found clear patterns of violations of International Humanitarian Law by members of Russia's forces. The evidence has helped to identify certain actions as potential war crimes. More than 65,000 such incidents are now registered with Ukraine's Office of the Prosecutor General. The experts found Russia's disregard for its international law obligations during those initial five weeks increased the number of civilians killed or injured, especially those far from the battlefield. In the year since, Russia's disregard for human life has only become more staggering. Having failed on the battlefield, Russia has waged a relentless campaign to bomb and freeze Ukraine's civilian population into submission. A year ago, the experts found that much of the conduct of Russia's forces in occupied parts of Ukraine violated legal obligations as an occupying power. And, over the past year, nothing has changed. We continue to learn of mounting atrocities and abuses by Russia's forces and authorities in areas of Ukraine they temporarily control or occupy. In fact, over the last week, we have seen two gruesome videos come out purportedly showing Russia's forces beheading two Ukrainian soldiers after they were taken captive. If these beheadings are confirmed, they would add to the long list of war crimes committed by Russia's forces in Ukraine.

As Vice President Harris announced in Munich, the State Department has determined that members of Russia's forces and other Russian officials have committed crimes against humanity in Ukraine. Violations of the prohibition against torture and other cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment and punishment, as well as appalling abuses in the areas of Ukraine under Russia's temporary control or occupation, remain a brutal and ongoing reality to this day. Individual

violent acts committed in the early weeks of Russia's war and documented by the experts, including targeted killings and enforced disappearance or taking of civilians, turned out to be only the first of numerous violations and abuses committed by members of Russia's forces and other Russian officials. Deportation, murder, torture, and rape committed early on were part of a widespread and systematic attack directed against Ukraine's civilian population.

Rather than put a stop to the barbaric behavior of its forces and occupation authorities, Russia has let the atrocities and abuses continue. In the year since the first expert mission report, the Kremlin has expanded its callous tactics in an unsuccessful effort to weaken the support of Ukraine's European partners, and in the process, Russia has weaponized energy and exacerbated food insecurity in some of the poorest countries in the world.

Each day since that first telling expert mission report, Russia has had the choice to end this war, to withdraw its forces from the internationally recognized borders of Ukraine, and to make it possible for the people of democratic Ukraine to live in peace and pursue their chosen future. Though Russia has already failed in Ukraine, it continues to choose war. And that is why this subject continues to be the focus of this Permanent Council. For as long as it takes until Russia leaves Ukraine completely, we will stand united with Ukraine.

###