



Delegation of Canada
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Délégation du Canada
auprès de l'OSCE

**STATEMENT BY AMBASSADOR JOCELYN KINNEAR
ON THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION'S ONGOING AGGRESSION AGAINST UKRAINE
1442nd MEETING OF THE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

21 September 2023

Mr. Chair,

I would like to start by resolutely condemning the multiple waves of missiles with which Russia attacked Ukraine, once again, last night. Our thoughts are with the communities that were affected, including the 18 people who have been wounded.

Mr. Chair,

Since we last met for a regular session, Russia held so-called elections in another country – in the five regions of Ukraine that it illegally claims to have annexed.

Canada does not recognize the results of these elections, and never will. These territories belong to Ukraine and Russia has no electoral authority in them.

If as much effort was put into genuine democratic development in Russia as was put into staging fake democracy, the world would be better off.

Mr. Chair,

I would like to take this Council behind the scenes of Russia's theatrical production of so-called democracy, and consider what life under the Russian regime, including in Ukrainian territories under the Russian occupation is really like.

It starts with political repression at home. Freedom House qualifies Russia as a consolidated authoritarian regime, where Vladimir Putin has absolute control of the government. He maintains power by brutally silencing critical voices, controlling the media, and relying on cronyism to preserve loyalty.

Prominent opposition figures and critical voices have been harassed, killed, hurt, detained, or falsely imprisoned.

Opposition political Alexei Navalny was poisoned with a nerve agent from Russia's illegal chemical weapons program. He was subsequently jailed on bogus charges and remains in prison under extreme circumstances.

Memorial, Russia's oldest and Nobel Peace Prize-winning civil rights organization was ordered to close. This was also the case for numerous other civil society organizations. Most independent media, journalists and activists were declared "foreign agents" and were forced to leave the country.

Russian people have lost their freedom of expression. They can be arrested for holding up blank pieces of paper.

Vladimir Kara-Murza, a prominent Russian journalist, was sentenced to twenty-three years in prison for denouncing Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine. His associate Boris Nemtsov was assassinated in 2015.

Many Russian men are forcibly mobilized and sent to the war in Ukraine, without proper equipment, or training. Many are reportedly used as human shields and are deprived of basic services. Over a million (lucky) Russians have fled the country to avoid the mobilization. This forced mobilization appears to disproportionately affect the most vulnerable population: ethnic minorities (Bashkiria, Dagestan), naturalized Russians (Tajik and Uzbek), and rural populations. With widespread economic hardship across the country, many are willing to sign contracts with the Russian military, for a promise to generously compensate their families in case of their death.

Russian children are forced to learn propaganda – fictional history, and are subjected to military training from an early age.

All of these cases have been discussed on many occasions at the Permanent Council. They barely scratch the surface of oppression in Russia.

The situation has clearly deteriorated since the 2022 Report of the Moscow Mechanism catalogued a myriad of disturbing human rights violations and concluded that these "internal repressions" are inextricably linked to Russia's external aggression.

Now, a state with this record, invaded its peaceful neighbour a year and a half ago, illegally occupied and claimed to annex five of its regions, subjected its people to unimaginable horror, pillaged its cities and villages, and asserts that it has made life better for them.

Recently, in a self-interested attempt to consolidate their attempted theft of Ukrainian land, and power over the Ukrainians living there, Russia staged sham elections – without *any* legal right to do so.

Civil society groups report that starting 9 days before election day, Russian occupying forces collected ballots from residents in public places like shops, bus stops and hospitals, and were going door-to-door forcing people to cast their ballot *at gunpoint*.

The process was reportedly accompanied by forced involvement of public sector employees, and the distribution of food packages to residents to buy votes.

Involving Ukrainian citizens in Russia's occupation and creating an illusion of a healthy political life is Russia's intention with the sham elections.

But, what is life really like in the temporarily occupied territories?

A collection of grassroots reporting paints a very distressing picture.

Residents are reportedly refused medicines unless they accept a Russian passport. Birthing mothers are denied health benefits unless they do the same. Their newborns are automatically considered citizens of the Russian Federation.

Children have to learn historical fiction about the occupation rather than fact, creating a dissonance between the reality they see, and the imaginary tales they're being taught.

The occupiers confiscate property from Ukrainians, evicting them from their own homes.

They forcibly conscript Ukrainian men to fight against their own country.

They rob Ukrainians of their harvest and resources and sell them as their own.

They force civilian medical personnel to treat Russian soldiers, creating a scarcity of doctors for Ukrainian residents.

They detain Ukrainians for any display of Ukrainian identity: language, documentation, flags or opinions. Families are often unaware about the whereabouts of their loved ones, detained and held for months.

Again, my examples barely scratch the surface.

Russia has made life miserable for Ukrainians under occupation. No fake election or amount of disinformation can hide the brutality of this war.

Mr. Chair,

Last week, many in this room attended the Prague Forum on the Economic and Environmental Dimension of the OSCE, where we heard about the extensive ecological costs of Russia's aggression against Ukraine.

We heard about soil contamination from landmines, the release of polluting substances into the air and water, the death of wildlife, and flooding caused by the deliberate destruction of the Kakhovka dam.

Environmental pollution doesn't know borders, and regional and global consequences of Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine will be with us for generations.

Finally Mr. Chair,

We call on Russia to immediately and unconditionally withdraw from Ukraine's internationally recognized territory, return Ukraine's children to their homes, and conduct itself in a manner that lives up to its OSCE commitments.

Thank you Mr. Chair.