



## United States Mission to the OSCE

# Ongoing Violations of International Law and Defiance of OSCE Principles and Commitments by the Russian Federation in Ukraine

As delivered by Acting Political Counselor Lane Darnell Bahl  
to the Permanent Council, Vienna  
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The fighting in eastern Ukraine over the past week was similar to the week before. Ceasefire violations occurred every night. Civilian casualties mounted. Forces increase in numbers and their emplacements harden as the sides dig in with winter approaching. The local population suffers, and the humanitarian situation worsens.

These conditions could be reversed if Russia were to implement its commitments under the Minsk agreements, starting by ordering its forces to cease fire and withdrawing them from the line of contact. With a lasting ceasefire in place, it would be possible to implement the political measures of the Minsk agreements, withdraw heavy weapons and foreign troops, hold local elections, and return to the Ukrainian Constitutional order. This is the agreed upon order of action. We call on Russia, as the instigator of the conflict, to take the first steps to cease the fighting and bring peace to Ukraine.

Russia also contravenes its Minsk commitments politically by announcing its pseudo-Republics will hold illegitimate "elections" on November 11, the day most of us recognize as Armistice Day. We condemn the announcement by Russia's proxies of their intention to conduct illegitimate "elections" in the sovereign territory of Ukraine. Carrying out such actions would set back efforts of the Trilateral Contact Group (TCG) and the Normandy Quartet. It would mean Russia has rejected its responsibility to implement Minsk. We call on Russia to be responsible and cancel its planned sham "elections" in the Donbas and commence meaningful Minsk implementation.

On October 9, 10, and 11 the SMM reported convoys of trucks crossing the internationally recognized border of Russia and Ukraine. This took place on a dirt track under the cover of darkness in a Russia-controlled area east of Donetsk. One truck was carrying an anti-aircraft gun. The contents of the other trucks are unknown to us, and clearly Moscow *does not want us to know*. The United States repeats its calls on Russia to cease the charade of denying its

lead role in the conflict and to take responsibility for the consequences of its failed policies by implementing its Minsk commitments.

Mr. Chair, there has been no improvement in the treatment and restrictions placed on SMM monitors, patrols, and equipment, especially in Russia-controlled areas of Ukraine. Monitors are harassed and sometimes threatened with violence for fulfilling the Mission's mandate. We note the SMM's October 10 report titled "Restrictions on SMM's Freedom of Movement and other Impediments to Fulfilment of its Mandate." In nearly every metric, the restrictions placed on SMM operations in areas controlled by Russia's proxies are orders of magnitude greater than in those areas controlled by Kyiv. Eighty-seven percent of all access restrictions take place in the areas controlled by the forces that Moscow arms, trains, leads, and fights alongside. The SMM is critical to our efforts in Ukraine. Russia must end this campaign of violence, threats, and intimidation against the SMM monitors.

Mr. Chair, we are troubled by recent reports of worsening restrictions on the exercise of religious freedom in the Russia-controlled parts of the Donbas. On October 16, authorities in the so-called "Luhansk People's Republic" reportedly denied registration to all Baptist, Pentecostal, Seventh Day Adventist, and other Protestant churches. This amounts to a ban on all religious activities by these groups, and these believers could now face fines or arrest even for gathering to pray in private homes. On October 12, in the so-called "Donetsk People's Republic," authorities reportedly confiscated a Baptist church in Novoazovsk, the latest move to seize places of worship in order to prevent religious communities from meeting.

Since April, Russia has delayed hundreds of commercial vessels attempting to reach Ukrainian ports in the Sea of Azov via the Kerch Strait. These delays have damaged the Ukrainian economy and are another example of Russia's efforts to destabilize the country. The United States condemns Russia's harassment of international shipping and supports Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders, extending to its territorial waters.

Mr. Chairperson, the United States is deeply concerned about the health of Oleh Sentsov, Volodymyr Balukh, and other Ukrainians unjustly held in Russian prisons, as well as deliberate attempts to misinform Ukrainian officials and the world at large about their condition. At the same time, severe restrictions on expression, association, and peaceful assembly continue unabated in Russia-occupied Crimea. We are concerned that Russian occupation authorities reportedly took steps recently to restrict public protests against the occupation authorities' inaction in the face of the dire environmental situation in the city of Armyansk, where toxic sulfur dioxide gas released from a nearby titanium plant has been sickening residents since late August. A September monitoring report by the Crimean Human Rights Group documented 365 prosecutions for the exercise of peaceful assembly in Crimea since Russia began its repressive occupation. The United States calls on Russia to uphold its OSCE commitments, respect international law, and end its occupation of Crimea.

The United States supports Ukraine's sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders. We do not, nor will we ever, recognize Russia's purported annexation of Crimea. We join our European and other partners in affirming that our Minsk-related sanctions against Russia will remain in place until Russia fully implements its Minsk commitments. The separate, Crimea-related sanctions will remain in place until Russia returns full control of the peninsula to Ukraine.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.