



**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 Chargé d'Affaires, a.i. Kate Byrnes  
to the Permanent Council, Vienna  
November 24, 2016

The situation continues to deteriorate in eastern Ukraine. In mid-November ceasefire violations reached their highest levels since the establishment of the Special Monitoring Mission in 2014. Furthermore, the SMM recorded last week the highest-ever number of violations from heavy weapons, including multiple launch rocket systems. Combined Russian-separatist forces continue to be responsible for the majority of ceasefire violations. We call on all parties to comply fully with the Minsk agreements, including upholding the ceasefire, withdrawing proscribed weapons, making progress on disengagement, and providing the SMM full and unfettered access to all parts of Ukraine, particularly the territory controlled by combined Russian-separatist forces.

As fighting has surged, so too have threats and aggressive acts against the SMM, with nine incidents recorded over the last two months. Combined Russian-separatist forces have failed to follow-up on any of the incidents for which they were responsible, even after the SMM met with senior separatist leadership. Not a single one. This is unacceptable. Russia and the separatists it supports must accept their responsibility for this conduct and prohibit intimidation and threats against monitors.

Civilian casualties continue to mount as security conditions deteriorate. The SMM has confirmed 365 civilian casualties so far in 2016. Restraint is needed to avoid harm to the civilians living in the conflict zone. The United States reiterates its call to all sides to remove their forces from civilian areas. We thank Ukraine for its commitment to do so in last week's Permanent Council.

With the onset of winter, humanitarian concerns are even more acute. For months, combined Russian-separatist forces have pursued a policy of deliberate delinquency on utility bills, showing disregard for the well-being of the people living in the territories they control. After their default triggered a cut-off of electricity to a water filtration plant serving Luhansk oblast in

early October, the International Committee of the Red Cross stepped in to avert a disaster, temporarily paying the bills that allowed the plant to resume operations. The separatists still refuse to pay these bills, even though they reportedly collect utility payments from the local population. As a result, over 600,000 people could be affected by a cut-off of water at the end of November.

We repeat the appeal made at the Permanent Council by over 30 delegations to reopen the vehicle crossing point at Zolote, which would offer some relief to the people of Luhansk who wish to cross between government and separatist-held areas. The footbridge at Stanytsia Luhanska remains in dangerous condition, and the SMM has reported that the elderly and disabled endure hardships as they struggle to cross the rickety wooden structure. We applaud the Ukrainian government for taking steps to prepare the crossing point at Zolote – as noted by the SMM – and call upon Russia-backed separatists to reciprocate. We also stress, once again, the need for agreement in the Trilateral Contact Group to protect critical infrastructure, which would help restore sorely needed confidence along the contact line.

We regret that no progress was reached in the Trilateral Contact Group’s security working group on disengagement. Disengagement can still work as part of a larger effort to restore and consolidate the ceasefire, if it is given a chance. We stress the need for a comprehensive seven-day ceasefire at Stanytsia Luhanska.

Mr. Chair, since the beginning of Russia’s occupation of Crimea, abuses on the peninsula have risen steeply, including the severe curtailment of the freedoms of expression, peaceful assembly, association, and religion or belief. The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights has found a pattern of security services carrying out arbitrary interrogations and house searches, and threatening prosecution against those questioning the Russian occupation. In the past week, the total number of Crimean Tatars being prosecuted on baseless “extremism” or “terrorism” charges has risen to 21 following a new series of police raids on Tatar homes that took place November 17.

Russia has cut off access to government employment, education, and health care for those Ukrainians refusing Russian citizenship. At least 30,000 residents of Crimea, and likely many more, have fled to other parts of Ukraine, fearing reprisals for their work as political activists or journalists, or because of their pro-Ukrainian views. Others have suffered politically-motivated disappearances. We highlight the vote in the UN General Assembly’s Third Committee on November 15 that condemned the deteriorating human rights situation in Crimea and Sevastopol, exposing Russia’s occupation and purported annexation for what they really are.

In closing, we reiterate that Crimea-related sanctions will remain in place until Russia ends its occupation and attempted annexation of Crimea and returns control of this territory to Ukraine. We join our European and other partners in restating that our sanctions against Russia for its

aggression in eastern Ukraine will remain until Russia fully implements its commitments in the Minsk agreements.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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