



## United States Mission to the OSCE

# The Russian Federation's Ongoing Aggression Against Ukraine

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires Katherine Brucker  
to the Permanent Council, Vienna  
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In February 2022, Russian President Vladimir Putin thought his forces would capture Kyiv in days. The grit and heroism of so many Ukrainians proved him wrong. Totally wrong.

Now, in the 26th month of Russia's full-scale invasion, Putin relies on ever more desperate measures to feed his war machine. Along with the whole of Ukraine, ordinary Russian citizens – and even foreign citizens with no ties to Russia – are paying the price.

Over the past two years, we have witnessed a litany of Putin's lies. Until the eve of his full-scale invasion, he told the world he wouldn't invade Ukraine. And then he did. In March 2022, he told the Russian people only professional soldiers, not conscripts, would need to fight. That was a lie. That same month, he said reservists would never be called up. Six months later, he declared a mobilization. Putin said civilians drafted into his forces would not fight on the front lines. Then they did.

Compare those empty promises to the experience of a draftee named Aleksandr, deployed in September 2022. His commanders duped him into believing he would never see combat. But he did, and horrific combat at that. He later described to journalists his first-hand account of the aftermath of an attack in Luhansk, saying, "legs, guts. I mean, meat. Just meat... I know it sounds terrible, but you can't describe it any other way. People were turned into hamburger."

Russia's tactics of human wave attacks show how little value Putin and his generals place on their citizens' lives. Avdiivka alone reportedly saw more fighters killed than the Soviet Union lost in the entire Soviet-Afghan war. If you've forgotten that chapter in history, the USSR said it lost 14,500 soldiers in Afghanistan. It makes you wonder how many people Putin is willing to sacrifice in pursuit of his imperialist folly.

In the face of these casualties, Russian women organized *The Way Home* to call for the return of their husbands, sons, and brothers. Maria Andreeva, an unofficial leader of the movement, pointedly asked journalists, "when will our husbands be considered to have discharged their military duty? When they're brought back with no arms and legs? Or do we have to wait for them to be sent back in zinc coffins?"

In the face of this domestic backlash, it is no wonder the Kremlin is looking further afield for fighters. A September 2023 Jamestown Foundation report found that Russia has tricked Central Asian migrant workers into military service, including confiscating migrants' passports after they had traveled for construction work to Russia-occupied areas of Ukraine. Shocking stories have also come to light indicating Russia has deceived Indian, Nepali, and Sri Lankan nationals into military service.

Madam Chair, successive OSCE Expert Mission reports and other international inquiries have chronicled the extensive violations of international law by Russia's forces and officials in conducting Putin's war. The mistreatment of Ukrainian prisoners of war whom Russia is obligated to protect is another egregious example. On March 15, the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine laid out even more evidence Russia has committed widespread and systematic torture of Ukrainian prisoners of war than previously recorded.

The report, delivered to the UN Human Rights Council, detailed numerous instances of abuse by members of Russia's forces, from electric shocks to the genitals to repeated beatings and starvation. Norwegian judge Eric Mose, the Commission's chair, said victims' accounts disclosed Russian authorities' profound disregard for human dignity. The use of torture by Russian authorities, the report found, may amount to crimes against humanity.

What is crystal clear is that far too many have suffered or died in Ukraine for Putin's needless war. He can and should stop this war by withdrawing his forces from all of Ukraine's sovereign territory. He needs to do so now.

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