



United States Mission to the OSCE

The Russian Federation's Ongoing Aggression Against Ukraine

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires, a.i. Timothy Hanway
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
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OSCE participating States have committed to respect international humanitarian law and to hold individuals responsible for war crimes and other violations. Russian officials and members of its armed forces must be called out for their wartime actions that violate international humanitarian law.

Today I'd like to focus on credible reports of the Russian military's use of secondary strikes in Ukraine against civilians – including paramedics and first responders – who gather to assist victims of a first, initial strike. The Russian government is following its own example from Syria, where it carried out dozens of such airstrikes killing civilians, first responders, and humanitarian workers, according to findings published in July 2022 by the Syria Justice and Accountability Center.

In the April 2022 Moscow Mechanism report, the experts found, "clear patterns of international humanitarian law violations by Russian forces in their conduct of hostilities." The report specifically addressed secondary attacks on civilians. It noted, "On the 1st of March 2022, the Kharkiv regional administration on Liberty Square was hit, allegedly by a Russian Kalibr-class cruise missile. After the rescuers arrived [in] five to seven minutes, there was a second strike by a similar rocket that hit the building. This implies that the rescuers and the persons wounded by the first attack... were deliberately targeted."

Since the OSCE published that report, evidence indicates that Russia has killed more than 90 paramedics, police officers, nurses, and firefighters and injured nearly 350 civilians across Ukraine using this tactic.

Disturbingly, Russia's apparent use of this type of attack is increasing. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs said it had seen a "particularly troubling pattern" of such strikes in recent weeks. In March and April alone, Russia's iterative attacks hitting first responders killed nearly 30 rescue workers in Odesa, Kharkiv, and Zaporizhzhia and wounded more than 20.

The Director of the UK-based Conflict Studies Research Centre observed that a state would need to "abandon any pretense at subscribing to international humanitarian law and commonly accepted norms to start counting medics and ambulances as valid military targets."

International humanitarian law requires all parties to an armed conflict to distinguish between civilians and combatants and between civilian and military objectives. It prohibits deliberate or direct attacks against civilians and civilian objects. Russian forces' violations of international humanitarian law must not continue with impunity. Russia's merciless campaign against Ukraine's civilians must stop. And the United States will continue to support Ukraine for as long as it takes.

Yesterday, April 24th, President Biden signed into law a 60.8-billion-dollar assistance package for Ukraine. This package will provide Ukraine with vital assistance, including more of the air defense materials it needs to defend its people. The United States is proud to have rallied the global coalition of more than 50 countries who support Ukraine to work to ensure it has what it needs to defend itself, and we will continue to work within the OSCE to hold Russia to account for its war of aggression.

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