



Permanent Mission of Ukraine
to the International Organizations in Vienna

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Statement on “Russia’s ongoing aggression against Ukraine and illegal occupation of Crimea”

As delivered by Ambassador Ihor Prokopchuk,
Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the International Organizations in Vienna,
to the 1165th meeting of the Permanent Council,
23 November 2017

Mr. Chairperson,

Approaching the fourth winter of the Russian armed aggression against Ukraine, we note with grave concern that repeated attempts to establish cease-fire, including the latest so-called “back to school” ceasefire, do not bring results as the Russian Federation would not renounce the pursuit of the principal objectives of its aggression. In its weekly report of 15 November, the SMM recorded a 20 per cent increase of the number of ceasefire violations, representing “a general upward trend in the past five weeks.” The SMM weekly report released yesterday registered the highest level of cease-fire violations in one week since mid-June 2017. We again witness the repetition by the hybrid Russian forces of the patterns of the past few years.

These developments again place into spotlight the wide gap between Russia’s political declarations and commitments on the one hand, and on the other – Russia’s continuing perpetration of violence on the ground and disregard for the Minsk agreements.

Whereas the Russian delegation in the OSCE continues to provide a diplomatic cover for the ongoing aggression, including by disseminating in the Permanent Council unfounded accusations of the Ukrainian Armed Forces and alleged “preparation for offensives”, the SMM keeps registering hundreds of pieces of heavy weapons, military equipment and vehicles that had been brought by Russia to sustain its military operations in Donbas. In one single day of 13 November, the Mission recorded 150 heavy weapons and armoured vehicles (44 infantry fighting vehicles, 36 tanks, 28 howitzers, 17 armoured personnel carriers, 9 mortars, 6 anti-tank guns, 6 surface-to-air missile systems, 4 armoured combat vehicles), at least 60 military-type trucks and about 100 persons in military-style clothing in one single location near non-government controlled Shymshynivka 27km south-west of Luhansk. Notable is the SMM daily report of 20 November registering 23 howitzers in violation of withdrawal line as well as 107 battle tanks in different non-government controlled locations.

These staggering figures do not reflect the full strength of the Russian invasion force in Donbas, but can serve as an indicator.

Available evidence shows that Russia maintains uninterrupted its supplies of military designation into the occupied parts of Donbas. In one month, from 5 October till 4 November, the Ukrainian side has documented the supply of 8350 tons of fuel and lubricants, 15 railcars of ammunition, 10 amphibious APC, 8 mortars, 2 MLRS and 2 air-defense missile systems, which arrived from Russia to various locations in certain areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions (Donetsk, Rovenky, Ilovaisk, Simeikyne, Krasna Mohyla, Dovzhansk and Khartsyzk). The findings on some of these supplies were reported earlier by the SMM. The persistent calls by the Ukrainian authorities formally directed to the Russian Federation to put an end to these internationally wrongful acts remain ignored by the Russian authorities.

This is the factual attitude of the Russian Federation towards calls for peaceful resolution of the conflict, towards implementation of Russia's commitments under the Minsk agreements and reaffirmation by the Russian President of full respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine, contained in the joint declaration of the leaders of the Normandy Four countries which accompanied the Minsk Package of measures and was attached to the UNSC Resolution 2202.

The concept of Russia's aggression of hybrid nature requires secrecy, deception and masking of actions which prompt ongoing restrictions and intimidation of SMM monitors and attacks on SMM assets in the non-government controlled areas. For instance, on 16 November, the SMM patrols were denied access to Kozatske and Verkhnohyrokiyske, both of them located north-east of Mariupol, under the pretext of presence of mines and UXOs, while the SMM could see people and cars moving on the allegedly mined roads. At the same Verkhnohyrokiyske the SMM monitors had been attacked by militants on several occasions earlier. According to the SMM, "the armed formations in parts of Donetsk and Luhansk regions frequently deny the SMM access to areas adjacent to Ukraine's border outside control of the Government, citing orders to do so". On 20 November another attempt by the SMM patrol to proceed on the road towards Siedove, near the border with the Russian Federation, was denied, thus leaving this area out of reach for the SMM since April 2017. Although the SMM informed the JCCC after each one of such denials, the Russian part of the JCCC has no interest in removing the impediments for SMM's mandated activities.

The unpredictability in Russia's military intentions is compounded by this week's infighting between different illegal structures and armed formations in Luhansk, which is an onsite manifestation of infighting between different groups and secret services of the Russian Federation that exercise control over the occupied parts of Donbas and over financial flows, including from the Russian state budget. We strongly urge the Russian Federation to refrain from any provocations that would further exacerbate the security situation at the contact line and endanger the lives of the people for the mere purpose of diverting attention from Luhansk.

The overall present situation reaffirms the need to strengthen the consolidated international pressure on Russia to make it abide by its commitments and, in particular, to enable establishment of permanent OSCE monitoring and security zone along the uncontrolled segments of the Ukrainian-Russian state border.

Distinguished colleagues,

We again emphasise our deep concern in connection with ongoing attacks carried out by Russian hybrid forces at or in close vicinity of the critical infrastructure facilities. In particular, the SMM camera at the Donetsk Filtration Station registers on a daily basis such attacks and the projectiles in flight from south, south-east and east, where the positions of the Russian hybrid forces are located.

To impede the SMM monitoring, the camera at the Donetsk Filtration Station is regularly targeted by the Russian fighters. As reported by the SMM, most recent attacks took place on 15 and 16 November, when the camera recorded the incoming explosions very close to it. The projectiles were fired “from a southerly direction, in the vicinity of known “DPR” forward positions”. These attacks stand in the same row as earlier shootings at the SMM’s UAVs in the non-government controlled areas or the use of laser beam to disable the SMM camera in Stanitsa Luhanska.

The Russian strategy of “blinding the SMM” is also exposed in the refusal of the Russian hybrid forces “to provide the security guarantees necessary for the installation of an acoustic sensor near Shyrokyne”, as indicated in the SMM weekly report of 15 November. This acoustic sensor would allow the SMM “to detect ceasefire violations: identifying from where they originated and under certain circumstances, pinpoint the origin of fire”.

While more detailed discussions on the operational environment of the SMM’s activities in Donbas will take place at the next Permanent Council with participation of Chief Monitor Ambassador Apakan, we now again urge the Russian Federation to lift all restrictions which impede the SMM’s freedom of movement and monitoring and to stop intimidation of monitors and attempts to damage the Mission’s assets.

Distinguished colleagues,

Russia’s illegal occupation and attempted annexation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol continue to erode the European security architecture and the rules-based order, amplifying the threats of Russia’s aggressive posture. The Russian Federation persists in its attempts to legitimize the use of force and violation of sovereignty and territorial integrity of a neighbouring sovereign state. On 20 November 2017 the MFA of Ukraine issued a statement condemning the recent visit of the Russian President to the illegally occupied Crimea as a form of demonstrative defiance of the norms of international law. We reiterate that the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol are the integral part of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders as reconfirmed by the UN General Assembly Resolutions 68/262 and 71/205.

This morning the Russian occupation forces in the Crimean peninsula again carried out raids, searches and detentions in the houses of Crimean Tatars. It is reported that one woman, Vedjie Kashka, a veteran of the Crimean Tatar movement, died during attempted detention. She was 82 years old, as a girl survived the deportation by the Stalin regime in 1944 and hardships of life in remote places, returned to Crimea and now died in her house when Russian occupiers attempted to

detain her. We strongly urge the Russian Federation to immediately stop repression and persecution of innocent people breaking their lives.

We also strongly urge the Russian Federation to return to the tenets of international law, to stop its aggression against Ukraine, including by withdrawing its troops from the Ukrainian territory, and to reverse the illegal occupation of Crimea and Sevastopol.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.