



United States Mission to the OSCE
U.S. Statement for the
Forum for Security Co-operation:
General Statements

As delivered by Arms Control Counselor Daniel Wartko
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Thank you, Mr. Chair,

Since the beginning of Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, this forum has wrestled with the dire implications for the founding principles of the OSCE. Russia’s disregard for Ukraine’s territorial integrity and political independence cannot be overstated. We have documented the loss of lives, the horrific injuries, and the lifelong trauma to families and communities. We will continue to do so.

But today, we will also bear witness to the assault on Ukraine’s cultural identity. We all committed in Article One of the Helsinki Final Act to respect the rights inherent in the sovereignty of others. We also committed to *“respect each other’s right freely to choose and develop its political, social, economic and cultural systems.”*

In article seven, we committed to *“respect human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief, for all without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion.”*

We all also agreed to *“the implementation of joint projects for conserving, restoring and showing to advantage works of art, historical and archaeological monuments and sites of cultural interest.”*

Over the last two and a half years, the Russian Federation has committed an assault on Ukraine’s culture. The Kremlin’s bombs have destroyed the Orthodox Transfiguration Cathedral in Odesa, a UNESCO World Heritage site. Russia’s military forces have looted archeological treasures from Ukrainian museums. Kremlin-installed authorities have deemed Ukrainian history books and literature as “extremist” and seized them from public libraries in occupied territories. And President Putin has infamously denied that Ukraine even possesses an identity independent of Russia.

As of October 16, UNESCO has verified damage to 457 cultural sites since 24 February 2022. This includes 143 religious sites, 231 buildings of historical or artistic interest, 32 museums, 33 monuments, 17 libraries, and 1 archive. These destructive acts even include damage by Russia's forces to a mass grave of Soviet Army soldiers who died liberating the village of Irpin in 1943.

I ask my distinguished colleagues in this room to think about the defining marks of their own national identity. Think about your own countries' national treasures: The buildings, the monuments, the art, the literature, the founding documents, and the history that help define your distinct cultural and national identity. And now imagine what it would be like to have those treasures destroyed or stolen or desecrated by an invader.

Mr. Chair,

The defense of Ukraine's national sovereignty goes beyond defending the rules-based order that we all committed to under the Helsinki Final Act. It goes beyond our daily work in Vienna and strengthens our focus on this unjust and illegal war. Russia's horrendous actions make it absolutely clear that we need a common effort to protect our individual and shared culture and history.

That is why, since the beginning of Russia's unprovoked invasion, the United States has committed financial and expert aid to help Ukraine protect its culture and identity. Through the Ukraine Cultural Heritage Response Initiative, we are supporting Ukraine in its efforts to protect and repair damage to its cultural heritage sites and collections, as well as to expand and strengthen public-private heritage preservation and protection partnerships with civil society. We are also working with the Prosecutor General's Office of Ukraine to strengthen Ukraine's capabilities to investigate the looting and trafficking of Ukrainian cultural property and to prosecute those responsible for those crimes.

Along with projects proposed by our partners at the EU and the World Monuments Fund, this support will ensure that Ukraine's victory will not only restore its sovereignty over its internationally recognized territory, but also preserve its distinct cultural identity for future generations.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.