



Delegation of Canada
to the OSCE

Délégation du Canada
auprès de l'OSCE

**STATEMENT BY AMBASSADOR JOCELYN KINNEAR
ON THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION'S ONGOING AGGRESSION AGAINST UKRAINE
1477th MEETING OF THE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

6 June 2024

Madam Chair,

Yesterday we commemorated World Environment Day, which put the global spotlight on our shared natural environment and the challenges it is facing today.

Russia's brutal aggression against Ukraine, undertaken with blatant disregard for international law and political commitments, lays bare the devastating impact of war on our natural environment. In this vein I thank you, Madam Chair, and our Ukrainian colleague, for highlighting the one-year anniversary of the destruction of the Kakhovka dam.

Ukraine estimates the cost of this aggression to be nearly EUR 60 billion in environmental damage. The aggression has adversely affected Ukraine's protected areas and contaminated 30% of its land with landmines, making it the largest mined territory in the world. Assessing the impact of mine action on the environment and climate change is a priority for Canada in the Anti-Personnel Ban Convention.

The full extent of environmental damage to Ukraine and its neighbours continues to unfold and grow with ongoing hostilities. Experts project that the consequences of the war will be felt for decades and reach beyond Ukraine's borders. This includes widespread impacts on global food security.

Biodiversity—and associated ecosystems—provide a range of invaluable services to society that underpin human health, well-being and economic growth. The preservation of a healthy and peaceful environment in Ukraine is important for our region, and the world. Ukraine harbours about a third of Europe's biodiversity equating to more than 70,000 species, including many that are rare or endemic. Moreover, Ukraine forms part of several transboundary ecological areas of importance spanning at least six other participating States. The detrimental impact of Russia's aggression on a threatened species of migrating eagles has already been documented.

The destruction of the Kakhovka dam has devastated mature aquatic ecosystems, leading to massive flooding that carried waste, landmines, and unexploded ordnance into the Dnipro River Delta and the Black Sea. Research by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) indicates that much of the damage in and around the Kakhovka water reservoir is likely irreversible, with some protected areas within the reservoir likely to have sustained complete destruction.

It bears repeating even in warfare, rules must be upheld. International Humanitarian Law safeguards the environment during armed conflict, prohibiting the use of methods or means of warfare intended or expected to cause widespread, long-term, and severe damage to the natural environment and thereby to prejudice the health or survival of the population.

We call upon the Russian Federation to honor all its commitments under International Humanitarian Law.

Madam Chair,

Last week, 75 Ukrainians returned home from Russian captivity through a prisoner exchange, among them 5 women and 4 civilians. Although the exact number of remaining prisoners of war (POWs) in Russia remains uncertain, current estimates by Ukrainian authorities stand at about 6,000 individuals.

According to interviews with returned POWs conducted by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, over 90% have been subjected to torture, ill-treatment, or sexual violence. Disturbing accounts of torture and rape of POWs have been shared by former POWs at the OSCE as well. Canada, Norway, and Ukraine also hosted a former POW in Kyiv during the last meeting of Working Group 4 last month, where he shared his harrowing experience and evidence of severe malnourishment during Russian captivity.

Working Group 4 will continue to raise awareness on this issue at the upcoming Peace Summit in Switzerland, where the plight of POWs, other detainees and deported and forcibly transferred children will be one of three key themes for discussion.

We urge the Russian Federation to uphold its commitments under international humanitarian law by granting unfettered access to Ukrainian detention centers to the International Committee of the Red Cross and ensuring regular contact with families. Russia stands only to gain from such actions. And I reiterate our call on Russia, Madam Chair, to immediately and unconditionally release the three SMM employees that it has been holding unlawfully for over two years: Vadym Golda, Maksim Petrov, and Dmytro Shabanov.

Thank you, Madam Chair.