



United States Mission to the OSCE

The Russian Federation's Ongoing Aggression Against Ukraine

As delivered by Ambassador Michael Carpenter
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
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I would like to start today with a quote from the recent report of the UN Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine. This report notes that: “Russian authorities have committed a wide range of violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law in various regions of Ukraine, many of which amount to war crimes...The[se] war crimes include attacks on civilians and energy-related infrastructure, willful killings, unlawful confinement, torture, rape and other sexual violence, as well as unlawful transfers and deportations of children.”

The report also notes that “Russian armed forces have carried out attacks with explosive weapons in populated areas with an apparent disregard for civilian harm and suffering, failing to take the required precautions.” The Commission found that “the waves of attacks by Russian armed forces on Ukraine’s energy-related infrastructure from 10 October 2022 may amount to crimes against humanity... [leaving] entire regions and millions of people being left for periods without electricity or heating, particularly during freezing temperatures.”

The UN Commission also corroborated the Russian Federation’s pattern of widespread and unlawful detainment of men, women and children – a subject we have spoken to many times in this Council. Detained persons in the temporarily occupied regions of Ukraine and in the Russian Federation experienced what the Commission called “consistent methods of torture against certain categories of persons.” For example, the Commission’s report noted a former detainee underwent beatings as a “punishment for speaking Ukrainian” and for “not remembering the lyrics of the anthem of the Russian Federation.” The Commission concluded that such systematic torture may well amount to crimes against humanity. The United States agrees that several categories of atrocities committed by the Russian Federation in Ukraine indeed qualify as crimes against humanity. The evidence of such crimes has now been catalogued by numerous NGOs, governments, and international organizations, including of course the OSCE and now the UN as well.

Mr. Chair, the Russian Federation here likes to speak about “de-Nazification.” But who are they to use this term. Who can forget the Human Rights Watch Report documenting what Russian Federation forces did last year in the small village of Yahidne, rounding up the community’s 350 residents, including 70 children and forcing them into a school basement. As eyewitnesses reported, there was no space to move and soldiers forced everyone to use buckets as toilets. For the first couple of days, no one was allowed out. After a week, nearly everyone was sick, with almost all the children violently coughing and vomiting. Ten elderly captives died. Those still living were forced to share this cramped space with the dead, whose corpses decayed before their eyes. Russia’s forces reportedly held these poor civilians captive in such conditions for 28 days. As the Commission notes, such conditions of

detention were “generally inhuman.” So, the next time the Russian delegate here speaks of de-Nazification, think of Yahidne, think of it, every time he uses that term.

Mr. Chair, we can never keep silent about such crimes and never attempt to normalize what Russia is doing in Ukraine. We must never forget how Russia’s forces bombed the maternity hospital in Mariupol, and the Drama Theater with the large word “CHILDREN” emblazoned on the ground outside of it. We must never forget how Moscow’s forces hit the Kramatorsk train station, killing 59 civilians and injuring 92 more. We must never forget how Russia’s attack turned a nine-story apartment building in Dnipro into burning rubble, killing 45 civilians, including six children. And we must never forget how we bore witness to countless waves of Russian missile and drone attacks on Ukraine’s energy grid in a failed attempt to freeze Ukraine into submission.

Mr. Chair, we also must continue to shine a light, however gruesome and difficult it may be, on the torture and sexual-based violence being perpetrated by the Russian Federation’s forces in Ukraine. According to the Commission, the victims of such torture often had their hands bound behind them, and were beaten, electrocuted, suffocated, starved, and exposed to freezing temperatures. Russia’s forces even nicknamed their use of a military phone to electrocute a victim as a “*call to Putin*.” Sadly, rape and gender-based violence have been commonly used by the Russian Federation as a method of torture. Known victims included women, men, boys and girls, ranging from age four to 82. Perpetrators often threatened to kill the victim or the victim’s family if they resisted. More than one soldier sometimes raped the same victim, or the same victim was raped several times at different points. Family members, including children, were forced to watch the rape of their loved ones. It’s clear from cases like these why the UN Commission found that “Russian authorities have committed torture and cruel or inhuman treatment, which is a war crime” and “used torture in a systematic and widespread manner.”

Mr. Chair, last week we saw the international community act to hold the Russian Federation and its leadership to account. In addition to the UN Commission of Inquiry report, the International Criminal Court issued arrest warrants for Vladimir Putin and Maria Lvova-Belova for their responsibility for unlawfully transferring or deporting Ukrainian children, which would amount to war crimes. We should stand by the OSCE’s contributions to international accountability efforts like these, and we should continue to shine a light on Russia’s barbaric practices. We cannot sit still; we have to do more. Now is the time to again use the Moscow Mechanism to continue to expose and document the Russian Federation’s crimes in Ukraine - and they are many. Now is the time to deploy additional projects through the OSCE’s Support Program for Ukraine to help those suffering from Russia’s horrific abuses. Now is the time to act in defense of our shared values. We’ve seen over the last year how the OSCE succeeds when we decide to act. Let us continue to hold the Russian Federation to account for its atrocities in Ukraine. And let’s never forget that those who sit behind the nameplate of the Russian Federation are representing a regime responsible for some of the world’s most heinous atrocities.

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