

United States Mission to the OSCE



**Ongoing Violations of International Law and
Defiance of OSCE Principles and Commitments by
the Russian Federation in Ukraine**

As delivered by Chargé d’Affaires Courtney Austrian
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
March 18, 2021

Although the months following the implementation of the July 27, 2020 “*Additional Measures to Strengthen the Ceasefire*” brought about historically low levels of violence, the situation remains fragile. Regrettably, we are again seeing Russia-led forces use heavy weapons and reports of shelling around water and sanitation infrastructure in Donetsk. Russia-led proxies continue to block the Freedom of Movement of the Special Monitoring Mission, as we saw again this week. While the decline of ceasefire violations registered in the last six months is a good foundation, we must not forget the guns must be silenced altogether if there is to be a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

In recent weeks, we have noted a troubling shift in Russia’s messaging on the conflict in eastern Ukraine. Russia’s latest stream of disinformation appears designed to predict and pre-assign blame for an escalation of violence.

While average reported daily violations of the ceasefire rose over the last three months, the recorded numbers remain a tenth of what SMM monitors observed just one year ago. Since the strengthening of ceasefire measures, the SMM reported unprecedentedly low levels of violence in eastern Ukraine, despite Russia’s specious claims of a Ukrainian build-up or planned military action.

We wish this ceasefire were 100% observed and regret the SMM and the Ukrainian government continue to report both civilian and Ukrainian Armed Forces casualties. We will not accept, nor will we ignore, Russia’s constant attempts to distance itself from a conflict for which it is solely responsible. And we will not accept the Kremlin’s efforts to cast Russia as an impartial mediator. Russia’s aggression started this conflict, Russia’s support fuels it, and Russia’s obstructionism at peace talks prevents its peaceful resolution.

In Crimea, Moscow’s occupation authorities continue to target Crimean Tatars, ethnic Ukrainians, members of religious minority groups, and others who oppose the occupation. Russia has greatly restricted the ability of these residents of Crimea to exercise their rights to Freedom of Expression, Peaceful Assembly and Association, and Religion or Belief. We condemn the March 11 FSB raids of the homes of least nine Jehovah’s Witnesses in which at least five individuals were unjustly detained and interrogated for simply being believers in their faith.

On March 5, a Russian occupation court again barred Crimean Tatar leader Mustafa Jemilev from Crimea, this time until 2034. After Russia occupied the peninsula, he was barred for an initial five years. Jemilev, a Ukrainian citizen, member of Ukraine’s Parliament, and former Chair of the Mejlis, now has been accused by Russia of “illegally entering Crimea”—which is sovereign Ukrainian territory—and of possession of a firearm and ammunition. Jemilev survived a 303-day

hunger strike while imprisoned in the Soviet Union for his efforts to expose the forced deportations of the Crimean Tatar people under Stalin and to advocate for their return to their native Crimea.

We call on Russia to end its repression of the Crimean Tatars, ethnic Ukrainians, and all others; to release all Ukrainian political prisoners; to remove its forces and hardware from eastern Ukraine; and to immediately end its occupation of Crimea.

Madam Chair, the United States fully supports Ukraine's sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders, including its territorial waters. We do not, nor will we ever, recognize Russia's purported annexation of Crimea. We join our European and other partners in affirming our Ukraine-related sanctions against Russia will remain in place until Russia fully implements its Minsk commitments, and Russia returns full control of Crimea to Ukraine. As the Secretary stated in his February 26 video message on Crimea, Crimea IS Ukraine.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

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