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Délégation du Canada
auprès de l'OSCE

**STATEMENT BY CHARGÉE D'AFFAIRES, ESTHER VAN NES
ON THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION'S ONGOING AGGRESSION AGAINST UKRAINE
1428th MEETING OF THE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

8 June 2023

Mr. Chair,

Canada strongly condemns the destruction of the dam of the Kakhovka Hydroelectric Power Plant, which flooded dozens of Ukrainian settlements, unleashed an ecological catastrophe, and put the ZNPP, once again, at risk. It shows once again the catastrophic impacts of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. We underline that civilians and critical infrastructures are illegitimate targets of war, and that those responsible for this attack will be held accountable for their crimes. To follow up, on the same day, Russia launched 35 cruise missiles against Ukraine, all of which were reportedly intercepted by Ukraine's defenses. These events again show the brutality of Russia's war.

This is a war without justification. It is a war – instigated unilaterally by the Russian Federation – to destabilize and destroy its neighbour, and to undermine Ukraine's sovereignty in a misguided attempt to bolster its own. Disinformation efforts that suggest otherwise belie the reality that this is Putin's war of choice; and, thus, the responsibility for the great human suffering and ecological damage being inflicted lies at the door of the Kremlin, and nowhere else.

Mr. Chair,

Every day the war continues brings further risk to civilians – with Ukrainian civilians detained, passed through “filtration camps”, and subject to torture and mistreatment. A few weeks ago, we heard from the Media Initiative for Human Rights and directly from a few survivors of detention and families of those still missing. Anastasia Pantielieieva described the locations where civilians are held in Ukraine's south, where Russia has kidnapped people since the beginning of the invasion, and where they have “set up torture chambers in every occupied town and city.”

Viacheslav Zavalnyi shared his harrowing story of eight months in captivity, during which he was physically and mentally tortured to try and force him to confess to being a spy. He was made to dig what he thought would be his own grave. He also passed through Olenivka, where 53 Ukrainian prisoners of war were later killed when their housing unit was destroyed. While culpability is not yet conclusive, it is Russia who refused to cooperate with a UN and International Red Cross fact-finding mission.

We have also heard of the alarming case of two teenagers, Tihiran Ohannisian and Mykyta Khanhanov, who were harassed, detained and brutally interrogated, and who now both face criminal charges carrying a penalty of 10 to 20 years in prison. They are children.

The Media Initiative for Human Rights has identified over 950 civilians being held captive in the Russian Federation, Belarus, and occupied territories of Ukraine and they believe the actual number to be at 5–7 times higher. From their interviews with former prisoners of war and detained civilians, MIHR has identified over 100 locations where Russia holds Ukrainians, (with [an interactive map](#) available through a link in the written version of my statement). The map demonstrates the systematic and state-sanctioned fashion that civilians are brought to filtration hubs for torture and then dispersed to prisons with inhumane conditions as far from their homeland as Siberia. Many, like the three SMM staff still held by the Russian Federation and its partners, were taken solely for the crime of being Ukrainian.

Russia's war crimes are the subject of multiple accountability processes. Ukraine's only crime was its existence and its belief in the international rules-based order, freedom, democracy, and human rights, as laid out in the OSCE's principles and commitments. And we will continue to support Ukraine in its defence of these values.

Mr. Chair,

Canada strongly condemns the continued arbitrary detention of innocent Ukrainian civilians in the Russian Federation and in places under its temporary occupation. Russia's actions are violations of international human rights and international humanitarian law and could amount to war crimes. We call on Russia to release all civilians being held in unlawful detention.

Russia can end the torture, murder, and human rights violations by ending this war now and unconditionally withdrawing all troops and military equipment from all occupied Ukrainian territory, including Crimea. We call on it to do so immediately, to release all SMM staff and assets, and to abide by its obligations under international law and by its commitments to OSCE principles.