

Russia's ongoing aggression against Ukraine: UK statement, 3 March 2022

Thank you Mr Chair. We meet here today to discuss the war that Russia has unleashed against Ukraine – its sovereign and democratic neighbour. A war that was unprovoked, premeditated and entirely unjustifiable, and for which President Putin and the Russian government bear the sole, heinous responsibility.

The United Kingdom condemns in the strongest terms the Russian government's bombardment of Ukrainian villages, towns and cities. We are deeply saddened by the death of Maryna Fenina, who was killed by shelling in Kharkiv. Our thoughts are with all the victims and their families.

Since we last met in this hall on Sunday, the Russian military has intensified its use of rocket artillery, including in Kyiv, Kharkiv, Chernihiv, Kherson and Mariupol, and as we have heard from the distinguished mayor, Zhytomyr. On the night of the 27th-28th February, the SMM reported hearing explosions and heavy shelling, including fire from multiple launch rocket systems in areas north and north-east of Kharkiv city.

Russia's use of heavy artillery in densely populated areas is causing civilian casualties. Since Russia further invaded Ukraine last week through to the 1st March, the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has reported that 227 civilians have been killed, including 15 children, and 525 injured. Tragically, the real figure is certain to be far higher.

Russia's indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks on civilian areas have also affected critical civilian infrastructure. Schools and kindergartens have been damaged and residential buildings destroyed. Critical infrastructure such as gas and water supplies, fuel depots and communications, have also been affected, particularly in eastern Ukraine. UN OCHA have highlighted that the continued operation of critical hospital services is being threatened by constant power outages and the persistent risk of ambulances and health personnel being caught in the crossfire. We were appalled at the strike on the Kyiv TV tower which killed civilians and damaged the Babyn Yar Holocaust memorial. It is vital that the horrors we are witnessing in Ukraine are fully investigated and that those responsible are held to account. That is why the UK and 37 of our allies and partners have referred atrocities in Ukraine to the International Criminal Court.

Mr Chair, we are grateful to ODIHR Director Mecacci for sounding an early alarm about the human impact that Russia's attack on Ukraine is taking on civilians. We welcome ODIHR's readiness to keep monitoring the situation. This will be important for ensuring accountability, including for violations of international humanitarian law.

Hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian civilians are fleeing the violence

perpetrated by Russia. UNHCR estimates that nearly 900,000 Ukrainians have already fled to neighbouring countries and more than 100,000 have been displaced within Ukraine.

We reiterate the 27th February call that we, together with the Polish Chair and 44 other participating States, made on the Russian Federation to implement an immediate ceasefire to allow humanitarian aid to access those in need and prevent hostilities against civilians. International organisations, including the dedicated staff of the SMM who remain in Ukraine, must also be provided safe passage. We are deeply grateful to the Secretary General, the OSCE Secretariat, the SMM leadership and the Polish Chair for their efforts to fulfil the OSCE's duty of care towards staff in Ukraine.

We are also grateful to the OSCE Representative on the Freedom of the Media, Teresa Ribeiro, for denouncing the Russian government's attempts to limit the information on Russia's attack on Ukraine that Russian people can receive through the media.

Despite President Putin's efforts, he and his government cannot hide the brutality of their attack on Ukraine, either from the world or from the Russian people themselves. We are deeply concerned at the arrest of thousands of peaceful protesters in Russia, including even children, simply for voicing their opposition against this war – this is a grave violation of the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly. ODIHR have reported on numerous arbitrary arrests and police intimidation, with riot police on some occasions outnumbering protesters. Human rights defenders and journalists have also been arrested.

There have also been unacceptable crackdowns on protests in Belarus, whose government has dragged an unwilling people into the Russian Federation Government's war against Ukraine. We are deeply concerned at the holding of a referendum, which fell far short of any international standards of democratic best practice, on changes to the Belarusian constitution, including the dropping of Belarus' neutrality and non-nuclear status. Combined with President Putin's instruction to Russian nuclear forces to move to high alert status, this is once again elevating risk for no justifiable reason. Due to the role that Belarus is playing in facilitating Russia's further invasion of Ukraine, the UK announced on 1st March that we would be implementing the first tranches of sanctions over the conflict against Belarussian individuals and organisations. We condemn the role that Belarussian authorities have played so far and urge them to step back from this appalling path being charted by President Putin.

We are also determined to ensure that the Russian government pays the price for their appalling violation of international law and the UN Charter. This is why, the UK, together with our allies, have implemented the biggest sanctions package ever imposed against a G20 nation. And we are not alone in this. Across the world we've seen organisations from banks to oil companies, to football leagues make it clear that President Putin and his regime must be isolated from the international community for his actions. At yesterday's UN General Assembly, 141 countries voted in favour of a resolution condemning Russia's attack on Ukraine. Russia is now an international pariah.

The UK stands together with Ukraine and the Ukrainian people. We will make the Russian government pay the price of its actions, and we will hold them accountable for their crimes, for as long as it takes. We do not and will never accept the Russian government's attempts to change borders or impose its influence by force.

I request that this statement be attached to the journal of the day.