

Russia's ongoing war of aggression against Ukraine: UK OSCE statement, 17 March 2022

Thank you Mr Chair. I'm grateful to the UN Assistant High Commissioner for Operations for briefing us today. As he has just said, this week we passed a terrible milestone – 3 million people have been forced to flee Ukraine. Forced to flee due to President Putin's war of choice. We are grateful to Poland and other neighbouring countries for the generosity and the compassion that they have shown to fleeing Ukrainians.

Hundreds of thousands of people have also left their homes within Ukraine seeking places of safety elsewhere in the country.

We are grateful to UNHCR for their work to support those who have fled their homes.

Sadly, the numbers of those displaced is only likely to rise as we see Russia increasing the number of Ukrainian towns and cities that it targets with shelling. Last week there were attacks reported on Lutsk in north western Ukraine and Ivano-Frankivsk.

As Martin Griffiths told us last week, it is vital that civilians are afforded safe passage to leave areas of active hostilities in the direction of their choosing. While we welcome reports that some civilians were able to depart from Mariupol on Tuesday, we continue to be concerned by evidence that Russia has targeted evacuation corridors. Russia's continued attempts to force civilians to flee via Russia and Belarus are cynical and unacceptable.

Meanwhile 12.7 million people are stranded in conflict affected areas as the Russian government resorts to ever more barbaric tactics. Russia is using cluster munitions and thermobaric rockets, weapons designed to inflict maximum damage wherever they are deployed.

For those civilians who have been unable to leave encircled cities like Mariupol and Volnovakha the situation is life-threatening. Not only have they been facing shelling daily, but hundreds of thousands of people are facing critical shortages of food, water and life-saving medicines. We are shocked by multiple reports that Russian forces shelled a theatre and a swimming pool in Mariupol where we understand people were sheltering. Mr Chair, who can hear the harrowing testimonies coming from civilians in Mariupol and not be moved? Moved by anger at the Russian government's actions and moved by determination to bring those responsible for atrocities to justice.

Likewise, Mr Chair who can not be moved by the bravery demonstrated by Ukrainians? Ukrainians protesting Russian military control in Kherson, Berdyansk and Melitopol. We are deeply concerned at reports of arrests of protestors being made by Russian forces in those cities, as well as reported

abductions and abuse of Ukrainian activists, human rights defenders, volunteers, journalists, health-care workers and government representatives in the areas of Ukraine under control of the Russian army. Russia must immediately release all illegally-detained persons in Ukraine.

Sadly, as the esteemed US Ambassador rightly pointed out last week, we know all too well the results of Russia's efforts to stamp out opposition to their presence in Ukraine. This week we mark eight years since Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea, which they attempted to seal with a sham referendum and enforce with brutal oppression. Our thoughts remain with all Ukrainians wrongfully detained simply for expressing the truth – that Crimea is an integral part of Ukraine.

Russia's attempts to subvert Ukrainian democracy is an unacceptable abuse of OSCE principles and commitments.

In the face of these appalling violations of fundamental freedoms by Russia, the work of human rights organisations is more important than ever. We welcome [the appointment of three eminent experts to conduct an independent fact finding mission under the Moscow Mechanism](#); a mission that is supported by Ukraine and 45 participating States.

This is important because, Mr Chair, facts matter. Even the Russian government knows that facts matter – otherwise they would not be going to such lengths to conceal them from the Russian people. [As the OSCE Representative on the Freedom of the Media has highlighted](#), Russia has blocked access to several media websites and introduced a law on the spread of so-called "fake" information about the brutal actions of the Russian Armed Forces. Several Russian media representatives have resigned in the face of overwhelming editorial interference. Those who, like Marina Ovsyannikova, dare to defend the truth, those individuals face arrest.

Mr Chair, we will not stand by as President Putin wages his campaign against the Ukrainian people. We will hold him accountable for his crimes. We will work with prosecutors at the International Criminal Court (ICC) to help them get the information they need. And we will not relent in our mission to see justice done. This hideous and barbaric venture must end in failure. However long it takes, that will be the steadfast and unflinching goal of the United Kingdom.

I ask Mr Chair that this statement be attached to the journal of the day.