

Special OSCE meeting on Russia's ongoing aggression against Ukraine: UK statement, 27 February 2022

Thank you, Mr Chair, for convening this Special Permanent Council meeting today.

It is deeply saddening that we are meeting for the fourth time in less than a week in the most appalling of circumstances. The news from Kyiv and elsewhere in Ukraine is grim. Russia's leaders have – without need or provocation – launched the largest European war since 1945. They have brought the madness of conventional war – a madness we had thought consigned to history – back to Europe. And they have done this against a peaceful, sovereign, and democratic neighbour.

Russia's actions show flagrant disregard for the UN Charter, the Budapest Memorandum, the Minsk Agreements and the Helsinki Final Act. Alongside this, Russia has disregarded all of the subsequent OSCE Declarations and de-escalation mechanisms that it not only freely signed up to, but helped to build. The Russian Government has walked away from its commitments designed to protect all our security and is looking to conquer an independent state by force of arms. This is an attack not only on Ukraine, but on the security and freedom of Europe as a whole.

We have by now all become used to the rhythm of the lies of the Russian government. Russia said that their military build-up was merely an exercise – a lie. Russia said that Ukraine was a threat – a lie. And Russia is saying that they are conducting a peacekeeping operation – a lie.

But the truth of the Russian Government's actions in Ukraine is now beginning to emerge. [As the Director of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights \(ODIHR\) said on Friday](#): "While the attack on Ukraine is little more than a day old, it is already taking its toll on civilians". The British Government has verified multiple instances of military strikes destroying large apartment buildings across Kyiv. UNICEF are reporting terrified families sheltering underground across the city. We have seen reporting of civilians shot by Russian soldiers, and – unbelievably – of tanks crushing people alive in their cars. We have verified footage of Uragan Multiple Launch Rocket Systems – weapons with wide area effects – indiscriminately targeting the city of Akhterka, causing many casualties. And, Mr Chairman, I am sorry to say, we have verified that a kindergarten called 'Solnyshko' has been completely destroyed.

Overnight, we have seen reports that Ukraine's energy infrastructure has been targeted, including the oil depot in Rovenky, Luhansk, and Vasylkiv Oil depot near Kyiv. We are also concerned by reports of heightened levels of radiation detected in the Chernobyl Exclusion – just a couple of examples of the environmental cost this unprovoked Russian invasion is starting to have.

This crisis is also leading to displacement. UN agencies suggests around 100,000 people have lost their homes. Innocent civilians fleeing Russia's onslaught are now arriving in Moldova, Romania, Slovakia, Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic. We have reports that on Saturday morning there was a 58km queue on the border with Moldova, with 30,000 people having crossed. These have grown since. You mentioned Mr Chair the thousands of civilians arriving into Poland. I am grateful for the humanitarian spirit in which these countries are receiving innocent civilians. We must also support the safe passage out of Ukraine for the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission teams.

The Russian military – under the government's orders – bomb civilians and have caused thousands to flee their homes. They call this demilitarisation. They destroy kindergartens, and call it denazification. Mr Chairman, they will make a desert, and call it peace. Have they no shame? Have they no shame?

Mr Chairman, the Geneva Conventions have, for over 150 years, codified the Laws of Armed Conflict. The President of the International Committee of the Red Cross has said that all sides must adhere to international humanitarian law. He has said, 'Attacks must not be directed against civilian objects'. And he has said that, 'the use of weapons with wide area effects should be avoided in populated areas'. And Amnesty International has said that the Russian military's use of area weapons in densely populated areas may constitute war crimes.

One day – when this horrific attack and unfolding tragedy is all over – Russian soldiers will have to look their Ukrainian brothers in the eye and answer to them for what they have done.

Until that day comes, we will make President Putin pay. Three days ago in this forum, our Foreign Secretary announced the toughest package of sanctions that Russia has ever faced. We said at the time, these sanctions will only get tougher. More sanctions were announced yesterday. Last night decisive action was taken with international partners to shut Russia out of the global financial system, including the important first step of ejecting Russian banks from SWIFT. We will continue to provide defensive assistance to Ukraine. And where there is evidence of war crimes, we will ensure that – however long it takes – justice is served.

Mr Chair, the UK, with our international partners, stands united in condemning the Russian government's premeditated, unprovoked and unjustified aggression against the Ukrainian people. We stand with Ukraine. We have nothing but the utmost respect and admiration for the brave men and women of Ukraine's armed forces, whose tenacity and fortitude – our military intelligence assesses – have stopped President Putin achieving any of his day-one objectives. We defend and will always defend the Ukrainian people's right to choose their own destiny, and make their own security choices. Free from external aggression and free from coercion. We stand shoulder-to-shoulder with the people of Ukraine – for however long it takes – to ensure that their sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence is rightfully restored.

Mr Chair, the world is watching. Russia is now an international pariah. Russia needs to stop its attack and withdraw its forces. President Putin's squalid venture will ultimately fail and will be seen to fail. However long it takes, that will be the steadfast and unflinching goal of the United Kingdom. Thank you.