

Special session on Ukraine at the Annual Security Review Conference: UK statement

Thank you Mr Secretary General. I would like to thank the Albanian Chairmanship for organising this special session on the security situation in Ukraine. I would also like to thank the panel for their valuable insights. I share many of the concerns expressed by our partners, including the EU, that have been highlighted today.

The UK is an ally and friend of Ukraine and we fully support their sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence within their internationally recognised borders and their waters. Since 2014, in violation of OSCE principles and commitments, the Russian Federation has sent troops to Crimea, attempted to illegally annex sovereign Ukrainian territory and sought to destabilise Ukraine by instigating and fuelling conflict in Donbas. Sadly, in the six years since the conflict in Donbas began, approximately 13,000 people have lost their lives, including nearly 3,500 civilians. The humanitarian situation affects 3.5 million people who are mostly vulnerable, including elderly civilians and children.

I would like to pay tribute to Ms Lubrani and all the UN staff working to support Ukraine in mitigating the humanitarian effects of the conflict. I commend the excellent work of the ICRC in Ukraine, under the able leadership of Ms Gillette, in trying to alleviate the situation of some of those who are most vulnerable in this conflict. I would also like to pay tribute to the many other humanitarian organisations that have faced unnecessary access restrictions this year due to the Russia-backed armed formations. Russia bears a heavy responsibility for the ongoing loss of life and devastation to civilian lives. They must use their influence, with the armed formations they back, to respect the ceasefire, protect critical infrastructure and to make progress on humanitarian demining.

I wish to thank Ambassador Cevik and his dedicated team of SMM monitors for their factual, impartial reporting of the situation in eastern Ukraine. The SMM operates in challenging circumstances and the UK is deeply concerned by continued restrictions on the Mission's freedom of movement, in areas held by Russia-backed armed formations, as well as incidents that threaten the safety of monitors.

The situation has been made worse by the Russia-backed armed formations' use of COVID-19 as a pretext to restrict the Mission's ability to cross the Line of Contact and between non-government controlled Donetsk and Luhansk regions. This has effectively divided the Mission into three parts, in violation of its mandate to operate as a single, cohesive Mission throughout Ukraine. These restrictions on the SMM are unacceptable and we call on Russia to play its crucial role in ensuring that the SMM has full, safe and unhindered access in accordance with their mandate.

We also thank Ambassador Grau and her team for their important work in the Trilateral Contact Group; you continue to have our full support. The UK is a firm supporter of the Minsk agreements and the Normandy Format. We urge all sides to fully implement their obligations under the agreements and work urgently to achieve a full and sustainable ceasefire. This is fundamental to any further progress towards peace in eastern Ukraine.

Unfortunately, Russia has repeatedly failed to meet their obligations that are essential in bringing peace to eastern Ukraine. Since the last Normandy Summit, ceasefire violations have continued along the Line of Contact, including the use of heavy artillery, resulting in further casualties. We consistently see SMM reporting of sophisticated Russian equipment, such as the Zhitel jamming device. SMM Long Range UAVs continue to observe military-type trucks travelling on dirt track roads between the border and the Manych holding site in non-government controlled areas on no fewer than seven occasions. These are just a few examples. Russia could use its considerable influence on the Russia-backed armed formations to ensure they comply with the Minsk agreement commitments. Instead it fuels the conflict by supplying them with weapons and personnel.

The situation in Crimea remains of grave concern. Since its illegal annexation in 2014, which the UK does not and will not accept, Russia has focused on militarising the peninsula, undermining the territorial integrity of Ukraine and threatening the security of the wider region. Russia has increased its military personnel on the ground, including through the illegal conscription of at least 21,000 Crimean people. It has deployed a multi-layered air, naval and ballistic missile defence system in the peninsula. The Black Sea Fleet has strengthened its coastal missile brigades with BAL and BASTION systems, capable of destroying targets at sea and on land. The worrying reports of closure of parts of the Black Sea near the Crimea Peninsula, for the purpose of combat training and military exercises, impede navigation and undermine regional security.

Finally, I'd like to thank Ambassador Herasymenko for sharing his insights on the challenges faced not just by his own country, but also by the entire OSCE community, stemming from Russia's ongoing violation of OSCE principles and commitments in Ukraine. We stand united with Ukraine in calling out unacceptable Russian aggression against sovereign Ukrainian territory and its people. We call on Russia to cease its financial and military support to armed formations in eastern Ukraine, implement the Minsk agreements and end its illegal annexation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the City of Sevastopol. The international community will not be silenced on these issues. The Ukrainian people deserve peace. Thank you Mr Secretary General.