

Supporting Ukraine's independence

Thank you very much, Madam President, and thank you also to our briefers on the VTC and to the Undersecretary-General.

Madam President, the Minsk agreements provide a roadmap to a peaceful resolution of the conflict in eastern Ukraine. The United Kingdom reiterates our firm support for those agreements and for Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity. And I welcome the minister here today and thank him for joining us. The United Kingdom underlines our support for French and German efforts to facilitate a negotiated end to the conflict through the Normandy process.

Madam President, we welcome President Zelenskyy's clear commitment to ending the conflict and the important steps he's taken towards achieving peace through diplomatic means, including prisoner exchanges, acceptance of the Steinmeier formula and progress on disengagement.

Madam President, the Russian Ambassador spoke at length about the failure of others in fulfilling their obligations under the Minsk agreements. His account was largely a falsehood, wrapped in a fiction inside a fairy tale. Rather than enumerate where we believe the Russian account is misleading, I will say simply that I endorse what the German representative said in laying out all those areas of the agreements that Russia has violated. Rather than reigning in its proxies in the non-government controlled areas of eastern Ukraine, Russia has furnished them with arms and personnel. Russia claims to act only in the interests of those Ukrainians living in those areas, but does nothing to ensure the safe delivery of international humanitarian aid so desperately needed by many of the communities there.

Madam President, Russia's only objective in Ukraine is to undermine that country's sovereignty and territorial integrity. They want Moscow, rather than Ukrainians themselves, to define Ukraine's future.

Madam President, we do agree with Russia that local elections should pave the way for special status to be granted in parts of the Donbas. But these local elections can take place only under proper conditions. And these conditions include a comprehensive ceasefire, unfettered access for the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission and the withdrawal of foreign troops. And this is a far cry, as we've heard, from the reality we face today.

Two months on from the last Normandy summit, ceasefire violations continue along the line of contact, including the use of heavy artillery. Ukrainian troops continue to die at the hands of separatists armed and sponsored by Russia. As recently as this morning, as other speakers have noted, there was a sharp increase in violations of the ceasefire, near to this allotted disengagement area.

Despite the efforts of international de-mining organisations like HALO, an organisation my government is proud to support, Russia's proxies are planting

yet more mines near the Petrivske disengagement area. We have heard how the Special Monitoring Mission's freedom of movement is severely limited and we constantly see the monitoring missions reporting of sophisticated Russian equipment, such as Zhitel jamming device.

In 2018 and 2019, the Special Monitoring Mission long range UAVs observed military-type tracks, travelling on dirt track roads between the border and the manic holding site in the NGCAs on no fewer than seven occasions.

Madam President, the combination of these Russian actions have a devastating impact on the lives of Ukrainians civilians. In the six years since this conflict began, over 13,000 people have lost their lives, including nearly 3,500 civilians, and almost 30,000 have been injured. 3.5 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance. Russia bears a heavy responsibility for the ongoing suffering. So we invite Russia to immediately cease the practice of sending uninspected "humanitarian convoys" across the border and to focus instead on facilitating the safe delivery of international aid based on an agreed international mechanism as foreseen under the Minsk agreement. We also look to Russia to ensure the ICRC has full and unconditional access to the detainees held in the NGCAs – access to the OSCE has said was denied as recently as January.

Madam President, Russia claims she's not party to the conflict. In reality, Russia started the conflict in Ukraine. Russia continues to fuel the conflict in Ukraine and people suffer because of it. I, for one, welcome the Russian Ambassador's enthusiasm for Security Council meetings on Ukraine and we look forward to other future opportunities to ask Russia what Russia is doing to ensure the agreements are implemented.

Madam President, I'd like to end by reiterating the United Kingdom's enduring support for Ukraine's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders and territorial waters. Ukrainian people deserve peace and we will continue to hold Russia account to this end.

Thank you, Madam President.