

The human cost of Russia's war in Ukraine continues to grow: UK statement to the OSCE, 31 March 2022

Thank you Mr Chair. This week at the Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting, we heard harrowing stories from Ukrainian civil society organisations about the human impact that President Putin's premeditated and unjustified war on Ukraine has created.

Our colleagues from civil society described how they took shelter in basements during the Russian shelling that has rained down on villages, towns and cities across Ukraine. Every day the human cost of Russia's indiscriminate attacks on civilian areas continues to grow. Tragically, according to the UN over 100 children have already been killed. I am grateful also to Governor Kim for joining us today and sharing the appalling impact of Russia's invasion on his region, including the recent attack on the regional administrative building. I offer the UK's condolences to all the victims and their families.

Civil society organisations also shone a light on the dire situation in Ukrainian cities that have been encircled by Russian troops such as Chernihiv, Sumy, Kharkiv and Mariupol. In an effort to break the resistance of these cities, the Russian government has stooped to new lows; effectively forcing a humanitarian crisis through constant shelling and by refusing to allow the delivery of humanitarian aid to these cities. In Mariupol alone, local authorities estimate that close to 5000 people have been killed.

Yesterday many delegations had the opportunity to hear from Ukrainian speakers about the appalling human rights violations perpetrated by Russian forces in the cities under their control. The Mayor of Melitopol, Ivan Fedorov, described how Russian forces abducted him in broad daylight and held him in detention for six days, where he heard evidence of torture of other detainees. Sadly, there are many other Ukrainian local government members who have been abducted by Russian forces who have not yet been released. I would like to share the names of just some of them: Serhiy Pryima, the chair of the Melitopol District Council, Olena Plaksina a member of the Tokmak town council, Viktor Mariuniak the headman of the village of Stara Zburiyivka, Mykola Masliy, a member of Kupyansk town council, and Oleksandr Medvediov, Mayor of Snovsk.

At the same event, Oleg Baturin, a journalist from Kakhovka, shared how he was held captive for eight days by Russian forces who told him that they wanted to take revenge for his journalistic activities. I am deeply grateful to the Ukrainian Ambassador for organising this meeting and to the speakers for courageously sharing their stories from yesterday.

Russia is resorting, Mr Chair, to these abhorrent tactics because they have not been able to overcome the determination of millions of Ukrainians who

look to live in a free, democratic Ukraine. These brave civilians often march carrying nothing more than Ukrainian flags and are met by tanks and Russian forces who shoot at protesters. Local government representatives, journalists, priests, civil society activists and Ukrainian military veterans are all being targeted. Appallingly, there are multiple reports of sexual violence, including rape, by Russian armed forces.

I would like to pay tribute to Ukrainian civil society organisations and their courageous members for their dedicated work in shining a light on these atrocities. Their work will help to ensure that Russia is held accountable for its actions. The cooperation between the Ukrainian Government and civil society organisations is also an example to us all of how a flourishing civil society, which is free to speak its mind, enhances a country's security – even in the gravest of circumstances.

The people and Government of the United Kingdom stand firm and resolute in our solidarity with the people of Ukraine. To that end we have provided military equipment, economic support, humanitarian aid and supported efforts to ensure accountability for war crimes – including by appointing Sir Howard Morrison QC as an independent adviser to Iryna Venediktova – to support Ukraine's journey in seeking justice against the Russian government's actions.

President Putin is attempting to hide the extent of the atrocities we have seen from his people and from the world. The Russian government spouts a barrage of disinformation, they attack television and radio infrastructure in Ukraine, block free media in Russia, and they detain journalists. Now they are trying to put an end to the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission's impartial, facts-based reporting by unilaterally blocking the extension of its mandate. But, Mr Chair, as the decisive votes at the UN have shown, the international community is not fooled. The United Kingdom certainly is not fooled – no amount of disinformation or feigned pretence at troop withdrawal will distract us from what is needed to stop the bloodshed in Ukraine. Russia must end this unjustifiable war, enable humanitarian access, abide by international law and international humanitarian law, withdraw its troops and respect Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Thank you, Mr Chair and I ask that this statement be attached to the journal of the day.