

UK intervention in response to Ambassadors Çevik and Grau: UK statement

Thank you Mr Chairperson. I would like to join previous speakers in thanking Ambassadors Çevik and Grau for briefing us today. I commend you, and your teams, for your crucial work in these difficult times.

The UK welcomes Ambassador Çevik's assessment of the impact of the additional measures to strengthen the ceasefire. The sustained reduction in ceasefire violations has also led to a reduction in civilian casualties and in damage to infrastructure since July; none have benefitted from this more than the innocent people of eastern Ukraine who have been suffering on a daily basis as a result of this Russia-fuelled conflict. It shows what can be achieved when there is political will and we applaud Ukraine for their flexibility and commitment in achieving these measures.

We support the crucial work of Ambassador Grau and the Trilateral Contact Group towards peace and stability in eastern Ukraine. Yet while the strengthened ceasefire has offered welcome respite, and we welcome progress towards opening two new Entry-Exit checkpoints, there still remains much to be done to achieve further progress. In particular, we call for the implementation of the agreed areas for demining and for further disengagement as soon as possible, before the upcoming winter weather makes this more challenging. We also call for the exchange of conflict-related detainees based on the principle of "all for all", and for the ICRC to be granted access to detainees in non-government controlled areas.

Sadly, the Russian Federation consistently fails to act constructively in TCG discussions. It is unacceptable that political issues under discussion in the Trilateral Contact Group are being used to block progress on vital security and humanitarian issues. Moreover, the obstructive raising of procedural obstacles is distracting from the TCG's vital work. We support the agreed, established processes of the TCG and its Working Groups and stress that these should be maintained. We call on Russia to engage productively, and match the political will demonstrated by Ukraine, so that real progress can be made.

Ambassador Çevik, we commend you and your entire Mission for your vital work in challenging circumstances. We value the leadership you have demonstrated during the pandemic and we support the sensible mitigation measures put in place by the Mission. We share your concern that, despite the partial release of the restrictions imposed by the Russia-backed armed formations on movement at official crossing routes at the Line of Contact, remaining restrictions still impede the Mission's freedom of movement; particularly by preventing the seamless crossing of the line of contact towards the non-government controlled areas.

It is unacceptable that these restrictions result in the Mission being

obliged to work in three separate operational areas. Such actions undermine the ability of the SMM to fulfil its mandate, which all members of this Council, including Russia, committed to support.

The SMM also continues to face systematic restrictions on its freedom of movement within areas outside of Ukrainian government control. We call on Russia, as a party to the conflict, to use its influence with the armed formations to bring these restrictions to an end. We reiterate that the SMM and its assets must have full, safe and unimpeded access throughout the entire territory of Ukraine, including Crimea, which is part of Ukraine. This access is all the more critical, given serious concerns about Russia's ongoing violation of human rights in Crimea, as well as its militarisation of the peninsula.

Ambassador Çevik, we read with sadness your Mission's regular reports of children, the elderly and pregnant women being unable to cross the line of contact, and of them being forced to sleep on the ground or on benches in the open, without proper facilities. This is unacceptable. We share concerns raised in your report that these restrictions on civilians' freedom of movement are impeding access to medicine and education, and preventing families from being reunited. While reasonable precautions should be taken to prevent the spread of COVID-19, we call on the Russia-backed armed formations to refrain from imposing unnecessary limitations on civilians' freedom of movement.

Against this backdrop it is inspirational to hear of the SMM's "Women on the Contact Line" book, which demonstrates how women community leaders, and women SMM monitors, are working towards an inclusive resolution of the conflict. We thoroughly welcome its publication and the British Embassy Kyiv will be publicising it on their social media platforms as part of their "Women on the Frontline" campaign next week. The Ukrainian women role models in this book remind us of the importance of including the real voices of conflict-affected women in all aspects of decision-making. This must include decisions related to the peaceful resolution of the conflict.

The UK reiterates our support for the Minsk agreements and our firm desire to see the peaceful resolution of the conflict in full respect of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. We welcome the efforts of the Trilateral Contact Group and the Normandy Four in this regard and repeat our call for a full implementation of the outstanding commitments from last year's Paris Summit.

The UK strongly supports Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial Integrity within its internationally recognised borders, including its territorial waters. We will continue to work with international partners on deterring Russian interference and aggression including in the Black Sea region. We do not and will not recognise Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea. The UK has consistently stood with Ukraine in opposing all instances of Russian aggression towards Ukraine and we will continue to do so, including through sanctions with our international partners.