

UK intervention in response to Ambassadors Çevik and Grau

Thank you Chair. I would like to thank Ambassador Çevik for briefing us today and Ambassador Grau for providing her update through her representative, Daniel Ricco. We are very grateful to both of you and your teams for the work you do to promote the peaceful and sustainable resolution of the conflict.

While we welcome the significant reduction in violence and casualties since the 27 July, Ambassador Çevik, your report shows us that we cannot be complacent. During the reporting period, the daily average of ceasefire violations was almost double the daily average between the 27 July to the 16 September 2020.

The Special Monitoring Mission (SMM) also continues to observe new and extended trenches, improvements to fortifications, and heavy weapons located in and near residential areas, in violation of the measures agreed to strengthen the ceasefire. In this context, we note that once again the overwhelming majority of heavy weapons observed by the SMM were in non-government controlled areas. This activity exposes civilians and civilian infrastructure to heightened risk of armed violence.

Your reports have highlighted the ongoing plight of civilians affected by this Russian-fuelled conflict. Sadly, the burdens faced by civilians have been increased by the restrictions placed on their freedom of movement. Ukrainians rely on crossing the line of contact to access jobs, education, pensions, medical care and to see their families. It is unacceptable that the Russian-backed armed formations are still refusing to fully open the new crossing points at Shchastia and Zolote. We commend Ambassador Grau for her continued efforts to resolve this issue.

Women have been particularly affected by these restrictions. Ambassador Çevik, we welcome the inclusion of their stories in your written report, as well as the accounts of the challenges faced by women working for peace and security across Ukraine. It is essential that women are included in official decision-making and conflict resolution efforts for those efforts to be effective.

We also highly appreciate your ongoing work to ensure the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission continues its important work, whilst ensuring duty of care for all staff remains a priority. We commend the numerous measures you have taken to protect SMM staff and, by extension, host communities in light of COVID-19, including regular PCR and antigen screening of Mission members and enhancing telecommuting capabilities.

Unfortunately, restrictions on the SMM's freedom of movement continue to pose an additional challenge to the mission's activities. We noted that during the reporting period 94 per cent of all restrictions faced by the SMM, including those imposed under the pretext of COVID-19, occurred in non-government-

controlled areas.

We call on Russia to use its influence over the armed formations it backs to ensure full, safe and unimpeded access for the Mission's personnel and assets, in accordance with its mandate. We reiterate again that the Mission's mandate applies to the entire territory of Ukraine, including Crimea and the uncontrolled segment of the Ukraine-Russia State border.

The SMM's ability to monitor is further impeded by mines and other explosive objects. The presence of these mines on roads frequently used by the SMM poses a serious threat to the Mission. Moreover, they continue to endanger the lives of civilians. Between 17 September and 21 December 2020, the SMM corroborated 38 civilian casualties due to mines, unexploded ordinance and other explosive devices. Ambassador Çevik, sadly your report also makes clear the heavy price that civilians continue to pay for the failure to mark, fence and clear such explosive material. We thank you and Ambassador Grau for your continued efforts in the TCG on a demining plan. It is appalling that Russia and the armed formations it backs still will not agree to its implementation.

We are grateful to Ambassador Grau for her work in the Trilateral Contact Group towards improving the situation for Ukrainian civilians and achieving peace and stability in eastern Ukraine. It is unacceptable that political issues in the TCG have been repeatedly used to block progress on vital security and humanitarian issues. We call on Russia to act constructively in the TCG, and in its Working Groups, to ensure that progress can be made.

The UK reiterates our strong support to both Ambassador Çevik and Ambassador Grau. Where there has been failure to make progress on the issues I have highlighted today, it is not for lack of hard work or dedication on your part, but rather a lack of political will, particularly from Russia who continues to fuel the conflict.

We reiterate our support for the Minsk agreements to deliver a peaceful resolution to the conflict in full respect of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and the work of the Trilateral Contact Group and the Normandy Four in this regard. Russia must play its part and fulfil the commitments it made at the Paris Summit in December 2019 (many of which I have touched upon today) and under the Minsk agreements; and reverse all unilateral measures that undermine them.

We repeat our call on Russia to withdraw its military personnel and weapons from the territory of Ukraine; to cease its support for the armed formations it backs; and to stop access restrictions and intimidation of the SMM in areas held by Russia-backed armed formations.

The UK continues to strongly support Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders, including its territorial waters. 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, together with our international partners.