

UK responds to OSCE reports on the conflict in eastern Ukraine

Thank you Madam Chairperson. Ambassador Çevik, Ambassador Kinnunen we are grateful for your reports today and all your efforts towards a peaceful and sustainable resolution of the conflict. Ambassador Kinnunen welcome to the forum for this first time.

Ambassador Çevik, the Special Monitoring Mission (SMM)'s impartial, facts-based reporting remains vital in providing an understanding of the security situation on the ground. While your report showed that the daily number of ceasefire violations – 239 between 7 June and 8 September – had decreased since the last reporting period, it remains markedly higher than the months immediately following the July 2020 strengthened ceasefire. We were also deeply concerned that the Mission recorded a doubling of the use of weapons proscribed under the Minsk agreements and 403 weapons in violation of their respective withdrawal lines, 72 per cent of which were in non-government controlled areas.

Sadly, this violence continues to lead to civilian casualties and fatalities. 14 civilian casualties due to shelling and small arms fire occurred in August alone – the highest monthly number of casualties due to shelling and small arms fire since July 2020. We urge all sides to uphold the strengthened ceasefire and cease the use of weapons proscribed under the Minsk Agreements. Civilians suffer the cost of failing to do so.

Ambassador Çevik, we also share your alarm at the persistent restrictions on the SMM's access and technical assets. We continue to condemn the unacceptable limitations that the Russia-backed armed formations impose on your Mission's ability to freely cross the line of contact, which, as you have described today, violates the Mission's mandate and effectively forces it to act as three separate entities. We note that 90% of SMM patrols' access restrictions during the reporting period occurred in areas held by the Russia-backed armed formations. This is particularly the case close to the Ukraine-Russia State border temporarily outside of Ukrainian government control, where the Mission has also been denied the necessary security guarantees to open long-planned and much needed forward patrol bases.

We call on Russia to take the necessary action to ensure that the SMM has safe and secure access, in accordance with its mandate, throughout the entire territory of Ukraine, which includes the temporarily uncontrolled border and illegally annexed Crimea.

Ambassador Çevik – Thank you for the information provided on the move of the Long Range Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) base to Varvarivka. We hope that this will facilitate an increased operation of this vital SMM asset-class, which has been subject to an unacceptable level of jamming. We condemn in the strongest terms all interference and targeting of the Mission's technical equipment, including both its cameras and UAV systems.

Madam Chair, 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 (TCG) and the Normandy Four in this regard. We call on Russia to withdraw its military personnel and weapons from the territory of Ukraine and cease its support for the armed formations it backs.

The UK strongly supports 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.