

UK statement in response to Ambassadors Cevik and Grau

Thank you Mr Chairperson. I would like to join the EU and others in thanking Ambassador Cevik and Ambassador Grau for briefing us virtually today and commend you both for finding ways to continue your vital work, whilst taking appropriate measures to help prevent the spread of infection. As this is the first time I am taking the floor today, I would also like to thank the Albanian chairmanship for facilitating this meeting and for the leadership they have provided in these difficult times.

We welcome the 16th April mutual release and exchange of detainees on the eve of Orthodox Easter. Unfortunately, however, we have little other cause for celebration and the current Covid-19 outbreak risks exacerbating civilian suffering even further.

Many Ukrainians remain unjustly detained in non-government controlled Donetsk and Luhansk regions, in illegally annexed Crimea and in the Russian Federation. Many are reportedly being held in conditions that render them vulnerable to infection. We call on Russia to release all illegally detained Ukrainian political prisoners. We also condemn Russia's latest moves to further undermine Ukrainian sovereignty and make life harder for people living in Crimea – including another round of conscription of residents of Crimea into the Russian military.

Whilst Easter brought a prisoner exchange, there was sadly no recommitment to the ceasefire. Indeed, Ambassador Cevik's report demonstrates that the security situation has deteriorated since the start of the year, with the situation of the Donetsk Filtration Station and the Vasylivka pumping station remaining concerning. We join the call of UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres for a global ceasefire during this outbreak, and we note that a comprehensive and sustainable ceasefire in eastern Ukraine is all the more important to ensure that the water and electricity supply, which civilians need to prevent the spread of Covid-19, is not interrupted. Ambassador Grau, I would be very interested to hear what discussion there has been of the call for a global ceasefire in the Trilateral Contact Group.

Today is additionally sombre as we mark three years since the death of SMM paramedic Joseph Stone. It is a poignant reminder of the dangers that mines continue to pose to both civilians and the SMM. We would like to reiterate Ambassador Cevik's call for comprehensive demining, especially around hospitals and access routes, which may be required during the Covid-19 outbreak.

Ambassador Cevik, we would like to thank you in particular for continuing to take the decisions necessary to balance duty of care with implementing the Mission's mandate. Your Mission has always operated in challenging circumstances, and we note that the systematic restrictions in non-government controlled areas continue unabated. Now you are facing additional challenges,

which are being compounded by the unacceptable restrictions imposed by the Russia-backed armed formations on your mission's ability to cross the Line of Contact and between non-government controlled Donetsk and Luhansk regions. Ambassador Cevik, we would be grateful if you could give us an update on the restrictions imposed on the Mission at the entry-exit checkpoint at Stanytsia Luhanska Bridge in particular.

Unfortunately vital humanitarian assistance provided by international organisations like the ICRC is also being affected by these same restrictions, which is crucial to helping civilians.

We therefore call on Russia to act responsibly and use their influence over the armed-formations they back to end these restrictions, to respect the ceasefire, to protect critical infrastructure and to make progress on humanitarian demining.

We reiterate our full support to the Minsk agreements and call on all sides to implement them in full. Our support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognised borders, including its territorial waters, is unwavering and we will continue to call on Russia to return to respect for the OSCE principles and commitments that enhance all our security.