

UN calls for 'new political energy' to end the conflict in eastern Ukraine

The United Nations top political affairs official on Tuesday stressed the need to breathe life back into ongoing efforts to end the conflict in eastern Ukraine, now in its fifth year, which has killed and injured thousands of civilians, plunging the country into a humanitarian crisis.

"To overcome the status quo, it is imperative to inject efforts with new political energy," said Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Rosemary DiCarlo, during her briefing to the Security Council.

She said that the conflict between the pro-government forces and separatists "may no longer make major international headlines, but it is neither dormant nor frozen," requiring attention, particularly to alleviate the human cost of the conflict.

While violence and casualties have declined since 2015, the killing, destruction and immense suffering continues, she said.

The civilian death toll of the conflict has now exceeded 2,700, with as many as 9,000 injured, according to the [Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights](#) (OHCHR). An estimated 1.6 million people remain internally displaced – the largest uprooted population in Europe and among the 10 largest in the world.

Over half a million civilians live within five kilometres of the 457-kilometre line which divides the opposing forces in eastern Ukraine, subjected day and night to shelling, gunfire, landmines and unexploded ordnance.

"The area around the Line of Contact is now the third most mine-contaminated area in the world," Ms. DiCarlo said.

She argued that a settlement to the conflict should be based on the February 2015 Minsk Agreements, which set out necessary steps to restore peace there.

The 2015 deal was agreed between the leaders of Russia, Ukraine, France and Germany.

Although "a breakthrough remains elusive", she continued, "we cannot allow ourselves to give in to fatigue or complacency."

In this regard, she urged all parties concerned to implement Security Council resolution 2202 (2015), which supports the package of measures set out in the Minsk Agreements.

She said Tuesday's Council meeting is the first on the situation in Ukraine since 2 February last year, when an upsurge in violence threatened to spiral

out of control.

It comes at a time when the fighting has recently escalated along the contact line and several days after a Dutch-led probe into the crash of Malaysian Airline passenger flight MH17 determined that the missile system used to down the plane originated from a Russian brigade. Russia has said that evidence does not exist to support such findings.

“We are all aware of the recent update of the investigation into the MH17 downing,” she said, stressing that the Security Council, in its resolution 2166 adopted in 2014, demanded that all States cooperate fully with efforts to establish accountability.

As the Secretary-General has expressed, establishing the truth about this event is an important part of achieving justice for the victims and their families.

“For its part, the United Nations remains committed to supporting the search for a peaceful resolution of the conflict, in a manner fully upholding Ukraine’s sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence and in accordance with all relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions,” Ms. DiCarlo concluded.

Conflict stretches millions of Ukrainians to breaking point

Assistant-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Ursula Mueller said that last year, landmines maimed or killed 238 civilians.

The [Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs](#) (OCHA) documented one million crossings per month of the contact line. Civilians risk shelling, sniper-fire and landmines as they make the arduous journey through the five official checkpoints where processing times can range from hours, to days.

Over 600,000 people are regularly exposed to hostilities along the contact line. Families live in damp basements, and more than 100,000 children attend schools with windows lined with sand bags. More than 40,000 homes have been destroyed or damaged.

Only 10 days ago, two schools in the Donetsk region were shelled when hundreds of children were attending classes.

In 2018, humanitarians aim to reach 2.3 million people with vital assistance and protection services, but only 13 per cent of the \$187 million needed has been received.

“This has forced agencies, such as the [World Food Programme](#) to withdraw from Ukraine, even though 1.2 million people are food insecure,” she said.

“This conflict has stretched millions of Ukrainians to breaking point. Many displaced people have exhausted their savings and means of survival,” she warned.