

UN Human Rights Council 51: UK statement following Putin's annexation of four Ukrainian regions

The Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action stressed the importance of democracy for the enjoyment of human rights. And it states, in the clearest terms, that democracy is based on the freely expressed will of the people to determine their own political, economic, social and cultural systems and their full participation in all aspects of their lives.

Yet what we have seen last week in Ukraine sought to make a mockery of these long-recognised principles. Putin's sham referenda must be seen for what they are: a desperate attempt to justify an unprovoked and illegal land grab of sovereign Ukrainian territory. A blatant continuation of the Kremlin's playbook, as seen before in Crimea in 2014. And a clear violation of international law.

This is not democracy, nor the will of the Ukrainian people. This is a farce – carried out with complete disregard for Ukraine's legal and constitutional framework, and down the barrel of a gun.

Let me be clear: the United Kingdom will never accept the regions of Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia as anything other than Ukrainian territory.

Mr President,

The principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity, so central to the UN Charter, are principles which all of us have a responsibility to uphold. As the UN Secretary General said last week, Putin's decision to proceed with the annexation of these regions has no legal value and must be condemned in the strongest terms.

We call on the international community to join us in unequivocally rejecting Russia's attempts to illegally annex Ukrainian territory, and to restore the ability of all people in Ukraine to express their will in a free and democratic society.

Thank you.