

We must all unequivocally reject Russian attempts to illegally annex Ukrainian territory: UK at the UN Security Council

Mr. President,

Russia's holding of sham referenda in the Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson regions of Ukraine is an egregious violation of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity and of the principles of the UN Charter.

As the UN told us today, this process is both illegal and illegitimate.

It is a shameless propaganda effort aimed at justifying Russia's illegal presence on sovereign Ukrainian territory.

We have seen Russia's referendum playbook before in Crimea. We see it playing out again now: disinformation, intimidation and fabrication.

As my Foreign Secretary told the Council last week, we know that President Putin is planning to rig the outcome.

These are regions that voted overwhelmingly to join an independent Ukraine in 1991 and to back President Zelenskyy in 2019.

When given a free vote, their choice has been clear: to be part of a free, independent, democratic Ukraine.

Since invading, Russia's control in these regions has been through violence, torture, filtration and forced deportation.

We've all seen images of soldiers with automatic rifles accompanying the ballots as they move from door to door, forcing Ukrainians to take part.

Any referenda held under these conditions, at the barrel of a gun, can never be remotely close to free or fair.

And the very idea that a referendum on a fundamental question could be held at three days' notice in the middle of a war zone is frankly farcical.

We must all unequivocally reject these illegitimate actions and Russian attempts to illegally annex Ukrainian territory. And support the draft resolution the US and Albania have brought forward today.

Colleagues, this is a critical moment. There is no middle ground. No member of the United Nations should turn a blind eye to Russia tearing up the principles of the UN Charter.

If we allow Russia to believe it can change sovereign borders by force, then the entire system on which we base our shared safety and security is under threat.

These Potemkin referenda, as well as Putin's decision to mobilise Russian men to fight in his illegal war, are admissions that his invasion is failing.

Instead of sending thousands more of his own citizens to their death and inflicting further destruction on Ukraine, he should end this senseless war today.

Thank you.