



## United States Mission to the OSCE

# **The Russian Federation's Ongoing Aggression Against Ukraine**

As delivered by Ambassador Michael Carpenter  
to the Permanent Council, Vienna  
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For over a year, we have witnessed the barbarity of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. As Ukraine continues to defend itself against this aggression, it's important to remember what Russia's occupation of parts of Ukraine means for the people of Ukraine. Filtration operations. Summary executions and torture. Rape and other forms of gender-based sexual violence. We know women, children, older persons, persons with disabilities, and other marginalized groups are most vulnerable to these attacks. Just this week, we saw the video of what appeared to be Russia's soldiers killing an unarmed Ukrainian prisoner of war in a ditch after he said the words "slava Ukraini." That would be a war crime. And overnight, Russia reportedly launched 81 missiles and 8 Shahed kamikaze drones at Ukraine, killing at least five people and forcing the people of Ukraine to endure 7 hours of fear as air raid sirens sounded, as well as cutting power to the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant. So today, I would like to remind us of what is at stake for those on the ground in areas of Ukraine that Russia continues to occupy.

Take 16-year-old Dasha's experience. Forced to come out of hiding in occupied Kherson to search for food, Dasha found two of Russia's soldiers lurking in her house. As she recounted, one of the soldiers, "started to shout, first telling me to undress. I told him that I will not, and he started shouting at me. And he said that if I do not undress, he will kill me. When I resisted, he strangled me and said he'll kill me. Then he issued an unimaginable threat. Either you sleep with me now, or I will bring 20 more people." When Dasha went to the local occupying commander in search of some accountability for this rape, she was threatened with more of the same violence. "He started saying the same things as the rapist had said to me, screaming at me and saying that he would do the same as the rapist did. I was so frightened, and I started crying."

Or take Oksana Minenko's experience when she refused to leave her home after Russia's forces temporarily occupied Kherson. Oksana's husband was a Ukrainian soldier who died on February 24 of last year defending his country. Because of this family connection, Russia's occupying forces repeatedly detained and tortured Oksana. Shortly after her husband's funeral, soldiers found Oksana at the cemetery where they forced her to kneel next to her husband's grave. They then fired weapons behind her back, simulating her execution. Oksana was also subjected to brutal physical abuse. According to her eyewitness report, Russia's soldiers submerged her hands in boiling water, pulled out her fingernails, and beat her in the face so badly she needed plastic surgery. At one point, soldiers forced her to undress, put a bag over her head, and then beat her. In her words, "when you have a bag on your head and you're being beaten, there is such a vacuum, you cannot breathe, you cannot do anything, you cannot defend yourself. One pain grew into another. I was a living corpse."

Russia's forces have also withheld basic necessities in a morally corrupt effort to force Russian Federation citizenship on Ukrainian children. This became a simple question for the occupiers. Do you need baby food or diapers? Only if you could show that you had changed your child's citizenship to that of the Russian Federation would you get these supplies. No Russian birth certificate, no supplies for your child. For those like Natalia Lukina, living with a newborn in a war zone without electricity and without running water, this unconscionable choice could have had tragic consequences had Ukraine not succeeded in compelling Russia's forces to retreat. And Natalia is not alone in these choices. We heard similar testimonials at a meeting last week where speakers described Russia's efforts to force Russian citizenship on Ukrainian children and deport them to Russia. All in an effort to deny these children their Ukrainian identity.

Mr. Chair, Elie Wiesel once said, "we must always take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented." A couple of us around this table should remember that. For our part, we will continue to speak out against Russia's aggression and oppression. Just as the United States will continue to support Ukraine. Last week, we signed a historic memorandum of understanding with Ukraine, Lithuania, Poland, Estonia, Latvia, Slovakia, and Romania that will strengthen our efforts to hold Russia's war criminals accountable, wherever they may be. This arrangement will facilitate further cooperation and information sharing for the investigation and potential prosecution of Russia's war criminals, both the individuals who carried out attacks *and* those who ordered them. This effort builds on decades of cooperation between the United States and Ukraine to investigate and document WWII-era crimes committed in Nazi-occupied Ukraine. In fact, the same U.S. prosecutor who led the Justice Department's work to investigate these Nazi-era crimes will now lead the effort to investigate Russia's crimes in Ukraine. It's appropriate, isn't it?

And to those who have committed these crimes, know the U.S. Congress enacted the Justice for Victims of War Crimes Act that will strengthen our ability to prosecute alleged war criminals who are found in the United States, regardless of the location of the crime and the nationality of the perpetrator or the victim. This is a new tool we intend to use to the fullest extent possible to ensure accountability for crimes committed in Ukraine. In the years ahead, Russia's war criminals who set foot in our country should expect to find themselves quickly escorted to a U.S. court of law.

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