



## **United States Mission to the OSCE**

# **Ongoing Violations of International Law and Defiance of OSCE Principles and Commitments by the Russian Federation in Ukraine**

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires, a.i., Harry Kamian  
to the Permanent Council, Vienna  
March 22, 2018

The United States notes with deep regret the mounting toll of civilian casualties in the now four-year old conflict in Ukraine – a conflict initiated and sustained by Russia. On March 19 the SMM reported an incident in which a 24-year old man was killed and a 30-year old woman was wounded in a grenade explosion in Dobropillia. While details of the incident are yet unclear, these cases, along with the 24 Ukrainian soldiers killed in action this year, can be added to the tens of thousands of innocents severely affected by this unnecessary conflict. The United States repeats its calls for Russia to make good on its commitments in the Minsk agreements by implementing a lasting ceasefire, withdrawing its heavy weapons, disengaging its proxies, and taking steps toward the permanent withdrawal of its forces from Ukraine. Mr. Chair, only when Russia fully acknowledges its role in the conflict and constructively works to bring peace to the Donbas will incidents such as this end.

Mr. Chair, Russia's proxies continue to use access restrictions to prevent the SMM from fully carrying out its mandate. Once again we note that the overwhelming number of access restrictions and interference with SMM patrols take place in areas controlled by Russia-led forces. In its March 13 daily report, the SMM wrote of yet another incident in which one of its patrols was blocked from observing a rail station. The March 13 weekly report noted that all 22 access restrictions occurred in territory controlled by Russia-led forces. The United States calls upon Russia and its proxies to stop their systematic campaign of interfering with SMM patrols and monitoring capabilities. We continue to call for the full, free, and safe access for the SMM throughout Ukraine – including along the internationally recognized border with Russia and in Crimea – according to its mandate.

Mr. Chair, the United States wishes to recognize once again the constructive role the SMM members play in this conflict. The SMM continues facilitating access for the staff of the Donetsk Water Filtration Station to their workplace. They have been the target of four dangerous incidents since the beginning of March. These employees were fired upon while driving clearly marked civilian vehicles commuting to and from work, trying to keep the water running for around 1 million people. Under usual circumstances, this coordinating function would be handled by the Joint Center for Control and Coordination (JCCC). Russia regrettably and unilaterally withdrew its contingent from the JCCC in December. The SMM has commendably stepped forward to fill some of the vacuum.

The abhorrent conditions in Crimea continue. We note with great alarm the announced hunger strike of Volodymyr Balukh, a Ukrainian activist and recognized political prisoner, who was sentenced under dubious charges in occupied Crimea after being arrested in December 2016 by Russian Federal Security Service. The United States calls for the release of Mr. Balukh, along with all other political prisoners, and for the Russian Federation to allow the access of international human rights monitors to occupied Crimea.

In closing, Mr. Chair, let me reiterate that the United States fully supports Ukraine's sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders. We do not, nor will we ever, recognize Russia's purported annexation of Crimea. Crimea-related sanctions on Russia will remain in place until Russia returns full control of the peninsula to Ukraine. And we join our European and other partners in restating that our sanctions against Russia for its aggression in eastern Ukraine will remain until Russia fully implements its commitments under the Minsk agreements.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.