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Seventy-eighth year

Provisional

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New York

<i>President:</i>	Mr. Hoxha	(Albania)
<i>Members:</i>	Brazil	Mr. França Danese
	China	Mr. Geng Shuang
	Ecuador	Mr. Pérez Loose
	France	Mr. De Rivière
	Gabon	Mr. Biang
	Ghana	Mrs. Hackman
	Japan	Mr. Ishikane
	Malta	Mrs. Frazier
	Mozambique	Mr. Fernandes
	Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
	Switzerland	Mrs. Baeriswyl
	United Arab Emirates	Mr. Abushahab
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Dame Barbara Woodward
	United States of America	Mr. Wood

Agenda

Maintenance of peace and security of Ukraine

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Maintenance of peace and security of Ukraine

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Czechia, Estonia, Italy, Poland and Ukraine to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Miroslav Jenča, Assistant Secretary-General for Europe, Central Asia and the Americas, Departments of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and Peace Operations, to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite His Excellency Mr. Olof Skoog, Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I give the floor to Mr. Jenča.

Mr. Jenča: Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine — launched in violation of the Charter of the United Nations and of international law — continues to inflict large-scale suffering on the people of Ukraine, as they face daily, intensifying attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure. Since February 2022, the Office of the United Nations High-Commissioner for Human Rights has verified 26,717 civilian casualties: 9,511 killed and 17,206 injured. At least 549 children have been killed, and 1,166 other children have been injured.

In a latest illustration of the suffering that Russia's invasion inflicts on civilians across the country, just two days ago a daylight missile attack hit a crowded market in Kostiantynivka, in the Donetsk region of Ukraine, reportedly killing 16 people, including a child, and injuring dozens of others. On the same day, a Russian drone attack on the Danube port of Izmail, in the Odesa region, reportedly killed one person and damaged agricultural and port facilities, according to local officials.

The continuing, relentless attacks targeting Ukraine's grain infrastructure on the Black Sea and Danube river ports, after Russia decided not to extend the Black Sea Grain Initiative, risk having far-reaching consequences for global food security. Attacks directed against civilians and civilian infrastructure, including objects necessary for food production and distribution, are prohibited under international law.

We are now approaching the one-year anniversary of the illegal attempt by the Russian Federation to annex the Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhya regions of Ukraine through the organization of illegal so-called "referendums" in those regions in late September 2022. I wish to reiterate that the United Nations remains fully committed to the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders, extending to its territorial waters.

That clear principled position of the United Nations, underpinned by the United Nations Charter and by international law, was unambiguously reaffirmed on 12 October 2022, when the General Assembly, with an overwhelming majority — 143 Member States having voted for and five against, with 35 abstaining — adopted Assembly resolution ES-11/4. The resolution condemned the

"organization by the Russian Federation of illegal so-called referendums in regions within the internationally recognized borders of Ukraine and the attempted illegal annexation of the Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk and Zaporizhzhia regions of Ukraine" (General Assembly resolution ES-11/4, paragraph 2)

and declared that those actions

"have no validity under international law and do not form the basis for any alteration of the status of these regions of Ukraine" (ibid., paragraph 3).

Similarly, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 68/262, adopted on 27 March 2014, Russia's attempted illegal annexation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and city of Sevastopol, Ukraine, remains invalid and unrecognized by the international community. As underlined by the Secretary-General, any annexation of a State's territory by another State resulting from the threat or use of force is a violation of the principles of the Charter and international law.

In that regard, we are concerned about reports of the Russian Federation holding so-called elections in areas of Ukraine currently under Russia's temporary military control. Those so-called elections in the occupied areas of Ukraine have no legal grounds. We also recall that, as the occupying Power, the Russian Federation is obligated under international humanitarian law to respect, unless absolutely prevented, the laws of Ukraine in force in the areas that it occupies.

We continue to condemn any actions that could further escalate or deteriorate the situation. We remain concerned about the humanitarian needs and the human rights situation in, and the lack of access to, the areas of Ukraine currently under the temporary military control of the Russian Federation.

Last year, the Secretary-General warned that the decision by Russia to go forward with its attempt to illegally annex Ukrainian territory would further jeopardize the prospects for peace. Regrettably, one year later, amid continuing intense fighting and unacceptable attacks against Ukrainian civilians and civilian infrastructure, these latest illegal attempts to organize new so-called electoral processes in the occupied areas of Ukraine further undermine the prospects for peace. As the Secretary-General has repeatedly stated, now more than ever, we need just and lasting peace in Ukraine, in line with the United Nations Charter, international law and resolutions of the General Assembly. The United Nations remains ready to support all meaningful efforts to that end.

The President: I thank Mr. Jenča for his briefing.

I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Albania.

I thank Assistant Secretary-General Jenča for his briefing on the recent developments in Ukraine.

Let us go back in time for a second. At the start of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the Kremlin rushed to convince the world that Russia had no plans for an occupation of Ukrainian territory, that the sole purpose of the military intervention was the country's demilitarization — focused entirely on military infrastructure — and, finally, that the civilian population had nothing to fear. After 562 days of a relentless war, we know that everything is false — a big lie — and that the harsh reality has left the emperor without clothes.

We now know that Russia's aim was to deny Ukraine its existence; when it failed, it focused on the eastern part of Ukraine. The sad truth is that Russia has never stopped bombarding urban and residential areas, with shelling, missiles and drones flying into homes and apartment buildings. Entire villages, towns and cities have been reduced to smithereens. Around 50 per cent of Ukraine's power-generation infrastructure has been destroyed. And now Russia is attacking ports and grain silos, as we heard in recent days. Large swathes of the eastern regions have been turned into mine fields. Instead of achieving demilitarization — unwillingly and in a totally adverse effect — Russia's policy became, as it were, the biggest sponsor in making Ukraine much stronger, better armed and more equipped to defend itself.

As to the protection of civilians, it could not even qualify as a bad joke. Around 10,000 Ukrainians have lost their lives. Millions have been displaced, within and outside the country. And thousands of children have been forcefully deported to Russia. As was mentioned, just two days ago 17 people, including one child, were killed by a missile in a public market in Donbas.

Give the total fiasco of the state of its initial plans, the Kremlin went back to its playbook. First, it invaded territory. Next, it forced Ukrainians to leave. And right after it started the *déjà vu* charade of the legitimization of the invasion. In September of last year, 143 States of the General Assembly condemned the sham referendums on the annexation of four Ukrainian regions, declaring that they had no validity under international law. Now Russia is planning to conduct illegal local elections in those four regions of Ukraine.

We have some simple questions that call for straightforward answers. Under which part of international law has Russia attacked and occupied parts of the territory of another country, its neighbour Ukraine? Under which article of the Charter of the United Nations has Russia annexed part of the territory of the same country, Ukraine? How does the position of a permanent member of the Security Council, which is entrusted by the United Nations membership with the noble duty of upholding the Charter and ensuring peace and security, cope with the behaviour of a rogue State that is breaking the law, killing civilians and committing crimes?

The answers to those questions are crucial, as they will determine not only what will happen in Ukraine

but also in Europe and the world we live in. If we accept that international law can be broken at will, if what we have built for 78 years can be easily undone by anyone, the world of tomorrow will not be under the rule of law, but the law of the jungle. We do not want a world where countries commit acts of bygone eras or acts that should never be committed. No one wants to live in a neighbourhood with a bully that assaults your home, harms your family and steals your belongings.

The legislation and the institutions of the Russian Federation have no legal effect, validity or business within the internationally recognized borders of Ukraine. Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson, Zaporizhzhya and Crimea are part of Ukraine, and Russia's illegal actions will not be able to change it. All persons involved in the organization of the so-called elections are committing illegal actions and, one day, they will be held accountable. Russia may hope that, with time, its *fait accompli* policy will end up being accepted in silence by a fatigued international community. They are wrong. Its illegal actions are null and void, and its territory grab will not be accepted.

The war in Ukraine is a defining moment and cannot become the new normal. It must be ended because its end means ending imperial ambitions. We know now that the war in Ukraine is not confined to only Ukraine. It already has had global implications for energy, food supplies, multilateralism and international institutions, including the Council, which is becoming more and more ineffective. We reiterate our call on Russia to stop the war, engage in dialogue to find a solution through negotiations, not by force, return to the grain deal and stop using food security as a weapon. The sooner the Kremlin accepts that this war is a dangerous dead end, the better it will be for all — for Ukraine and its people, for Europe and its security, for the developing world and for the millions in need, as well as for Russians and their future.

I resume my functions as President of the Council.

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements.

Mr. Wood (United States of America): I thank Assistant Secretary-General Jenča for his briefing.

Albania, with the support of the United States, called for this meeting today because of the Russian Federation's continued and flagrant violation of the Charter of the United Nations through its assault on

the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine and violence against the Ukrainian people. On 31 August, Russia began holding sham elections in the areas of Ukraine that it occupies, coinciding with annual regional elections being held throughout Russia. The Kremlin hopes that the sham elections will demonstrate its control over the occupied territories, but they are nothing more than a propaganda stunt. That is not a new tactic. The so-called elections in Russian-occupied territories of Ukraine are taking place nearly one year after the Kremlin staged sham referendums and purported to annex Ukraine's Kherson, Zaporizhzhya, Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, and more than nine years after Russia's purported efforts to annex Crimea.

The Kremlin uses the sham referendums and elections to try to lend a semblance of legitimacy to its attempts to unlawfully annex the sovereign territory of its neighbours. The Kremlin is rushing to fabricate electoral successes to hide its military losses in Ukraine from the Russian people. The Kremlin knows full well that its elections in Ukraine are a complete fraud. But some within the Russian Government are concerned about the perceived legitimacy and voter turnout for the elections in the occupied areas. The outcome will of course be predetermined and manipulated. In fact, from media reports, we understand that Russian authorities already have established field polling stations, where Russia's armed forces began conducting early voting as of 31 August in front-line areas, and elsewhere, to manipulate and maximize the vote count. Essentially, Russia's armed soldiers are providing so-called security to voters in an intimidating combination of bullets and ballots.

The sham elections in no way represent a legitimate expression of the will of the people of Ukraine, who have consistently resisted and bravely fought Russia's efforts to change Ukraine's borders by force for nearly 19 months. The Potemkin elections are an affront to the principles enshrined in the Charter. The Ukrainian people are fighting to expel Russia's forces from their territory. The vast majority of the world is united in support of Ukraine and the Charter. Last year, 143 countries voted in the General Assembly to condemn Russia's purported annexation of Ukraine's sovereign territory (see A/ES-11/PV.14). The United States will never recognize Russia's claims to any of Ukraine's territory. We condemn Russia's continued occupation unequivocally, and we will continue to work with allies

and partners to provide Ukraine with the military equipment it needs to defend itself.

We urge all United Nations Member States to refrain from actions that serve to lend credibility to Russia's sham elections on Ukraine's sovereign territory. We must all call out Russia's egregious violations of international law for what they are: a stain on our collective history as an organ founded on maintaining world peace and an assault on our rules-based international order. The overwhelming majority of the Security Council has said that international conflicts must be resolved through dialogue and diplomacy. We agree. And Ukraine's democratically elected President Zelenskyy has put forth a plan for a just and lasting peace based on Charter principles. But Russia has shown no interest in good faith dialogue to end the war, but just the opposite. Russia continues to wage its war of conquest, sending wave after wave of bombs and missiles into Ukraine, wreaking death and destruction on civilians and civilian infrastructure, with members of Russia's forces and other Russian officials committing unconscionable war crimes, crimes against humanity and other atrocities and abuses. Ukraine's fight is not only a fight for its own survival, but a fight in defence of the rules-based international order and its foundational principles. That is why it is imperative that we all stand unequivocally with Ukraine.

Mr. De Rivière (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Jenča for his briefing.

Almost a year ago, in October 2022, the overwhelming majority of the General Assembly membership condemned Russia's illegal holding of so-called referendums in regions within the internationally recognized borders of Ukraine and the subsequent attempt to illegally annex the Ukrainian regions of Luhansk, Donetsk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhya. As a demonstration of how Russia has isolated itself, 143 states at that time reaffirmed their commitment to Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity and to the Charter of the United Nations (see A/ES-11/PV.14).

Far from listening to the calls of the international community, Russia has chosen to pursue its dash forward violating the fundamental principles of the Charter, international humanitarian law and international human rights law. Today it is pursuing its provocations through the holding of staged elections, which are as illegitimate as their predecessors, in the same illegally occupied territories. But that strategy is fooling no

one. The so-called elections are a parody that has been staged by Russia to give a semblance of legitimacy to its attempts at illegal annexation. Those regions, like Crimea, are an integral part of Ukraine. France will not recognize the results of the sham elections, any more than it has in the past, which in no way represent the expression of the will of the Ukrainian people.

Our meeting today brings us back to the fundamental question of respect for the Charter, international law and the conditions necessary for peaceful coexistence among sovereign States. The question concerns us all. Allowing Russia to pursue its aggression and seize the territories of a neighbouring country is tantamount to condoning war, as well as paving the way for further acts of aggression. In Europe as well as throughout the world, no country will be able to consider itself safe if we give free reign to Russia today. We cannot allow force to prevail over law. That is why it is imperative that every Member of the United Nations unconditionally reject the sham elections and thereby defend the Charter and its universal principles, which we have been called upon to do by the Secretary-General through Mr. Jenča.

After more than 18 months of aggression, Russia continues to disregard international law and relentlessly and intentionally bomb cities and civilian infrastructure, which constitute war crimes. The recent attack on the Kostiantynivka market, which left at least 16 people dead and 32 injured, further attests to that. While the entire world is suffering from the repercussions of the war, Russia is methodically targeting the infrastructure needed to export Ukrainian agricultural products. The Izmail port, which has become vital since Russia suspended its participation in the Black Sea Grain Initiative, has been targeted four times in five days this week. Russia is doing everything it can to undermine the efforts of Ukraine and the international community to deliver food to the most vulnerable countries.

Russia alone is responsible for this war and its consequences for the Ukrainian people, the Russian people and the entire world. It can end it by withdrawing its troops and allowing for a peaceful settlement, under the Charter of the United Nations, respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine. The International Court of Justice ordered just that on 16 March 2022. Until then, France will continue to support Ukraine so long as is necessary to achieve that goal. We will continue to support the efforts of Ukraine to work towards fair and lasting peace.

Mr. Pérez Loose (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening today's meeting, and Assistant Secretary-General Miroslav Jenča for his briefing.

In just three weeks, it will be a year since draft resolution S/2022/720, condemning the Russian Federation's attempted annexation of Ukrainian regions, was vetoed. For my delegation, it is unacceptable that an occupying Power was able to prevent, through a veto, the adoption of a draft resolution that would require that it withdraw its troops and respect the territorial integrity of a State. Indeed, that was and is a grave violation of the letter and spirit of the Charter of the United Nations.

In any event, no veto can stop the force of the General Assembly, of which Ecuador is a permanent member. For that reason, I must reiterate General Assembly resolution ES-11/4, entitled "Territorial integrity of Ukraine: defending the principles of the Charter of the United Nations", which was adopted on 12 October last year during the eleventh emergency special session of the General Assembly, which was convened as a result of a decision taken by the Council, as contained in resolution 2623 (2022), of 27 February 2022, which was adopted in line with the mechanism known as "Uniting for Peace".

That is why we reaffirm that the referendums that took place last year in the Ukrainian territories of Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhya, under foreign military occupation, pose a threat to the sovereignty of Ukraine and lack any legal validity. In that context, one year later, we continue to reject any act that claims to administratively endorse that attempt at neocolonial annexation.

Let me be very clear. My delegation is not questioning the exercise of local elections that take place in the Russian Federation, but it is questioning the voting process organized by that country on Ukrainian territories in the month of September. We reiterate that Russia must immediately withdraw its occupation troops.

Lastly, we stress the need for the Council to provide the Secretary-General with better tools towards détente and a peaceful solution, based on respect for the sovereignty, unity, independence and territorial integrity of Ukraine, within its internationally recognized borders and extending to its territorial waters.

Mrs. Hackman (Ghana): I thank Assistant Secretary-General Miroslav Jenča for his informative briefing.

We are dismayed by the ongoing local elections being conducted by the authorities of the Russian Federation in four regions of Ukraine, namely, Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhya. The purported elections constitute a violation of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine, within its internationally recognized borders, and follow on from the widely condemned attempt by the Russian Federation in September 2022 to annex territories of Ukraine through a referendum.

As a fundamental principle of international law and the Charter of the United Nations, reaffirmed by the General Assembly in its resolution ES-11/4, adopted on 12 October 2022, no territorial acquisition resulting from the threat or use of force shall be recognized as legal. Consequently, the attempts by the Russian Federation to exercise sovereign authority within the borders of Ukraine, including the conduct of local elections, are, in our view, illegal and void. It is only the legal and constitutional framework of Ukraine that can accord legitimacy for any such elections.

Besides the tenuous legal basis for holding such elections, the prevailing security and political conditions in the four regions cannot confirm that the free and fair will of the people has been realized. The purported elections only introduce another layer of complexity to the conflict and complicate the chances for an early settlement.

As we have often stated in the Council, Ghana is firmly committed to the sovereignty, political independence and territorial integrity of Ukraine and cannot recognize any territory acquired through the threat or use of force by any State. In this instance, we strongly urge a reversal of all actions that assail the sovereign authority of the Government of Ukraine and emphasize that the power of might cannot be the rule of law.

In the light of the continuing threat of harm posed by the war to civilian life, as we heard from the briefing, we underscore the international obligations incumbent on the warring parties to protect civilians and further urge restraint against the deliberate targeting and destruction of civilian infrastructure. As repeatedly asserted in the Council, attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure are illegal and unacceptable.

It is increasingly evident that the war has brought the parties no closer to the realization of their security interests. Given the rapid deterioration of the security and humanitarian conditions in Ukraine, we are of the view that intensified diplomatic action must be mobilized to help de-escalate tensions and secure the cessation of hostilities. We once again urge the Russian Federation's immediate and unconditional withdrawal of its troops from the internationally recognized borders of Ukraine and urge collective action to lay the ground for pacific and constructive dialogue between the warring parties. There is no alternative to winning the peace of Ukraine.

Mrs. Frazier (Malta): I thank Assistant Secretary-General Jenča for his sobering briefing.

Two weeks ago, while commemorating Ukraine's independence, we again deplored Russia's relentless and ruthless aggression against Ukraine — a war of choice by Russia that is illegal and in defiance of everything the Organization stands for (see S/PV.9404). We again had to condemn Russia's actions, which blatantly threaten and undermine its neighbour's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

We reiterate clearly that Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine is illegal, unjustified and unprovoked. This is a war initiated by a permanent member of the Security Council, which is entrusted with the maintenance of international peace and security. That permanent member of the Security Council continues to cause death, destruction and immense human suffering. Just two days ago, we witnessed yet another instance of brutal Russian tactics aimed at terrorizing Ukraine's civilian population. This time, a missile attack on a market in the Donetsk region killed 17 people and injured dozens more.

Today, as we once again place the spotlight on these issues, we also reaffirm Ukraine's right to determine its own future. We deplore Russia's holding of sham elections in the occupied territories of Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhya and Kherson. We stand with Ukraine and its people in defending freedom and independence.

The elections are illegitimate and illegal and will not be recognized by the international community. They undermine the Charter of the United Nations and constitute a threat to the international system. We recall that, last October, the overwhelming majority of United Nations States Members in the General Assembly

condemned the illegal annexation of the four partially-occupied regions and reaffirmed the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders (see A/ES-11/PV.14). The elections further confirm that Russia has no intention of engaging in meaningful discussions towards a solution to the war, and neither is it willing to return the territories it illegally invaded. We stress yet again that any elections held by Russia in the temporarily occupied territories are illegitimate.

Russia's full-scale war of aggression has brought incommensurable suffering and destruction to civilians. We remain fully committed to ensuring that it be held accountable for its acts, including its practice of forcible deporting Ukrainian children, which amounts to a war crime, as concluded by the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine.

Women and girls continue to face extremely high risks of gender-based violence. There are credible, consistent and widespread reports of grave human rights violations, including torture and conflict-related sexual violence. Malta condemns those barbaric and illegal acts and urges Russia to immediately cease those actions. Regardless of the context, international humanitarian law and international human rights law must be upheld.

Russia's actions have far-reaching consequences that go beyond the war in Ukraine. Its politicization of humanitarian aid, including through its unilateral withdrawal from the Black Sea Grain Initiative, has had a tremendous negative impact on the most vulnerable communities around the world. It has also created uncertainty in global markets, increasing prices, and has exacerbated the dire situation of food-importing countries. The initiative also ensured access to grain for the World Food Programme. Such weaponization of food is simply unconscionable. It is crucial to restore the Black Sea Grain Initiative as soon as possible.

Russia did not stop at withdrawing from that initiative. Soon after, it proceeded to carry out attacks against Ukraine's grain storage facilities and port infrastructure, including in the Danube. Targeting civilian infrastructure is a violation of international humanitarian law, and we strongly condemn it.

In conclusion, we emphasize that the international community has repeatedly expressed its desire to reach a just and lasting peace in Ukraine, in line with the Charter of the United Nations. Any initiative in that

regard must be based on full respect for Ukraine's independence, sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders. We once again urge Russia to end its aggression and to immediately and completely withdraw all its forces and military equipment from the entire territory of Ukraine.

Mrs. Baeriswyl (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): I thank Assistant Secretary-General Jenča for his briefing.

My colleagues who spoke before me have already said it, but I believe it is important to repeat the truth: almost a year ago, Russia held so-called referendums in the occupied regions of Ukraine in contravention of the relevant international standards and provisions of Ukrainian law and despite urgent calls from the international community to desist from doing so. As the armed conflict raged on, Ukrainians in the occupied regions were forced to vote in an environment that was described by the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine as one of fear and coercion. Our position was clear a year ago and remains just as clear today: as the Assistant Secretary-General also just reminded us, the annexation of Ukrainian territories declared by Russia following those votes constitutes a serious violation of international law. Switzerland condemns such a violation and does not recognize the integration of the Ukrainian territories into the Russian Federation. Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhya, as well as Crimea, are part of Ukraine.

As we meet today, actions are under way to try to further cement those illegal acts and legitimize military control. Switzerland rejects the decision of Russia's Central Election Commission to hold local elections in the occupied territories. In the meantime, those so-called elections have begun in the occupied Ukrainian regions without any valid legal basis. Switzerland will not recognize the results of the illegal elections, which are taking place in a context that prevents any free and fair voting.

Respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of States, in particular through the prohibition of the use of force and the acquisition of territory by force, are fundamental principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations. By adopting a resolution on the territorial integrity of Ukraine in October by a very large majority (General Assembly resolution ES-11/4), the General Assembly, as many others have mentioned, defended those principles, which form the basis of our

multilateral order and of relations among the States Members of the United Nations. If those principles are not respected, it is the population that suffers most. That was the case two days ago, when a devastating mid-afternoon attack on a market in Kostiantynivka killed and injured dozens of people. In the south of the country, schools and homes, as well as port and grain infrastructure, have been damaged as a result of Russian strikes.

Switzerland therefore urgently reiterates the legal imperative to protect the civilian population in armed conflicts. The Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine has documented reports of serious violations of international humanitarian law and human rights, including in occupied zones. To date, the Commission has visited Ukraine more than 10 times and has provided detailed reports, the most recent of which was issued last week. Many of the violations found may constitute war crimes. All perpetrators of such crimes must be held accountable.

The parties to the conflict still have an obligation to respect international humanitarian law and human rights. In the territories under its control, Russia is also obliged to respect its specific obligations as an occupying Power. In particular, it must respect Ukrainian legislation in force. Rapid and unimpeded access for humanitarian aid must be guaranteed to all civilians in need, including in the occupied zones.

Once again, we call on Russia to refrain from any attempt to alter the internationally recognized borders of Ukraine, to reverse the decisions taken to that end and to finally withdraw its troops from all Ukrainian territory. As my Ghanaian colleague put it:

(*spoke in English*)

"There is no alternative to winning the peace of Ukraine".

Mr. Ishikane (Japan): I thank Assistant Secretary-General Jenča for his briefing.

We are assembled here today to discuss international peace and security in line with the Charter of the United Nations. That reminds us of what we are collectively committed to uphold, especially when the Charter's principles are put to the test by actions that go against the very foundations of our world.

Let us not mince words: Russia's ongoing aggression against Ukraine has not only violated the Charter but

has also seriously undermined the peace and security and stability that the United Nations aims to safeguard. Russia's actions have drawn condemnation not just from Japan, but from the overwhelming majority of Member States. We must acknowledge that the situation threatens not only the affected regions, but also the international order under which we all live.

In addition, Russia has been organizing what it calls elections in the territories of Ukraine that it currently occupies. It is vital to state unequivocally that such acts following the illegal annexation of those territories are totally unacceptable. We further emphasize that attempts by Russia to establish a sense of normalcy or legitimacy through those activities are doomed to fail. As affirmed in General Assembly resolution ES-11/4, adopted by an overwhelming majority of the Member States, Russia's attempted illegal annexation of the Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhya regions into the territory of the Russian Federation by force clearly breaches international law, including the Charter. Those actions by Russia have no validity and cannot form the basis for any alteration of the status of those regions of Ukraine.

Lastly, the recent proposal by Russia to discuss a so-called resolution of the crisis in the Security Council next week presents a paradox. How can a permanent member of the Council that is openly violating international law advocate for resolving a crisis of its own making? Russia can significantly contribute to a resolution of the crisis by withdrawing its troops and equipment from Ukraine immediately and unconditionally, which can be started without waiting for next week.

Japan remains steadfast in its commitment to upholding the Charter, and to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine. We continue to extend our hand in partnership to those who share those principles in order to realize a just and lasting peace in Ukraine as soon as possible.

Mr. Abushahab (United Arab Emirates): I would like to thank Assistant Secretary-General Miroslav Jenča for his informative briefing, and I welcome the participation of the representative of Ukraine at this meeting.

In all situations discussed by the Security Council, we must be guided by the Charter of the United Nations, which calls for respect for the territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence of all States. Those legal

principles protect all States, large and small, from the most to the least powerful. They are central to peaceful, cooperative and productive relations among States and are essential for their security and stability. The applicable rules of international humanitarian law with regard to this week's elections must also be respected.

Last year, an overwhelming majority of countries supported General Assembly resolution ES-11/4. The resolution states that the referendums held in parts of Ukraine do not form the basis for any alteration of the status of those regions. That clear conclusion of the United Nations membership necessarily also applies to the elections held this week on the premise of the results of the referendums. Those elections further complicate the efforts for a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

The Council has an essential role in prioritizing the peaceful settlement of disputes and maintaining international peace and security. De-escalation, dialogue and diplomacy are more urgent than ever. The United Arab Emirates has been consistent in expressing the need to bring the conflict to an end and continues to offer its support to all genuine efforts to achieve that.

The ongoing hostilities have not only brought immeasurable suffering to Ukraine and its people, but they also exacerbate an already difficult situation in global food security and risk pushing people further into poverty and undermining stability in countries far from the war. The Black Sea Grain Initiative, which was exemplary in showing what can be achieved through diplomacy, helped alleviate some of the war's impact on global food security. We are encouraged by the ongoing efforts of the United Nations, Türkiye and others to revive it.

While diplomatic solutions to the conflict remain elusive, we must do what we can to limit its impact. The war's toll is heavy, and it is heaviest on the civilians in Ukraine. A just and sustainable peace, in line with the Charter, is the only viable solution. The international community must come together around a vision that brings an end to that suffering and promotes peace and stability in Ukraine and the wider region.

Dame Barbara Woodward (United Kingdom): I join others in thanking Assistant Secretary-General Jenča for his very informative briefing.

Let me first condemn another appalling Russian missile attack earlier this week on a market in Kostyantynivka, in eastern Ukraine. Intentionally

directing attacks against civilians is a war crime, and those responsible must be held to account.

Last year, in violation of the democratic will of the Ukrainian people and of the Charter of the United Nations, Russia attempted to illegally annex Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhya and Kherson. We saw Russian soldiers round people up to cast ballots at gunpoint for Russia's so-called referendums. As my colleagues have said, the General Assembly emphatically rejected Russia's actions. A total of 143 Member States denounced Russia's blatant violation of international law. The Secretary-General condemned Russia's attempted annexations.

Now Russia is committing another violation of the Charter by holding so-called elections within those four oblasts and in illegally annexed Crimea. Russia claims it is protecting the right to self-determination. But as my Foreign Secretary has said, you cannot hold elections in someone else's country. Not only are Russia's actions illegal and illegitimate, but we have information that the Kremlin has predetermined the results of the sham elections across the sovereign territory of Ukraine that Russia temporarily controls. That gross deception will bring Russia no closer to justifying its war of aggression, just as Russia, in a year, has come no closer to expanding its control over the areas it has claimed in its failing invasion.

We now have information that, this year, Russia aimed to host approximately 100,000 Ukrainian children from Russian-controlled territories to participate in a summer camp programme aimed at politically indoctrinating children to align with Russia.

Ukraine is fighting for its future as a State. The only way that Russia's war can come to an end is through a just and sustained peace that fully respects Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty. We call on the international community to support Ukraine until that peace is won.

Mr. Afonso (Mozambique): I would like to thank Assistant Secretary-General Miroslav Jenča for his insightful briefing on this issue. We also wish to acknowledge the presence in the Chamber of the representatives of Ukraine, Czechia, Italy, Poland and Estonia, as well as His Excellency Mr. Olof Skoog, Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations.

Despite the numerous appeals from different entities around the world for a cessation of hostilities, including by members of the Security Council, the status quo persists. As we have been consistently stating in the Chamber, it is important to recognize that the primary issue is not merely addressing the symptoms and fallouts of this armed conflict, as attempted since the Minsk accords. More meaningfully, is it by addressing its root causes, including the genuine security concerns of the parties. In that connection, for meaningful progress, Mozambique believes that it is crucial to immediately cease hostilities; resume direct negotiations between the main parties without preconditions and in good faith; and adopt a constructive, inclusive and results-oriented approach focusing on mutual benefit rather than a zero-sum perspective.

As the Chair of the Informal Working Group on Documentation and Other Procedural Questions, which is responsible for overseeing the Council's working methods, Council members will agree with us that serious consideration has to be given to how to optimally utilize the Council's limited resources, considering the number of meetings dedicated to the subject. It is also concerning that our programme of work has not been adopted owing to the very same subject. That issue requires constructive dialogue, driven by our collective desire to find solutions.

As we enter the yearly high point of our multilateral calendar, Mozambique calls for a committed position for a political and negotiated solution to this conflict, grounded in the ideals of the Charter of the United Nations and our mutual responsibility for international peace and security.

Mr. Geng Shuang (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Assistant Secretary-General Jenča for his briefing.

China's position on the question of Ukraine has been consistent and clear. We have always believed that the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries should be safeguarded, that the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations should be respected, that the legitimate security concerns of all parties should be taken seriously and that all efforts conducive to the peaceful resolution of the crisis should be supported.

At present, as the crisis in Ukraine drags on, tensions on the ground remain high and the spillover effects are spreading more rapidly. The Security Council should

work with a greater sense of responsibility and urgency to find ways to achieve a ceasefire and restore peace at an early date. Priority should be given to making good use of the mediation tools granted by the Charter to promote the implementation of various peace initiatives and to leverage the core role of the international collective security mechanism.

The crisis in Ukraine has complex causes, and there is no easy fix. It requires concerted efforts by all parties. No matter how challenging it is, the door of political settlement must not be closed, efforts to promote a ceasefire and peace talks must not relent and the process of diplomatic negotiations must not stall.

China stands ready to strengthen dialogue and communication with all parties and will continue to make constructive efforts to promote a political settlement of the Ukrainian crisis.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We regret that the Albanian presidency has followed in the disastrous footsteps of its Western colleagues and has used rule 37 to invite the representatives of five States — Czechia, Estonia, Italy, Poland and Ukraine — together with the representative of the European Union (EU), which makes six delegations, even though it is obvious that there is no added value in their statements, which all toe the same general EU/NATO line. What is the point of making today's meeting an open debate if Albania intends to hold one on 20 September anyway? This approach devalues discussions in the Council.

When we saw the topic on which today's meeting was requested, we were pleasantly surprised by the desire to commemorate the anniversary of the referendums on the accession of the Donetsk People's Republic, the Luhansk People's Republics and the Zaporizhzhya and Kherson regions to Russia. Frankly, we ourselves had been thinking that it might be worth telling the Council about life in those new constituent subjects of our country. However, it seems that, having declared referendums as the topic of our meeting, Albania and the United States have confused them with the current elections to the regional parliament of our new subjects, or rather they intended to use them as a pretence for new attacks on our country, even though Western countries who mentor others about so-called genuine democratic values should be better informed about various forms of the expression of popular will than anyone. We know, however, that when Western

interests are at play, minor details such as referendums, elections and the opinion of ordinary citizens in general are not taken into account by our former Western partners. That was the case in Kosovo, for example, where instead of an expression of free will, there was simply a declaration of independence adopted by interim self-governing authorities, which had clearly exceeded their remit. Back then, the same countries that now criticize the Russian referendums argued that Kosovo had the right to secede from the Serbian State owing to the threat of a serious violation of the rights of Kosovo Albanians, even though by that point nothing had truly threatened them for a long time.

Unlike the situation with Kosovo, the rights and the very lives of the people of Donbas, Kherson and Zaporizhzhya were and continue to be under threat. They are under threat from the actions of the same criminal regime that, since 2014, has been shelling peaceful neighbourhoods and cities in Donbas and that, with the connivance of the United States and its allies, has declared war on everything Russian and is actively promoting neo-Nazi ideologies in Ukraine.

The only way to provide the residents of those regions liberated from the Kyiv regime with protection and certainty for their future is by establishing the clear legal status of those territories as part of the Russian Federation, just as, in 2014, the reunification of Crimea with Russia was ensured even as Kyiv unequivocally threatened that region with Ukrainization or reprisals.

From 23 to 27 September 2022, the long-awaited expression of popular will took place, and its results spoke for themselves. The overwhelming majority of those who voted — 99 per cent in the Donetsk People's Republic, 98 per cent in the Luhansk People's Republic, 93 per cent in Zaporizhzhya and 87 per cent in the Kherson region — made a free and informed choice in favour of our country. Despite the difficult security situation and the provocations of the Kyiv regime, the overwhelming majority of voters — from 76 per cent in the Kherson region to 97 per cent in the Donetsk People's Republic — decided to go to the polls. The referendums were held in full compliance with the norms and principles of international law, no matter how much our Western opponents may try to prove otherwise. The decisions of those plebiscites reflect the rights of peoples to self-determination, which, according to the 1970 Declaration on Principles of International Law concerning Friendly Relations and Cooperation among States in accordance with the

Charter of the United Nations, may take the form of the establishment of a sovereign and independent State, the free association or integration with an independent State. More than 100 international observers from Germany, Italy, Latvia, Venezuela and other countries who followed the process also recognized the results as legitimate.

For the residents of those new regions, that was not just a decision on legal status. They exercised their inalienable right to speak their native language and teach their children in that language and affirmed their right to pay tribute to those who fought to liberate their land from the Nazis on Victory Day, which is sacred for our people, and not to those who collaborated with them and committed horrific crimes.

The people of the Donetsk People's Republic and the Luhansk People's Republic had been waiting for that opportunity for eight years under incessant shelling from the Kyiv regime, which since 2014, had set a course for the physical extermination of undesirable residents in the south-east of the country. Ukrainian authorities openly declared Russian and Russian-speaking citizens of Donbas non-human and specimens. In one of his interviews, Volodymyr Zelenskyy suggested that they get out of Ukraine and go to Russia. The residents of the Donetsk People's Republic, the Luhansk People's Republic, the Kherson region and Zaporizhzhya region followed his cynical recommendation, returning to their homeland and taking the lands on which their ancestors had lived for centuries with them. The best testament to the voluntary accession of those territories to Russia is the active participation of their residents in the life of the country and national processes, support for efforts aimed at the economic and social revival of those new Russian regions and restoring their indisputable centuries-old Russian identity.

We recall the numerous prophecies about the emergence of guerrilla movements in those territories after they became part of Russia. The reality is that the only ones unsuccessfully attempting to stir up trouble are a handful of saboteur groups sent in from Ukraine, which the same local residents helped to identify and neutralize. That is a huge disappointment for the Zelenskyy regime, which now has a chance to find out how the people of Ukraine really feel about its criminal policies.

Of course, the choice of former Ukrainian citizens was also influenced by the achievements of Crimea after

it was reunited with Russia. Over the past nine years, life there has changed for the better. People live without fear for their lives, the economy is developing and infrastructure is being built. Throughout these years, we have been genuinely investing in the well-being of the region, just as we will continue contributing to the development of Donbas and other territories that Kyiv tried and continues to try to turn into ruins.

It is clear that other regions of Ukraine are closely following the experiences of the Luhansk People's Republic, the Donetsk People's Republic and the Kherson and Zaporizhzhya regions. They have gotten a good glimpse of the true face of the Kyiv regime over the period. It is enough to mention the Human Rights Watch report, which admitted that the Ukrainian Armed Forces shelled certain areas of the Kharkiv region with cluster munitions, leading to mass civilian casualties, just as the Kyiv regime at one time fired on Bucha, near Kyiv, and later tried to pass off civilian casualties of the shelling as victims of Russian occupiers, laying out the bodies on the streets of the village. It is no surprise that, as our Russian troops approach the Kupyansk district — the local administration admitted — nearly a lot of its residents refuse to evacuate, preferring to wait for our soldiers.

And in general, the majority of Ukrainians understand full well that the threat to them comes not from Russia's actions, but from the criminal policies of the Zelenskyy regime. In particular, currently that is taking the form of the mass drafting of soldiers, which has long been called "conscription to the grave", in Ukraine. It is a well-known fact that NATO is waging a hybrid war in Ukraine with Russia to the last Ukrainian, and now, after a failed counter-offensive, they are already beginning to run out of Ukrainians. Ukrainians no longer want to end up in a meat grinder, and draft officers are trying to catch anyone they can on the street. Information has emerged that the European Union is ready to extradite men of military age to Kyiv, thereby once again flouting its own principles and values. Ukrainian men quickly realized that, and a campaign is gaining momentum on social networks to move refugees to Russia, where several million Ukrainians have already found shelter. Further comments are unnecessary.

New regions are actively integrating into our country's life. The Government has approved a programme for the socioeconomic development of these federal subjects, which includes comprehensive

rebuilding of infrastructure, implementing tools to execute federal programmes and national projects, as well taking social support measures. We are planning to relaunch key industries and businesses, rebuild production facilities, create conditions for further growth and, most important, improve the well-being of citizens and protect their rights.

Russia will continue to consistently and systematically address the problems that accumulated in those regions when they were outside our country. In 2023, more than 700 kilometres of roads have already been repaired and 177 educational institutions have been restored. On 1 September more than 1,250 schools began operating in the four new regions.

Liberated Mariupol, which still remembers the brutal crimes of Ukrainian nationalists, is actively being rebuilt and developed. The first of September saw the grand opening of the Mariupol State University, named after Kuindzhi, and the Pryazovskyi State Technical University, as well as 25 schools and 26 kindergartens, including a new modern school built from scratch for 1,100 students.

Of course, in order for those four regions to fully integrate into the Russian legal and administrative space, they need normal authorities that have the same powers as in other subjects of the Russian Federation. From today until 10 September, the single general voting day across our country, elections of representatives to regional parliaments and municipal bodies are taking place across all polling stations, and the active political stance of residents can already be seen based on the results of early and extraterritorial voting.

However, the organizers and participants of the electoral process have to deal with the most severe conditions of endless shelling and provocations from Ukraine. From 31 August to 4 September alone, the Ukrainian Armed Forces fired at the Donetsk metropolitan area over 120 times using 155-mm Western-style shells, including cluster ammunitions. As a result, 63 men and women sustained shrapnel wounds and a 6-year-old girl died in the Kyiv region of Donetsk. Of course, none of our Western colleagues spoke about that today.

Despite threats to their lives, election commission workers are being sent to villages and hamlets in areas where fighting is taking place. In the Donetsk People's Republic, those field groups have travelled to the

most dangerous settlements — Horlivka, Volnovakha, Yasynuvata and several areas of Donetsk and Makiivka.

Western countries and the Secretariat are well aware of those place names, but they bashfully prefer not to mention them. In our country, however, they resonate with the pain of hundreds of civilians killed and injured civilians, of civilians killed by Western long-range weapons — in their own homes, in shops and cafés, in public places — in other words, in civilian facilities near which there are no military targets. Responsibility for their deaths lies not only with the Kyiv regime, but also with its Western sponsors, who supply artillery systems and other heavy weapons to Ukrainian nationalists. They are also making a tidy profit from others' misfortune and therefore are not interested in a peaceful solution to the Ukrainian crisis. We will address this topic again at the next Council meeting on 12 September.

It is the inhumane crimes of the Kyiv regime, its maniacal and hopeless desire to deprive the Russian people of their Russian identity that became the main reason that the residents of Donbas, the Luhansk region and Zaporizhzhya are actively and consciously voting for their future together with Russia. Kyiv lost them in the same way it lost Crimea in the past, having drawn no conclusions from its obvious mistakes. We see that it is unable to draw such conclusions even now, bringing its inglorious and inevitable end closer.

Some Western delegations and representatives of the Secretariat risked mentioning yesterday's strike on Kostiantynivka, in the part of the Donetsk People's Republic controlled by the Ukrainian armed forces. That is truly a horrific crime as a result of a rocket strike on a busy city market, killing 16 people and injuring 32.

But we are convinced that they will soon forget about and hush up that incident, having understood, just as in the attack on Kramatorsk in April last year, that they are covering up a horrific crime and terrible provocation carried out by Ukraine. One does not need to be a ballistics expert to see, from the available video materials posted by users of social networks, including Zelenskyy himself, that the missile arrived from the north-west, where exclusively Ukrainian positions are located. After realizing that, the Western media that circulated the video even hastily began to edit the reflection of the rocket on the roof of a parked car, which shows the direction of arrival, but it was already too late and the truth came out. This is another

horrific lie that Western media is using to cover up yet another Ukrainian provocation, which was traditionally clumsily organized before the visit of another high-ranking official, in this case Antony Blinken. We have no doubt that this was carried out in order to provide the dying regime with a new dose of financing and weapons. This is the same pattern behind the vile provocation in Bucha in April 2022, and there will undoubtedly be further Goebbels-style performances in future.

Mr. França Danese (Brazil): I thank Assistant Secretary-General Miroslav Jenča for the update on developments in Ukraine. I also welcome the Permanent Representative of Ukraine to this meeting.

Brazil has expressed its concern about the organization of regional elections in Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhya. Such actions raise tensions and further undermine the prospects for ending the conflict and finding lasting peace.

We remain convinced that the dynamics on the battlefield will not bring a solution to this war, let alone lasting peace and stability. That is why Brazil insists on its call for the de-escalation of hostilities, as a first step, and for the establishment of negotiations, either directly or through the other peaceful means described in Article 33 of the Charter of the United Nations. Those means have provided fair, effective and lasting solutions in several other international disputes. There is no reason they should not be used in this conflict.

Only a political solution that takes into account the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and the legitimate security concerns of all parties will bring lasting peace. Any solution must also ensure full respect for the civil and political rights of local populations, including ethnic and linguistic minorities.

Last, but not least, I note that the substantial and negative effects of this war continue to be felt in many parts of the world, especially developing countries. Economic growth is hampered, development compromised and food security threatened. We are still hopeful that a revised Black Sea Grain Initiative will be possible and that diplomacy will be given a chance once more.

Brazil's message is clear — all actions that make peace ever more elusive must stop. Negotiations must be pursued, even if politically very difficult, and no

one doubts that they will be complex and difficult. We should channel our efforts towards approaches that bring us closer to ending the conflict and the suffering and loss it entails.

Mr. Biang (Gabon) (*spoke in French*): I thank Assistant Secretary-General Miroslav Jenča for his briefing.

In the current context of intensifying fighting along various fronts of the war in Ukraine, the decision to organize local and municipal elections in the Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhya and Kherson territories on 10 September 2023 is not likely to ease tensions, much less boost prospects for an end to the war.

After 18 months of deadly fighting and destruction, the efforts of the warring parties and the international community must focus on de-escalation in order to put an end to the suffering of the people on the ground and to the war's repercussions, the shockwaves of which are affecting several countries around the world. My country reaffirms its commitment to respect for the territorial integrity of every State and underscores the importance of the parties adhering to the General Assembly resolution of 12 October 2022 (resolution ES-11/4).

We once again call on the parties to prioritize dialogue and negotiations to end the war and achieve peaceful coexistence. In that regard, it is imperative for the warring parties to refrain from taking any position or action likely to exacerbate tensions and fuel the escalation of violence. My country stresses that the Charter of the United Nations, which is the glue of our very coexistence, must remain the guiding light for all parties vis-à-vis the sovereignty and territorial integrity of every member of the international community. We will also continue to emphasize the urgent need for unimpeded access to humanitarian aid for populations in need, while at the same time encouraging all initiatives aimed at bringing the parties to the negotiating table to explore ways out of the conflict, which has lasted for far too long.

The President: I shall now make a further statement in my capacity as the representative of Albania.

I started my statement in my national capacity earlier today by mentioning the discrepancy between the Russian narrative and reality. We heard more of the same today. The Russian delegation tried to draw a parallel between what happened in the Republic of Kosova and what is happening in parts of the territories

in Ukraine. Nothing could be less accurate and farther from the truth. Kosova cannot and will not be used as a fig leaf or camouflage for Russia's military aggression against Ukraine and its attempts at annexation. Everyone knows that Kosova became independent after a bloody war and a long international peace process and talks, which Russia was also part of.

The International Court of Justice was asked whether the declaration of independence of the Republic of Kosova was in line with the international law — and it responded. I wish that Russia confirmed the Court's rulings in the very same way. There was one issued in March 2022 ordering Russia to stop the war, which, we hope, Russia will abide by. I have said it so many times, and I will be brief in repeating it: it is important that Kosova and Serbia do not fight. They meet, they talk and are bound by a process of dialogue — not an easy one, but a real and substantial one — to solve pending issues and march towards their common future in peace and cooperation.

As to the comments regarding rule 37, I want to assure our Russian colleagues that the presidency is committed to maintaining the orderly conduct of business of the Council. The presidency, in full respect of the provisional rules of procedure, presidential note S/2017/507 and its past practices, and in prior consultation with the members of the Council, has accepted the request for non-members of the Council to participate in this meeting.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I give the floor to the representative of Ukraine.

Mr. Kyslytsya (Ukraine): I note the continued occupation by Putin's envoy of the permanent seat of the Soviet Union. On Wednesday, his country added yet another horrific crime to the endless list of atrocities that one day will bring the representatives of Putin's regime, including those in this Chamber, to the docket of an international tribunal. I thank those Security Council members that have this week expressed their condemnation of and condolences over Russia's terrorist attack on civilian facilities — a local market, stores and a pharmacy — in the city of Kostiantynivka, in the Donetsk region. At least 16 people were killed, including a child, and 37 wounded as a result of that attack. Needless to say, they were civilians — another mass murder committed by Russians, as revenge for the failures of their troops on the battlefield.

The Ukrainian forces continue to undermine the Russian grip on the occupied territories and will persist in doing so until all sovereign territories of my country are liberated. Russia's desperate attempt to legitimize its illegal occupation of the Ukrainian territories by organizing an outright farce of an election serve only as proof that Russia realizes the inevitability of its defeat. One could hardly qualify as anything other than fake the elections to Russian puppet structures in the temporarily occupied parts of Ukraine, in Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson, Zaporizhzhya, the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, that are taking place from 8 to 10 September. As terrorists force hostages to read a prepared text on camera, Russia makes the civilian population that has stayed in the occupied territories participate in a staged free expression of their will.

It is crucial to remember that Russia has resorted to a mockery of free will since the very beginning of its aggression against Ukraine, in 2014. On 16 March 2014, Russia held a so-called referendum in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol that was not authorized by Ukraine. The General Assembly responded to that crime by adopting a resolution on the territorial integrity of Ukraine (General Assembly resolution 68/262). In that resolution, the Assembly underscored that the referendum held in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol on 16 March 2014, having no validity, cannot form the basis for any alteration of the status of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea or of the city of Sevastopol. In September 2022, Russia conducted other sham referendums in parts of the Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhya regions. In response, on 12 October 2022, the General Assembly adopted, by an absolute majority of 143 votes in favour to 5 votes against, a resolution on the territorial integrity of Ukraine and upholding the principles of the Charter of the United Nations (resolution ES-11/4).

The General Assembly clearly declared that the unlawful actions of the Russian Federation with regard to the illegal so-called referendums held from 23 to 27 September 2022 in parts of the Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk and Zaporizhzhya regions of Ukraine that, in part, are or have been under the temporary military control of the Russian Federation, and the subsequent attempted illegal annexation of these regions, have no validity under international law and do not form the

basis for any alteration of the status of these regions of Ukraine.

Let me recall that the demand by the General Assembly has yet to be met by Russia, namely, the demand that:

“the Russian Federation immediately and unconditionally reverse its decisions of 21 February and 29 September 2022 related to the status of certain areas of the Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk and Zaporizhzhia regions of Ukraine, as they are a violation of the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine and inconsistent with the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, and immediately, completely and unconditionally withdraw all of its military forces from the territory of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders.” (ibid., para. 5)

We firmly reject and strongly condemn the illegal actions of the Russian occupation forces in the temporarily occupied parts of the territories of the Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhya and Kherson regions, the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol.

We do not, and we will never, recognize those illegal actions and emphasize that their results will be null and void and cannot produce legal effects under international law. Likewise, any activity of illegally created so-called administrations and local authorities in the temporarily occupied areas of Ukraine will have no legal effect and will not alter the internationally recognized status of those areas as integral parts of the sovereign territory of Ukraine.

We call on the international community to condemn the use of the Russian election system on the territory of another State. We also urge the international community not to recognize the so-called results of those fake elections, the legitimacy of so-called authorities and officials appointed by the occupying Power under the guise of local representatives, or the legitimacy of any decisions made by the occupying Power on behalf of those authorities.

All those who are involved in holding those fake elections will bear responsibility. The competent authorities of Ukraine are already taking measures to track them down and bring them to justice. We are also convinced that the international community should respond to that deliberate violation of international law

and the Charter of the United Nations by strengthening pressure on the aggressor, in particular by imposing tough new sanctions.

Let me reiterate that illegal voting in the occupied territories of Ukraine poses an existential threat to the United Nations and its Charter. All those illegal actions are putting global peace and security at risk. If we do not condemn the actions of the Russian Federation today, then we condone similar blatant attacks on any and all countries tomorrow. Protecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all States Members of the United Nations, regardless of their size and power, is our collective duty and a core principle of the United Nations Charter.

As I said on 12 October 2022, there were only four countries that voted against the United Nations Charter, while 143 firmly stood in its defence and in support of Ukraine’s territorial integrity, within its internationally recognized borders. Today in the Chamber, not a single country in the Security Council has aligned itself with yet another violation of the United Nations Charter by the Russian Federation. Russia is alone and isolated.

I would like to express our gratitude, in particular for the stated position on the planned so-called elections, to the delegations of Albania, the United States, France, Ecuador, Ghana, Malta, Switzerland, Japan, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, Brazil and Gabon.

Enough is enough. Every day, if not every hour, Russia proves that those actions are completely incompatible with the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter, let alone with the criteria of membership in the United Nations and the Security Council in particular.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Estonia.

Mr. Tammsaar (Estonia): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the three Baltic States — Latvia, Lithuania and my own country, Estonia.

We also align ourselves with the statement to be delivered on behalf of the European Union.

I thank you, Mr. President, for convening today’s briefing. I would also like to thank Assistant Secretary-General Miroslav Jenča for his valuable insights and principled position.

The so-called elections held by Russia in the illegally occupied territories of Ukraine are yet another

grave violation of the Charter of the United Nations and the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine. Let me remind the Council that, last year, the General Assembly overwhelmingly condemned Russia's attempted illegal annexation of Ukrainian regions.

Whether Russia likes it or not, the Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk and Zaporizhzhya regions, along with Crimea and Sevastopol, are and will remain an integral part of Ukraine. By organizing elections on Ukrainian territory, Russia makes a shameless mockery of its position as a permanent member of the Security Council.

The Kremlin is following a playbook it has used in other occupied territories. They threaten and intimidate civilians to vote in sham elections in the hope of legitimizing their occupation and suppressing Ukrainian resistance. Those elections organized by the occupying Power violate international humanitarian law and international human rights law, including the Geneva Conventions.

All the territories in which so-called elections are being conducted have witnessed Russian war crimes. Members must ask themselves how they would vote in such elections if their family members had been held at gunpoint and their homes occupied by Russian armed forces or mercenaries with criminal track records, while also witnessing new atrocities on a daily basis. On Wednesday, at least 16 innocent civilians were brutally killed and many more wounded by the Russian shelling of a market in Kostiantynivka, a town in Donetsk oblast, just 30 kilometres from the front line.

Russia aims to portray the so-called elections as a triumph of democracy in occupied territories. In reality, there is nothing more undemocratic. The strict occupation regime is upheld by the Russian military and Russian special services. Federal Security Service officers placed in leadership positions organize the occupied territories' forced integration into Russia, according to Moscow's instructions.

The people in the Russian-occupied areas of Ukraine are experiencing extrajudicial killings, large-scale repression, deportation and severe regression. Ukrainians are being forcibly Russified and stripped of local resources — a Russian tactic that the Baltic States know all too well. Credible reports, including by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, found evidence of widespread violations of the right to

freedom of opinion and to peaceful assembly and of new sanctions for criticizing the Russian military.

In conclusion, Ukrainians living in the occupied territories have staunchly continued to resist the occupying forces or are looking for ways to leave. I believe it is our obligation to support and speak up for them. We will never recognize the holding of those sham elections nor their results, and we will ensure that those involved, including the Russian criminal leadership, are held accountable.

We once again call upon Russia to immediately, completely and unconditionally withdraw all of its troops and military equipment from the entire territory of Ukraine, within its internationally recognized borders. That is indeed the fastest and only viable route to lasting peace.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Czechia.

Mr. Kulháněk (Czechia): I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of Slovakia and my own country, Czechia.

We fully align ourselves with the statement to be delivered by the representative of the European Union.

The end of this month will mark the sad anniversary of the referendums orchestrated by the Russian occupation authorities in the territories of Ukraine. The international community, with only one conspicuous exception, overwhelmingly rejects their legitimacy. Those sham referendums were immediately followed by Russia's announcement of the annexation of the Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhya and Kherson regions.

This coming weekend, the Russian occupation Administration will take yet another illegal step in a similar vein. Under the guise of Russian municipal elections, the occupation authorities plan to organize so-called elections. They are actually already under way. Their underlying objective is quite clear — to lend an aura of legitimacy to the military occupation of Ukraine's sovereign territories.

The annexed parts of the four regions and Crimea are an integral part of Ukraine and are illegally occupied by the Russian invading forces. Such an act of annexation cannot be justified by manipulated votes conducted under the watchful eye and gun barrels of Russian soldiers. Be it through holding a referendum on accession or organizing the so-called elections in

occupied territories, the Russian Federation is once again flagrantly trampling on the basic principles of international law.

Both Czechia and Slovakia categorically condemn the annexation and do not recognize its legitimacy. The same applies to the staging of so-called elections in the occupied territories of Ukraine, as they violate international law.

We reiterate our full support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders. We call on Russia once again to immediately stop its aggression against Ukraine and to withdraw its troops from the territory of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders.

We will continue to support Ukraine and its citizens in their just defence against Russia's aggression for as long as it takes. We have no doubt that, notwithstanding the illegal actions undertaken by Russia, Ukraine will succeed in liberating its entire territory, as it did last year in the Kherson region merely weeks after the sham referendums.

The President: I now give the floor to Mr. Skoog.

Mr. Skoog: I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU) and its member States. The candidate countries North Macedonia, Montenegro, Albania, Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Bosnia and Herzegovina; and the European Free Trade Association country Liechtenstein, member of the European Economic Area; as well as Andorra, Monaco and San Marino, all align themselves with this statement.

I thank you, Mr. President, for the opportunity to speak to the Security Council today. Like everyone else, I also want to thank Mr. Miroslav Jenča for his presentation. Let me say, too, that we pay tribute to the United Nations country team in Ukraine, a contingent of which visited New York this week, for its enormous efforts on the ground to alleviate the plight of the Ukrainian people.

Today I want to emphasize two points: first, that Russia's illegitimate so-called elections in territories of Ukraine under temporarily military occupation hold no value under international law and that they should not and will not be recognized; and secondly, the dire human rights situation in those territories.

Russia has decided to go ahead with its so-called elections in the territories of Ukraine that it has temporarily militarily occupied. That is yet another manifest violation of international law and a futile attempt by Russia to legitimize its illegal military control and attempted annexation of parts of Ukraine's Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhya and Kherson regions and the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol. Russia has no legitimate basis for any such action on the territory of Ukraine. By wilfully undermining the world order based on international law and violating the fundamental rights of Ukraine to its independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity, as enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, Russia is putting global peace and security at risk, as many speakers have recognized today.

A little less than a year ago, the General Assembly overwhelmingly voted to condemn Russia's illegal annexation of Ukraine's territories (see A/ES-11/PV.14). With 143 votes in favour and only five against, the General Assembly called upon States, international organizations and United Nations agencies to not recognize any alteration by Russia of the status of those territories of Ukraine and demanded that Russia completely and unconditionally withdraw all of its military forces from Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders. Russia does not just block the Council from meaningful action — it is also in defiance of the General Assembly.

Russia, its political leadership and all those involved in organizing the illegitimate so-called elections will face consequences for those illegal actions.

The illegal so-called elections in Ukraine are taking place amid Russia's forced and illegal granting of passports, including to children, and widespread and systematic human rights violations in Ukraine's occupied territories. International monitoring mechanisms, including the United Nations human rights monitoring mission in Ukraine and the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine, have concluded that Russia has committed a wide range of violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law in Ukraine. Those violations include indiscriminate attacks, as well as intentional attacks against civilians and civilian objects; widespread and systematic summary executions, torture, ill-treatment and unlawful confinement; rape and other forms of sexual and gender-based violence; and forced transfer and deportation, including of children.

In the past months, Russia has once again escalated its attacks on civilian objects, including on facilities for the export of Ukrainian grain. Earlier this week, Russia bombed a crowded market in the Donetsk region, killing 16 people, including a child, and injuring dozens of others. Intentional attacks against civilians are war crimes. All commanders, perpetrators and accomplices of those atrocities will be held to account. The EU remains firmly committed to ensuring that Russia is held fully accountable for its aggression against Ukraine.

Furthermore, the report of the Secretary-General on the situation of children in armed conflict (S/2023/363) lists the Russian army and affiliated armed groups as perpetrators of grave violations against children. Those violations include the killing and maiming of Ukrainian children, mostly by air strikes, and attacks on schools and hospitals.

I express the EU's full support for the work of the United Nations to monitor and report on human rights violations and abuses and to support efforts toward accountability. In that regard, we welcome the recent visit by the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment to Ukraine. We urge Russia to uphold international human rights and humanitarian law. It must enable full, safe and unhindered humanitarian access through the front lines and stop willingly withholding aid from people in need in Ukraine's occupied territories.

We remain unwavering in our support for Ukraine and its sovereignty and territorial integrity. Russia must immediately, completely and unconditionally withdraw all of its troops and military equipment from the entire territory of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders. Ukraine is exercising its inherent right to defend itself and to regain full control of its territory. Crimea, Kherson, Zaporizhzhya, Donetsk and Luhansk are Ukraine. We call on all States and international organizations to unequivocally reject the illegal elections.

In a couple of days, world leaders will descend on New York, where they will discuss and recommit to the Sustainable Development Goals. As the rest of the world renews those commitments to assist every country in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, Russia's unlawful military assault on Ukraine is not only setting back the ambitions of the Ukrainian population but is

also imperilling the fundamental goals of many people in all corners of the world.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Italy.

Mr. Massari (Italy): Italy fully aligns itself with the statement just delivered by the observer of the European Union and would like to add some considerations in its national capacity.

Far from being an exercise of democracy and self-determination, the illegitimate so-called elections organized by Russia in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine are taking place amid widespread and systematic human rights abuses and intimidation. It is crystal clear that they represent only an attempt to pretend to uphold democratic practice while imposing with coercion and military force Russia's imperialistic plans.

Let me be clear: Italy will never recognize the fabricated results of the illegitimate elections organized by Russia in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine, just as Italy did not and will never recognize the illegal attempted annexation of all the Ukrainian territories temporarily occupied by Russia. We call on all States to do the same, as we see it not as a discretionary choice for States but rather as our common obligation under international law.

Italy condemns, in the strongest possible way, Russia's continuous brutal attacks targeting civilian infrastructure and cities across Ukraine, as well as Russia's complete disregard for the call from the entire membership to put an end to its full-scale, unprovoked and illegal invasion of Ukraine. There must be no impunity for those responsible for war crimes and other atrocities. Russia will ultimately have to be held accountable for the heavy damages caused by its war of aggression.

While thanking the United Nations country team for its extensive work on the ground and for having shared its very important insights during its visit to New York this past week, Italy fully supports all the humanitarian actors who are working tirelessly to ensure the protection of the population and that vital assistance is within reach. Rapid, safe and unhindered access to humanitarian assistance for those in need in Ukraine must be guaranteed.

Italy is committed to the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its

internationally recognized borders. Support for Ukraine will be one of the key priorities of our Group of Seven presidency next year and we are determined to continue doing so for as long as necessary, aiming to reach a just, comprehensive and lasting peace. We will concentrate on the reconstruction of Ukraine, including by hosting the Ukraine Recovery Conference in Italy in 2025. We will lay the foundations for a prosperous, independent Ukraine within our common European family.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Poland.

Mr. Szczerski (Poland): Let me begin by thanking Albania for convening today's meeting and for giving Poland the opportunity to actively participate in it. I also thank Assistant Secretary-General Miroslav Jenča for his very informative briefing on the current situation in Ukraine.

We are meeting at an important moment. On one the hand, Member States have come up with various diplomatic initiatives aimed at finding a path to a just peace in Ukraine. Poland belongs to that group. Recently, together with the representatives of more than 40 countries, we took part in a summit hosted by Saudi Arabia in Jeddah, during which we discussed the peace formula proposed by President Zelenskyy. On the other hand, contrary to that and other Member States' efforts, the aggressive party in the ongoing war, which is the Russian Federation, strives to achieve the opposite. It is creating an aggressive fait accompli situation, standing in opposition to the Charter of the United Nations.

Russia's acts are of a dual nature: political and military. The political acts are the plans to hold sham local elections as a follow-up to the sham referendums held almost exactly 12 months ago in the temporarily and partially controlled territories of Ukraine. The Kremlin is undertaking those actions in spite the fact that 143 Member States of our Organization clearly voiced their indignation with Russia's pseudo-democratic practices in General Assembly resolution ES-11/4, entitled "Territorial integrity of Ukraine: defending the principles of the Charter of the United

Nations", which has been referred to today several times. That resolution specifically calls for

"all States, international organizations and United Nations specialized agencies not to recognize any alteration by the Russian Federation of the status of any or all of the Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk or Zaporizhzhia regions of Ukraine, and to refrain from any action or dealing that might be interpreted as recognizing any such altered status" (General Assembly resolution ES-11/4, paragraph 4).

As we can clearly see, today that plea remains as timely and as wholly appropriate as it was one year ago. Poland cannot and will not accept the violations against Ukraine's territorial integrity — or against any other Member State. We believe such acts to be explicitly illegal.

While trying to create new political faits accomplis with a view to legitimizing its occupation in the eyes of the international community, Russia continues its brutal military aggression against civilians in many Ukrainian towns and villages. One of the latest such examples was its cruel attack earlier this week on a crowded market in Kostyantynivka. The Kremlin also continues to terrorize the global food supply through its continuing attacks against Ukraine's grain storage and port facilities.

In the context of the approaching high-level week of the seventy-eighth session of the General Assembly, the behaviour by Russia that I have just described constitutes a fundamental challenge for the entire United Nations. While we strive to maintain and restore international peace and security, we are forced to deal with a country — a permanent member of the Security Council — that continues to repeatedly break the most fundamental principles of international law. Its illegal actions have negative spillover effects for the whole international community. Consequently, we must defend the Charter, including the overarching principle of territorial integrity being discussed today. That is Poland's main message of peace for the upcoming high-level week.

The meeting rose at 11.50 a.m.