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Official Records

President: Mr. Muhammad-Bande (Nigeria)

In the absence of the President, Ms. Beckles (Trinidad and Tobago), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

Agenda item 63 (continued)

The situation in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine

Mr. Woodfield (United Kingdom): The United Kingdom welcomes this discussion on the situation in Ukraine. I would like to start by reiterating the United Kingdom's unwavering support for Ukraine's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity, including within its internationally recognized borders and territorial waters.

Today we remember those who tragically died during Ukraine's 2014 Euromaidan protests. The United Kingdom assures the families who lost loved ones that their sacrifice is not forgotten. Today also marks six years since Russia seized the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol from Ukraine. On 16 March 2014, Russian de facto authorities in Crimea organized a so-called referendum. On 18 March, President Putin signed a treaty formalizing Russia's illegal acquisition of Crimea and Sevastopol.

Let us be clear: by forcibly seizing 10,000 square miles from Ukraine, Russia broke the first principle of international law, that countries may not acquire territory or change borders by force. Russia's actions flagrantly violated its own international commitments,

including in Article 2 the Charter of the United Nations, the Helsinki Final Act and the Budapest memorandum. Through resolution 68/262, the General Assembly responded to Russia's actions by affirming Ukraine's territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders and the illegality of Crimea's change of status.

The position of the United Kingdom is clear: we do not and will not recognize Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea. Crimea is part of Ukraine, and we cannot ignore Russia's attempt to redraw boundaries in Europe.

The Russian Government continues to commit serious human rights violations beyond its borders, on the Crimean peninsula. The widespread persecution of ethnic and religious groups, including Crimean Tatars, must stop.

The release of Oleg Sentsov and other political prisoners, while welcome, was long overdue. It is appalling that approximately 89 Ukrainian political prisoners remain in detention in Crimea. Some are denied urgent medical assistance: Arsen Dzhapparov for his hearing, Viktor Shur for his heart. The United Kingdom calls on Russia to immediately release all Ukrainian political prisoners.

It is deplorable that Russia continues to ignore General Assembly resolutions calling for the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to visit Crimea to provide a full, independent assessment of the human rights situation. We call on Russia to grant access, in line with resolution 73/263.

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The United Kingdom is deeply concerned about Russia's ongoing militarization of Crimea and the Sea of Azov. In line with the General Assembly's resolution 74/17, on the militarization of Crimea, the United Kingdom calls on Russia to withdraw its military forces from the peninsula and to stop restricting access to the Sea of Azov.

Russia's actions in November 2018 violated the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, and had no basis in international law. It is inexcusable that Russia persists with daily restrictions on Ukrainian vessels passing through the Kerch Strait. That is clearly a brazen attempt to destabilize Ukraine's economy.

The international community must continue to stand united and focus on Russia's behaviour and consolidation of its illegal annexation of Crimea through the railway bridge across the Kerch Strait and local elections on the Crimean peninsula.

The Russian-led conflict in eastern Ukraine remains volatile. Russia has incited and supported military activity by armed formations, including through the deployment of Russian troops and military equipment on Ukrainian territory. As recently as this week, there has been a sharp increase in ceasefire violations near the Zolote disengagement area, with heavy weaponry proscribed under the Minsk agreements, which has caused further casualties. The Ukrainian people deserve peace, and we will continue to hold Russia to account to that end.

The United Kingdom condemns continuing threats to the Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM) of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). Russia's repeated refusal to allow the SMM to implement its mandate within non-Government controlled territories threatens the security of Ukraine and the wider region. We call on Russia to ensure safe, unconditional and unimpeded access in areas outside Ukraine's effective control.

The continued fighting is having a tragic impact on the lives of ordinary men, women and children. Over 13,000 people have now lost their lives, almost 30,000 have been injured, 3.4 million are in need of humanitarian assistance and approximately 1.4 million are registered as internally displaced people. Russia bears a heavy responsibility for the ongoing suffering.

Let us be clear: this conflict is not frozen. Russia created this conflict, and Russia continues to use its

influence over the separatists to service its agenda: attempting to suppress Ukraine's independence. In contrast, President Zelenskyy has shown a clear commitment to ending the conflict.

The United Kingdom therefore calls on Russia to abide by its Minsk agreement commitments and to deliver on the actions agreed at the Normandy format summit in Paris on 9 December: a full and comprehensive ceasefire, further disengagement, further prisoner exchanges and full and unimpeded access for the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission and humanitarian organizations to the non-Government controlled areas. That is the only way to end the fear and suffering of ordinary people in Ukraine.

The United Kingdom once again calls on the international community to stand united behind Ukraine and oppose Russia's continued attempts to destabilize Ukraine, undermine its sovereignty and steal its territory.

Mr. Kaneto (Japan): Japan consistently supports the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine. The stability of the situation in Ukraine is of importance to the international security environment, including in Europe.

Japan welcomes the initiation of talks between President Zelenskyy and President Putin to resolve the situation in Ukraine. We also welcome the Normandy format summit meeting, which was held last December for the first time in three years. We appreciate the initiative of the countries concerned. We would like to encourage further talks between Ukraine and Russia, including between the two leaders.

At the same time, we are concerned about the continuation of the situation with ceasefire violations, which have resulted in casualties despite a series of ceasefire agreements. It is our expectation that all the parties concerned will implement those agreements, advance confidence-building measures and take steps towards a resolution of the situation. Japan will continue its support, in cooperation with international organizations, and contribute to resolving the situation together with relevant countries.

Mr. Moraru (Republic of Moldova): The situation in and around Ukraine remains a matter of continuous concern for the international community. The developments on the ground, referenced today by the Ukraine's Minister for Foreign Affairs and other

speakers (see A/74/PV.58), only amplify that concern. As a neighbouring country profoundly preoccupied by the security implications of the unresolved situation in and around Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova supported the inclusion of item 63 on the agenda of the General Assembly at the present session. We believe that by considering, in a constructive and non-politicized manner, the matters arising from challenges to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Member States, the General Assembly can encourage and promote approaches and solutions based on strict observance of international law and the Charter of the United Nations.

The Republic of Moldova supports international efforts aimed at identifying a peaceful solution to the conflict in the eastern regions of Ukraine — Donetsk and Luhansk — on the basis of the Minsk agreements and under the auspices of the Normandy format. The Normandy format, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the United Nations are well positioned to promote the de-escalation of the situation in the conflict zone and to give further impetus to the political process for a peaceful settlement, based on full respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine.

We believe that the deployment of a United Nations peacekeeping mission on the ground, in accordance with Ukraine's requests, that would act in unison with the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM) could contribute towards achieving that goal. We take this opportunity to stress that the Republic of Moldova commends the activity of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine, which includes 40 Moldovan citizens. The Republic of Moldova will continue to contribute to the implementation of the Special Monitoring Mission's important mandate. In that context, we fully support the OSCE calls for ensuring unconditional and unimpeded access for SMM observers to all areas covered by the mandate.

Unlike the Transnistrian and other unresolved conflicts in the OSCE area, the conflict in the eastern part of Ukraine is not frozen and threatens peace and security in our region. Described recently by the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office as "the most pressing security challenge in Europe", this crisis cannot be resolved in a sustainable manner without the political will of the parties.

The Republic of Moldova welcomes the commitment of President Zelenskyy of Ukraine to identify a

diplomatic solution to the conflict, which has recently led to some confidence-building measures, including prisoner exchanges. We expect all parties involved to act likewise.

As a neighbouring country, we are directly interested in identifying, as soon as possible, sustainable solutions for the challenges facing Ukraine, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and the relevant resolutions adopted by the General Assembly, which the Republic of Moldova co-sponsored.

It should be also mentioned in this context that Ukraine has played an important role as a mediator in the 5+2 format for the settlement of the Transnistrian conflict. Its military observers continue to be a part of the peacekeeping mechanism in the eastern part of the country. We acknowledge and appreciate Ukraine's invaluable support.

In conclusion, I would like to reaffirm the interest of the Republic of Moldova in furthering its excellent bilateral cooperation with Ukraine.

Mr. Radomski (Poland): Poland aligns itself with the statement delivered on behalf of the European Union and its member countries (see A/74/PV.58). Allow me to make a few remarks that are of key importance to my country.

First, let me express our appreciation to Ukraine for calling for today's debate. We are especially honoured by the personal participation of Mr. Vadym Prystaiko, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, in this important meeting.

Despite the international community's protests, we are still witnessing the ongoing aggression of Russia on the territory of another State Member of the United Nations, Ukraine. Poland remains unwavering in its support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders. We continue to condemn Russia's violation of Ukraine's sovereignty, with its illegal occupation and attempted annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol. Russian aggression against Ukraine has serious consequences for the security of the entire region.

Russia is in persistent denial of its involvement in the conflict and continues shifting responsibility for non-implementation of the Minsk agreements to Ukraine. The confirmed presence in Donbas of weapons exclusively available in the Russian armed forces proves Russia's direct involvement in the armed

conflict with the neighbouring State. Russia's military actions and unilateral measures, including granting of Russian citizenship to Ukrainians in the Russia-controlled territories of Ukraine, seriously undermine the full implementation of the Minsk agreements.

We confirm our position that the conditions for holding local elections in the temporarily occupied areas of Donbas, according to rules established by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, require that security in the region be ensured.

Poland takes positive note of the first Normandy Quartet summit in the past three years, which took place in Paris in December 2019. Sadly, two months after the summit, out of several actions agreed, only a mutual release of detainees has been implemented. The ceasefire in Donbas is not being observed, and the agreed further measures on demining, additional disengagement areas and crossing points, as well as on ensuring safe access for the Special Monitoring throughout Ukraine, remain unfulfilled. We urge Russia, as a party to the conflict, to fulfil its obligations and to respect international law.

Through its illegal annexation and occupation of Crimea, as well as destabilization of certain areas in eastern Ukraine, Russia has violated the basic premises of the rules-based international order. No country has the legal right to benefit from such illegal actions.

We cannot forget that under international law all States have the duty not to recognize serious breaches of obligations arising under peremptory norms, such as the prohibition of aggression. What is important to emphasize is the legal character of that obligation: non-recognition is not a matter of political decision or approach; it is a legal requirement. Recognizing Crimea as part of the Russian Federation is in itself a violation of international law because it constitutes a form of support for a State that breaches peremptory norms and an attempt to legalize an unlawful situation. Therefore, Poland will never recognize Russia's annexation of Crimea.

We express our deep concern about the dire human rights situation in Crimea and in the territories of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic and Luhansk People's Republic. Discrimination on ethnic and religious grounds against Crimean Tatars and Ukrainians, violations of fundamental freedoms and arbitrary detentions in the territories de facto

administered by Russian-backed separatists have become persistent phenomena in those areas.

The recent quarterly report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) on the situation in Ukraine lists cases involving violations of the right to a fair trial as well as limited access to medical care for detained persons in the illegally annexed Crimean peninsula or their transfer to the Russian Federation, or even of the imposition of Russian citizenship on detainees. That is cause for strong concern on our part, and we therefore reiterate our call on the Russian Federation to uphold its obligations under international human rights law and international humanitarian law.

We are also alarmed by allegations of the torture and ill-treatment of people detained in the illegally annexed Crimea and in the territories of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic and Luhansk People's Republic. We urge all actors concerned to treat all detainees humanely and to ensure that detention conditions meet international standards.

Poland deeply appreciates the efforts of the Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the human rights monitoring mission in Ukraine. We strongly reiterate our call to ensure that OHCHR and other international human rights mechanisms are granted full and unhindered access to the illegally annexed or separatist territories of Ukraine.

Ukraine has been a priority recipient of Polish humanitarian aid for the past 15 years. The current geopolitical situation has only strengthened our determination to support Ukraine, which is reflected in the significant increase in our humanitarian support. Today the current assessment of humanitarian needs shows that the crisis is becoming a protracted one and that the situation of the displaced population has to be seen from a longer-term perspective, so as to enable people in need to become fully independent and better adapt to new conditions.

In conclusion, we call for the full implementation of the effective ceasefire announced in the joint conclusions of the Normandy Four summit. We also support the other aims agreed by the summit's participants, including the establishment by 2020 of three additional disengagement areas, the implementation of the updated demining plan and the creation of new crossing points along the line of contact.

Finally, we call on the international community to support President Zelenskyy's efforts towards a peaceful resolution to the conflict and to continue to apply unified pressure on Russia to do its part.

Mr. Cooreman (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): Belgium supports the statement delivered this morning (see A/74/PV.58) on behalf of the European Union.

Let me begin by reaffirming our unwavering commitment to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders, including its territorial waters. In accordance with Assembly resolution 68/262, we do not recognize Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea, which we consider contrary to international law. It constitutes a violation of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine and undermines the international legal order.

Let me turn to the situation in eastern Ukraine. The Minsk agreements were reached in order to put an end to the conflict. The implementation of those agreements is the only way to achieve a lasting political solution. We therefore expect the parties to fully and rapidly implement the agreements and honour their commitments. We call on Russia to use its influence on the armed formations to encourage them to comply fully with their commitments. We welcome the conclusions of the Normandy format meeting of 9 December 2019 and call for their implementation, including through the establishment of a lasting ceasefire.

The continued militarization of Crimea, the Sea of Azov and the Kerch Strait is a cause for concern. That continued militarization and any illegal use of force risks further destabilizing the region and exacerbating tensions. We condemn any obstruction of

navigation and freedom of passage through the Kerch Strait and urge Russia to ensure free and unimpeded passage through the Sea of Azov, in accordance with international maritime law.

The prolongation of the conflict also means the deterioration of the humanitarian and human rights situation. We urge all parties to allow international observers and monitoring mechanisms full, sustained and unhindered access to the various conflict zones, in accordance with humanitarian principles. We strongly encourage the same parties to respect the mandate of the Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine and to allow it safe and unhindered access to all Ukrainian territory, including the Ukrainian-Russian border and Crimea.

We are particularly concerned about the targeting of critical civilian infrastructure, contrary to international humanitarian law. As eastern Ukraine is one of the most mine-contaminated areas in the world, we call for further efforts to delineate and mark contaminated areas, as well as to clear mines, particularly near schools and at entry and exit points. We also call on Russia to release all Ukrainian political prisoners. All detained persons must be treated humanely in all circumstances, in accordance with international standards.

Belgium remains convinced that continuing and deepening the dialogue among all parties is the only way to build bridges that will make it possible to overcome differences and achieve a just and lasting peace.

The Acting President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate on this item. The General Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of agenda item 63.

The meeting rose at 3.30 p.m.