



Security Council

Seventy-eighth year

9524th meeting

Saturday, 30 December 2023, 4 p.m.

New York

Provisional

President: Mr. De La Gasca (Ecuador)

Members:

Albania	Mr. Stastoli
Brazil	Mr. Sénéchal de Goffredo Junior
China	Mr. Geng Shuang
France	Mr. De Rivière
Gabon	Ms. Koumby Missambo
Ghana	Mrs. Hackman
Japan	Mr. Iriya
Malta	Mr. Camilleri
Mozambique	Mr. Buanahagi
Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
Switzerland	Mr. Hauri
United Arab Emirates	Mr. Abushahab
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Mr. Phipps
United States of America	Mr. Kelley

Agenda

Threats to international peace and security

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The meeting was called to order at 4 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Threats to international peace and security

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of Ukraine to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Khaled Khiari, Assistant Secretary-General for the Middle East, Asia and the Pacific in the Departments of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and Peace Operations, 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. Khiari.

Mr. Khiari: As feared, the two-year cycle of death and destruction on full display during the Russian Federation's large-scale attack on Ukraine yesterday — which at last count had killed at least 39 Ukrainian civilians — escalated further overnight. According to Russian authorities, as a result of Ukrainian missile and rocket strikes on the city of Belgorod — which lies 30 kilometres from the Ukrainian border — at least 18 civilians, including two children, were reportedly killed. At least 108 others, including 15 children, were reportedly injured.

Attacks on locations in the Belgorod city centre reportedly resulted in damage to civilian infrastructure, including the regional Government office and the medical college of Belgorod State University. The strikes were reported as among the deadliest cross-border attacks on the Russian Federation since its full-scale invasion of Ukraine, in February 2022, launched in violation of the Charter of the United Nations and international law. Russian military authorities also reported separate overnight Ukrainian drone attacks in the Bryansk, Oryol, Kursk and Moscow regions of the Russian Federation. Meanwhile, Ukrainian authorities reported new overnight Russian drone attacks targeting the Kherson region.

The United Nations is not in a position to independently verify the various reported attacks or casualty figures.

As we meet again today, reports of new air raid alerts are also coming in from across Ukraine, including in the Kharkiv, Sumy, Mykolaiv, Kherson, Cherkasy, Poltava and Dnipropetrovsk regions. Just a few hours ago, the city of Kharkiv was reportedly attacked, resulting in civilians injured and civilian infrastructure damaged. As the war continues, we will see more Ukrainian and Russian civilians killed and injured.

As we have repeatedly warned, the latest series of attacks is a stark and vivid reminder of the very real dangers of further escalation and spillover of this war. We reiterate the Secretary-General's appeals for a de-escalation of tensions and for an end to attacks on civilians, population centres, residential areas and civilian and energy infrastructure. We unequivocally condemn all attacks on cities, towns and villages, in Ukraine and in the Russian Federation. Attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure violate international humanitarian law, are unacceptable and must end now. The protection of civilians must be the main priority. The fighting and bloodshed must cease. The war must come to an end.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Mr. Khiari for his briefing.

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

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): It was just yesterday (see S/PV.9523) that we met in this Chamber, at the insistence of representatives of the Kyiv regime and their sponsors, who tried to pass off the consequences of the unprofessional work of Ukrainian air defence forces as deliberate strikes by Russian aerospace forces against residential areas in Ukrainian cities. We used concrete examples to expose the falsity of those claims, and members had nothing to object to our arguments.

Let me ask where those people are today. Where are the representatives of European Union (EU) member states, who come in packs and bunches to request to take the floor at meetings on Ukraine in order to read out their tired propaganda on camera? Where is the representative of Czechia, whose missiles killed civilians in Belgorod? We tried to invite the Czech Permanent Representative to address us today, but he cowardly declined to participate. Of course, it is one thing to stand in line to participate in meetings convened by the Kyiv regime and its sponsors to promote anti-Russian propaganda, but it is quite another to take

responsibility for the actions of one's own Government. We want the citizens of Czechia, as well as other Western countries, the vast majority of which are not hostile to Russia, to understand where their money is going and what crimes their Governments are involved in. Where is the representative of Poland, who yesterday told us about the missile that flew into its territory, which 500 soldiers of the territorial defence troops of the Lublin province were looking for and could not find? Where is the representative of the European Union? Cast no illusions and drop the pretence. Brussels, along with Washington and London, as well as the majority of EU countries, are complicit in the crimes committed by the Kyiv clique.

Today members of the Security Council have a chance to do their duty and give an objective assessment of the terrorist attack of the Kyiv regime against the peaceful Russian city of Belgorod, which took place a few hours ago. The city centre and residential neighbourhoods of Belgorod were shelled with cluster munitions from multiple rocket launchers from the border town of Volchansk, in the Kharkiv region. Here are links to videos recorded by residents of Belgorod the moment the missile arrived. Let me stress that this was not some shards. The footage clearly showed a missile approaching. Here you can see the effect of this attack.

One of the targets of Ukrainian missiles was the Dynamo sports complex in Belgorod, where youth gymnastics classes were being held at that moment. Another was a skating rink in Belgorod city centre, where parents were spending time with their children. Belgorod State Technological University also came under attack by Ukrainian terrorists. In order to increase the number of victims of the terrorist attack, cluster munitions were used. Two Olkha missiles — in a prohibited cluster configuration — were used, as well as Czech-made Vampire projectiles.

This was therefore a deliberate, indiscriminate combined strike against a peaceful city. I would like to emphasize once again: what we saw was not a strike against military facilities with possible consequences for the civilian population, but a deliberate act of terrorism directed against civilians.

As of now, this premeditated and carefully prepared shelling of the central part of the city has killed 18 people, including three children. One hundred and eight people have been wounded, with five children and 12 adults in critical condition. We know that British and American advisers, who regularly incite the

authorities of present-day Ukraine to commit bloody crimes, were directly involved in the organization of this terrorist attack. Countries of the European Union, which stubbornly and irresponsibly continue to pump arms into the Ukrainian ruling clique, also bear responsibility.

We are very familiar with the narrative that we are going to hear today: “none of this would have happened if you had not started the special military operation in February 2022”. That is a lie. We launched a special military operation to stop what the Kyiv regime was doing in Donbas — bombarding its cities and towns with impunity for eight years, which the Council did not want to notice. We can only achieve that by defeating this terrorist regime, which openly brags about using terrorist methods against both its own and Russian citizens.

The shelling of populated areas in the Donbas, Kherson and Zaporizhzhya regions, Crimea and other Russian regions and the ruthless and indiscriminate killing of civilians attest to the agony of Zelenskyy's neo-Nazi regime — mired in terrorism, lawlessness, corruption and cynicism — which, in its impotent anger, seeks to kill as many Russian people as possible to please its Western masters.

All organizers and perpetrators of this and other crimes of the Kyiv junta will inevitably be punished. We call on all responsible Governments and relevant international mechanisms to condemn in the strongest possible terms this brutal terrorist attack, which used cluster munitions that are banned in most Western States, and to publicly distance themselves from the Kyiv regime and its Western sponsors who commit such crimes.

We are surprised by the Secretary-General's silence on this matter. Instead, on the part of the United Nations, we have heard only inarticulate comments from the Office of the Spokesperson of the Secretary-General, which just dropped an impersonal remark that such attacks should be condemned. Silence in response to the unbridled barbarism of Ukrainian Nazis and their puppeteer accomplices from “civilized democracies” will be akin to complicity in their bloody acts.

It was not by chance that the Nazi Kyiv regime chose Belgorod for a target of today's terrorist attack. As we all know, in recent weeks Ukrainian Nazis have lost many well-rooted positions in the suburbs of Donetsk, from where they have been shelling the

peaceful neighbourhoods of that city for nine years. The town of Marinka has been liberated. The Nazis are about to be driven out of Avdiivka. And Russian troops are pushing the Ukrainian militants along the entire line of resistance. At this point, the nationalists are no longer up to their usual shelling. Now they need to save their lives by piling the corpses of untrained recruits on fighting positions. But in the Kharkiv region, especially in close proximity to the Russian border, the situation is different — so far. We will of course correct it. As we have already stated, one of the tasks of our special operation, within the greater goal of demilitarizing Ukraine, is to eliminate threats coming from the territories bordering on Russian regions, including those that became part of Russia after the start of the military operation. The more such threats are created, the tougher we will retaliate. I think that must be clear to everyone.

To those here who called for negotiations yesterday, an adviser to the head of Ukrainian President's office, Mr. Podolyak, responded earlier today. Here is his quote:

“There will be no negotiations, in the classical sense of the word. There will be ultimatums to the Russian Federation at the highest level, and Russia will accept.”

Those are the associations that ringleaders of the Kyiv regime have with the word “negotiations”. Like Hitler in 1943 and 1944, they are sure of their invincibility and believe that the West will eventually save their skins.

Yesterday in this Chamber, a representative of the Kyiv clique, sitting behind the nameplate of the former Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, tried to lecture us and teach us about conscience — what is having a conscience and what is not. The Kyiv regime boasts of being an original Member of the United Nations, shamefully omitting the fact that that was possible only thanks to Comrade Stalin, who insisted on it in view of the enormous contribution to the victory made by Belarus and Ukraine and the sacrifices they made during the Second World War. The same Comrade Stalin, whom Ukrainian nationalists and Nazis hate fiercely, acquired for the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic Western Ukrainian lands that by that time had not been part of that country for centuries.

All of that, of course, has been forgotten and trampled on by the current Kyiv authorities. They have a different history and different heroes now, those whom the Nuremberg Tribunal — which the

representative of the Kyiv gang's representative refers to so abundantly — condemned as war criminals, collaborators and admirers of Adolf Hitler. The Führer of Germany as we know, said that conscience was a chimera. And the methods used by the current Kyiv strategists are no different from those used by Banderites and other folks from the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists, who used to massacre “Moskals”, Jews, Poles and Ukrainians themselves. The only difference is that now they are equipped with Western-made long-range weapon systems that allow them to reach city centres. And they aim at peaceful people rather than military targets.

In conclusion, let me recall a very accurate metaphor that Polish President Duda made during high-level week. He compared Ukraine to a drowning man who could pull down to the bottom whomever he had a grip on. Today we see Zelenskyy, Podolyak, Yermak and other neo-Nazi rabble trying to drag down not only the people of Ukraine, but also those who supply them with military equipment and ammunition, ostensibly for defence against Russia. It is clear that little hope can be pinned on the United States and Great Britain. For them supporting the Kyiv regime is a profitable enterprise, not only a geopolitical one but also a commercial one. But I very much want to believe that today's cynical use of Czech shells against civilians may yet sober up all the rest.

Mr. De Rivièrè (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Khiari for his statement.

On 24 February 2022, Russia attacked Ukraine. The war it unleashed has continued to inflict its toll of suffering on civilians. The massive strikes carried out yesterday by Russia throughout Ukrainian territory are further testimony to this. The cost already paid by the Ukrainian people, as we have said in this forum on numerous occasions, is unbearable. But Russia must also weigh the cost of this war for itself. If it had not invaded Ukraine, in violation of the Charter of the United Nations, if its troops were not currently present on Ukrainian soil, if it had not been bombing Ukrainian cities and villages daily for months, we would not be meeting today.

In March 2022, the International Court of Justice clearly demanded of Russia that its army leave Ukrainian territory without delay. France recalls the need for parties to a conflict to respect international humanitarian law. We likewise call on Russia to stop violating the resolutions of the Security Council, for

which it itself voted in favour, by arming itself with weapons from Iran and North Korea.

Finally, it is difficult not to notice — so crude is the artifice — that the convening of today's meeting is a way for Russia to respond to the meeting organized yesterday at the request of Ukraine (see S/PV.9523). France regrets that Russia, a permanent member, continues to weaponize the work of the Security Council. Ukraine is defending itself in full conformity with the Charter of the United Nations, which Russia is trampling upon. Nothing should distract us from the only urgency: Russia must end its war of aggression.

Mr. Abushahab (United Arab Emirates): I thank Assistant Secretary-General Khiari for his briefing.

We are meeting for the second time in 24 hours following a series of air strikes in Ukraine and Russia. Today's drone attacks reportedly targeted several regions in Russia, killing 14 and injuring more than 100. Particularly alarming are reports that two children were killed and 15 were injured. Reports indicate that civilian sites, including a school, were also hit. That adds to the 2,600 schools that have been damaged since this war began. Schools should be safe havens for children, and not a place where they fear for their safety.

We reiterate that international humanitarian law must be upheld at all times. Civilians must be protected, and constant care taken must be taken to spare them from military operations. Civilian objects must not be the target of attacks.

These air strikes show that, nearly two years into the war in Ukraine, the very real risks of its spreading remain a matter of grave concern. Following the end of the Black Sea Grain Initiative, there was an increase in military activity in and around the Black Sea. Civilian ships have been damaged and, just this week, civilian crew members were injured after their ship reportedly hit a mine.

Unless this conflict is halted, the new year will bring with it the prospect of further escalation. That will place communities in both Russia and Ukraine at greater risk and undermine their sense of safety. More civilians may be killed or wounded, and more families will be separated as the war continues unabated. The conflict will also continue its destabilizing impact on European and global security, while the damage it inflicts on our already fragile international order grows.

This past day has underscored both the potential for matters to spin out of control and the urgency of the war's resolution through diplomacy. We once again urge the parties to pursue a negotiated settlement. The worst of this war is managed and contained — until it is not. Those are risks that the parties, the region and the international community cannot afford.

The United Arab Emirates supports dialogue and diplomacy to achieve a just and sustainable peace in Ukraine. We support all serious efforts to end this war in a manner that preserves Ukraine's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity, in line with the United Nations Charter.

Mr. Phipps (United Kingdom): I thank Assistant Secretary-General Khiari for his briefing today.

The United Kingdom deeply regrets any civilian deaths in conflict, wherever they happen and particularly where children are involved. We are committed to upholding international humanitarian law and remind all parties to conflict everywhere of their obligations. We are also committed to upholding the Charter of the United Nations and its principles of respect for sovereignty and the right to self-defence.

Yesterday we discussed Russian airstrikes on civilians in Ukraine (see S/PV.9523); today Russia called this meeting to discuss Ukrainian strikes in Russia. Russia is attempting to draw equivalence. But let us be absolutely clear: there are hundreds of thousands of Russian soldiers in Ukraine; there is not a single Ukrainian soldier in Russia. The war in Ukraine is an invasion started by Russia, a fact that no amount of disinformation can obscure.

First, Russia blamed Ukraine for these strikes. Then it tried to demand Czechia appear before the Council. Now the Russian Ambassador is blaming the United Kingdom, the United States and the European Union. If Russia wants someone to blame for the deaths of Russians in this war, it should start with President Putin. President Putin is responsible for sending many thousands of Russian servicemen and women to their needless deaths.

In 2022, President Putin claimed his invasion was to stop a supposed genocide in Donbas. The International Court of Justice rejected that and ordered Russia immediately to end its invasion. Russia's real objectives were revealed when it attempted the illegal annexation of further Ukrainian territory. The United

Nations membership rejected that and repeatedly demanded that Russia end its invasion and withdraw.

As we discussed yesterday, having failed to defeat Ukraine militarily, Russia has now turned to indiscriminate attacks on civilians. The death toll from this week's attacks across Ukraine — the largest since the war started — continues to rise. Innocent children were among the casualties here too. In total, over 10,000 civilians, including more than 560 children, have been killed, and over 18,500 have been injured in Ukraine since 24 February 2022.

Russia chose to start this war; Russia can choose to end this war. Ukraine did not start it and has the right to defend itself. That is why the United Kingdom reiterates that we stand resolute with Ukraine and will remain so. We again call on Russia to respect the United Nations Charter, to end this war and to withdraw its forces from Ukraine.

Mr. Iriya (Japan): I thank you, Mr. President, for coordinating to convene this meeting. I also thank Assistant Secretary-General Khiari for his briefing.

We recall that indiscriminate attacks on innocent civilian populations constitute a war crime. We condemn all violations of international humanitarian law and violations and abuses of human rights and call upon all parties to strictly abide by international humanitarian law. We underline that there can be no impunity for war crimes and other atrocities. The international community must hold those responsible accountable in accordance with international law.

We should not lose sight of why on Earth we are gathering here today. This situation would not have happened in the first place if Russia had not started its illegal aggression against Ukraine. As stated by the overwhelming majority of the members of the General Assembly, Russia's aggression is a clear violation of international law, including the Charter of the United Nations.

As we have repeatedly made ourselves clear, including during the Security Council meeting yesterday (see S/PV.9523), Japan will continue to stand with Ukraine until the day when a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in Ukraine that upholds all the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter is realized. Once again, we urge Russia to withdraw immediately and unconditionally from the internationally recognized borders of Ukraine. Japan

has been standing, and will continue to stand, in solidarity with the people of Ukraine as long as it takes.

Mr. Camilleri (Malta): I also thank Assistant Secretary-General Khiari for his briefing.

Thousands of civilians have been killed since the beginning of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. Thousands more have been injured, maimed and displaced. We express our condolences to all victims of this senseless war and to their families.

Yesterday Russia carried out another barbaric attack on several cities across Ukraine — Kyiv, Lviv, Kharkiv, Odesa, and Dnipro, among others. It added to the tragic loss of life and misery the civilian population of Ukraine has been forced to endure for 675 days. As Russia continues in its desperate efforts to justify the unjustifiable and to try to present itself as the victim, we continue to stress that wars have devastating, long-lasting and far-reaching consequences. Meanwhile, the humanitarian situation in Ukraine keeps deteriorating. The most vulnerable, including women and children, are paying the highest price. The winter months and freezing temperatures will only compound existing hardships.

We remain firm in our belief that, to achieve a just and lasting peace, Russia must immediately cease all hostilities. It must unconditionally and completely withdraw from Ukraine. That is the only way forward. That is the only way to end the suffering that is impacting innocent lives on both sides. That should have been the focus of today's meeting.

Until then, Ukraine has the right to defend itself from Russia's aggression, as enshrined in Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations. It has the right to rely on its allies to do so. It has the right to protect its citizens, its borders, its sovereignty and its territorial integrity, just like any other Member of this Organization.

Mr. Kelley (United States of America): I thank Assistant-Secretary-General Khiari for his briefing yet again today.

We are once again gathered in this Chamber to discuss the impacts of Putin's illegal full-scale invasion of Ukraine. And as I said yesterday (see S/PV.9523), the United States mourns each and every civilian life lost to this conflict and all conflicts worldwide. We mourn every Ukrainian life cut short by Russian aggression. And we have not lost sight of the fact that ordinary

Russian civilians are also bearing the brunt of the Kremlin's brutal war.

Just as we discuss issues openly and plainly in this Chamber, Putin should be honest with his own people about the true and mounting cost of his war. This cost is not only the hundreds of thousands of lives lost on the battlefield, the families torn apart and in the many who have fled the country, but also the bleaker economic future for those who remain.

One fact remains clear: we are here again today because the Kremlin refuses to halt its illegal invasion. Every day the Kremlin's invasion of Ukraine continues, Putin is responsible for the senseless and unnecessary loss of life. This is his war. It is his war of choice and one that seeks to seize the sovereign territory of another United Nations Member State and subjugate the people of Ukraine to his will. As my colleagues have noted, Russia could end this war today and prevent more civilian deaths. The Russian delegation should beseech their capital for action, not the Council. As long as Russia persists, the United States will support Ukraine's efforts to defend itself, in line with Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations and consistent with its obligations under international humanitarian law. Civilians are protected under the law of war, and we call for the protection of all civilians, on all sides, of every conflict. All parties to a conflict must take feasible precautions to minimize civilian harm. Russia alone is responsible for starting and prolonging this war in violation of the United Nations Charter, and for the resulting loss of life. We again call on Russia to end its aggression and withdraw its troops from Ukraine's internationally recognized borders immediately.

Let me also again take the opportunity to congratulate Ecuador on a successful presidency of the Council and to express the deepest appreciation of the United States for the contributions and partnership of the outgoing members: Albania, Ghana, the United Arab Emirates, Brazil and Gabon. We welcome and look forward to working with the incoming Council members in the new year.

Mr. Sénéchal de Goffredo Junior (Brazil): I thank Assistant Secretary-General Khiari for his briefing.

For almost two years, Brazil has consistently warned about the immense cost of human lives in the conflict in Ukraine. The deaths recorded in Belgorod illustrate once again the suffering imposed on civilians on both sides of the front line. Many Brazilian nationals

actually live and study in the region. Brazil expresses its solidarity with the families of all victims and with all those injured in the attack.

It is essential and urgent to de-escalate, create conditions for dialogue and begin negotiations for a lasting peace, taking into account the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and the legitimate security concerns of all parties. The increasing flow of weapons into the conflict will only fuel more violence and will not contribute to ending it. The end of the war is the only way to prevent such incidents from recurring week after week. We urge the parties to respect their obligations under international humanitarian law and to engage in the search for a peaceful solution to the crisis. Article 33 of the United Nations Charter outlines the tools to achieve that goal. Strict adherence to the road map laid out by the founders of this Organization is a duty of all members of the international community.

Mr. Stastoli (Albania): I also thank Assistant Secretary-General Khiari for his briefing.

Yesterday the Council held an urgent meeting (see S/PV.9523) to condemn the simultaneous air missile attacks of the Russian army against the civilians in Ukraine. We heard Russia explain once more that their 158 missiles of all kinds did not cause any harm to anyone and that all the innocent victims — 39 by today's count — were caused by Ukraine's defence systems. One must be totally immune to absurdity to believe such a high degree of fallacy. According to the United Nations count, there are now more than 20,000 civilian casualties caused by Russia in Ukraine, and we have never heard Russia express any concern. On the contrary, they continue to blame victims for being attacked mercilessly. Today Russia called this mirror meeting to express its concern for the civilians who lost their lives in Belgorod. We do not know yet exactly the dynamics of the event, but we regret every casualty among civilians, whether they are Russians or Ukrainians.

Let us not get distracted by a narrative that has long shown its limits. While we deplore any innocent's loss of life, the core issue has been, is and remains that Russia wanted this war, planned for it, executed it and is by all accounts the sole responsible for the consequences that this war is causing. Had there been no aggression, there would be no victims, no crimes, no destruction, no such ridiculous efforts to confuse the world that Ukraine started the war, that Ukraine is killing its own people, that Russia is doing what it can do to stop it

and, finally, that black is white. Russia's attempts to distort the reality by portraying international solidarity with Ukraine as the cause of this crisis is nothing short of a fallacious narrative. It is in fact the consequence, the result of its own actions and policy. We vehemently oppose the Kremlin's sinister objective of dismantling Ukraine and subjugating its people through the relentless use of military force and propaganda. We will continue to support Ukraine in defending its territory and its freedom, just like every country would do. At the same time, we will not tire of seeking a just peace in line with the Charter of United Nations that respects the sovereignty and the territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders.

Mr. Hauri (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): I thank Assistant Secretary-General Mohamed Khaled Khiari for his briefing, and also welcome the participation of the representative of Ukraine.

Russia's military aggression has been going on for almost two years now. Today's attacks on Belgorod are yet another tragic consequence of this war initiated by Russia. Switzerland takes note of reports of destruction in residential areas and of civilian casualties. We call on all parties to the conflict to strictly respect international humanitarian law. This law applies to all armed conflicts, and we reiterate that regularly. International humanitarian law is clear: civilians must not be targeted.

As we heard in this Chamber yesterday (see S/PV.9523), Russia has launched in recent days, in several regions of Ukraine, one of its heaviest waves of missile and drone attacks since the start of the military aggression, causing many fatalities. According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, these attacks have caused considerable damage to a wide range of civilian infrastructure, including apartment buildings, a maternity hospital, schools, kindergartens, parks, a metro station, a shopping mall and energy infrastructure. In addition to the direct casualties, these attacks only serve to exacerbate the suffering of the population, particularly in the harsh winter conditions. And yet Russia continues its strikes against Ukraine, as it did tonight in the Kharkiv region and other parts of eastern and southern Ukraine. These attacks must stop.

To avoid further suffering among the civilian population, de-escalation is essential. For that reason, we once again call on Russia to cease all combat operations and to promptly withdraw its troops from

Ukrainian territory. Switzerland will remain committed to a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in Ukraine, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, international law and General Assembly resolutions.

Ms. Koumby Missambo (Gabon) (*spoke in French*): I thank Assistant Secretary-General Khaled Khiari for his briefing, and I welcome the presence of the representative of Ukraine in this meeting.

The Council met yesterday (see S/PV.9523) and is meeting again this afternoon owing to the intensification of a war that every day puts humankind at risk of a disaster with irreparable consequences. Each of our meetings must be oriented towards finding solutions to end the war. This war has already caused far too many deaths, destruction of civilian infrastructure and environmental and economic consequences at the international level. My country reiterates that civilian populations and civilian infrastructure should absolutely not be the targets of armed attacks and calls on the parties to the conflict to strictly adhere to international humanitarian law.

We are very concerned by the developments of the past few days, in particular the increasing number of drone attacks, which not only add to the terrible toll of the war but also risk extending the spectre of violence. The large-scale attacks in Belgorod yesterday and the far deadlier ones in Kyiv, Kharkiv and other cities in Ukraine the day before are a reflection of the deadly violence that is stirring the threat of a conflagration in the area of hostilities. My country reiterates its rejection of war and calls on the parties to cease all military escalation and any actions that are likely to exacerbate the dispute. It is time to end the war in Ukraine.

The Council exists for security. It must be able to justify its name in every one of our meetings. Our energies must be directed towards seeking a solution to conflicts, not justifying them. As my country reaches the end of its term as a non-permanent member of the Council, I would like to reiterate its commitment to peace and the pacific settlement of disputes, and against the use of force. My country will continue to engage tirelessly in the peace-seeking process and will stand by those who propose alternatives to the language of war. This war must be stopped, and it must be stopped very soon. The peoples of the world expect the Council to take concrete action to end this conflict.

Mr. Buanahagi (Mozambique): I thank the presidency for convening this briefing. I would also

like to thank Mr. Khaled Khiari, Assistant Secretary-General, for the information that he just shared with us. I also acknowledge the presence in this Chamber of the representative of Ukraine.

We are very concerned about the recent reports on the attacks in Belgorod. Regrettably, this is an additional sign of how violence is escalating in the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, which poses a serious threat to peace and security at the local, regional and international levels. The detrimental consequences of this conflict, such as the loss of human lives, the grave humanitarian situation and the destruction of property and public infrastructure, tend to worsen day by day on the ground. Mozambique once again calls for the parties to pave the way for a more pondered, constructive and peaceful approach leading to an end of the ongoing bloodshed and to the cessation of hostilities.

Building confidence between the contending parties is therefore an imperative path and a matter of urgency in order to create room for genuine and results-oriented dialogue. We are mindful of the fact that dialogue and diplomacy require willingness, devotion, compromise and commitment. The United Nations could play a central role in facilitating those efforts. The facts are clear: the longer the conflict persists, the more severe the consequences become. Furthermore, we urge all parties in this conflict to fulfil their responsibilities to safeguard civilians and rigorously abide by all relevant instruments of international humanitarian law, including pertinent resolutions such as resolutions 1265 (1999) and 1296 (2000).

Mozambique has a well-established and steadfast stance on principle. The only way of putting an end to this conflict is to lay the foundation for a long-lasting and sustainable peace between the two nations. We support a diplomatic and negotiated solution between the two neighbouring countries. The truth on the ground demands that dialogue be given a chance, today more than ever.

In conclusion, it is our sincere hope that the contending parties will embrace diplomacy and dialogue as a means of resolving this worrisome conflict.

Mrs. Hackman (Ghana): I thank Assistant Secretary-General Khaled Khiari for his briefing.

Less than 24 hours ago, the Security Council met following reports of the Russian Federation's aerial attacks across many regions of Ukraine. We are gathered once again in this Chamber following reports of attacks

by Ukraine against the Russian city of Belgorod. This time, 18 people, including children, are reported to have been killed, with damage caused to several civilian facilities. The harsh reality unfolding before us in both situations is the loss and endangerment of civilian lives and livelihoods, as the two neighbouring countries have chosen to prioritize the military logic for the resolution of this dispute. We have cautioned against that approach and must not lose sight of the wider ramifications of the war for global peace and stability. What may seem bad today could get worse if the parties persist with the military approach.

We emphasize that civilians and civilian infrastructure are not and should not be targets of war. The parties are equally obligated under international humanitarian law to refrain from causing civilian harm and should be guided by the principles of humanity, distinction, proportionality and military necessity. We reiterate our call for the de-escalation of tensions and call for urgent diplomatic efforts to support the immediate and unconditional cessation of hostilities. The international community must spare no effort in bringing the parties together to resolve their differences through a constructive dialogue and in a manner that assures durable peace. In that regard, we urge the parties to avail themselves of the modes for the pacific settlement of disputes outlined in Article 33 of the Charter of the United Nations.

Finally, in upholding the fundamental principles of international law and the values of the Charter of the United Nations, which guide and preserve the international order, Ghana reiterates its call to the Russian Federation to end its war of aggression against Ukraine with the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of its troops from the internationally recognized borders of Ukraine.

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

Yesterday, at the request of Albania and some other members, the Security Council held an emergency meeting to consider the civilian casualties resulting from the conflict in Ukraine. Today, at the request of the Russian Federation, we are back in this Chamber for another emergency meeting of the Council to consider the civilian casualties resulting from the crisis in Ukraine. This dense flurry of deliberations by the Council of the grievous attacks and civilian casualties when we are so close to the end of the year leaves us sad and distressed. We are deeply concerned by the long,

drawn-out Ukraine crisis that is not over yet and by the unabated and raging flames of war that continue to cause untold harm at a time when the new year is just around the corner.

There are no winners in any conflict or war. Conflict and war cause nothing but profound suffering to innocent people and tremendous damage to regional peace and stability and will only exacerbate the existing difficulties for global economic development, especially for developing countries in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. We renew our appeal to the parties concerned to respond positively to the international community's call for peace, enhance engagement, expand their common ground and put an early end to the hostilities. We also renew our appeal to all stakeholders to step up diplomatic mediation with a greater sense of urgency and to work together to create enabling conditions for an early political settlement of the crisis.

China will continue to stand on the side of peace and on the side of dialogue and is committed to encouraging and facilitating peace talks and playing a constructive role in a political settlement of the Ukraine crisis.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Ecuador.

I thank Assistant Secretary-General Khaled Khiri for his informative briefing and am grateful for his availability to respond to the Security Council's calls whenever necessary.

The statement I made yesterday in this very Chamber (see S/PV.9523) is fully valid, and I therefore reiterate it in its entirety. If, for every meeting convened in the Security Council, hostilities were suspended in every conflict in the world, Ecuador would be the first to request that this main United Nations organ remain in session permanently. The Council was established for that very purpose and given the primary responsibility of maintaining international peace and security. I would therefore recall that on 6 May 2022 (see S/PRST/2022/3), the Council expressed deep concern regarding the maintenance of peace and security of Ukraine. On that date, the Council also reiterated that all Member States have undertaken, under the Charter of the United Nations, the obligation to settle their international disputes by peaceful means.

Today my delegation expresses the wish it shares with all the peoples of the world: to put an end to this and all conflicts in the world. Of course, none of the foregoing and no provision of the Charter of the

United Nations undermines the inherent right to self-defence. We reiterate to the parties their obligation to refrain from attacking the civilian population or civilian infrastructure and to respect the principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution. We regret all the loss of human lives, particularly those of children, since the beginning of this conflict. The military aggression against Ukraine is a tragedy for the peoples of Russia and Ukraine, and it must therefore end, and end now.

As I stated yesterday, we are concerned that a military mindset will be perpetuated and that it will prevent dialogue and negotiation. We are also concerned about the possibility of escalation and spillover of the conflict. A little more than 24 hours before the new year, I hope that in 2024, diplomacy will proliferate, weapons will be silenced and the front lines will no longer be along borders and in cities, but in this Chamber and in the existing peaceful settlement mechanisms.

Finally, at the previous meeting, I expressed a few words of sincere gratitude to delegations and the Secretariat. I reiterate that gratitude today, and I would like to call upon all members of the Organization to renew the spirit of the Charter of the United Nations, to save present and succeeding generations from the scourge of war, and to practice tolerance and coexist peacefully with one another as good neighbours.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

The representative of the Russian Federation has requested the floor to make a further statement.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): I just wanted to make a few comments. Many Council members are fond of saying, "do not let Russia mislead or distract us". That is a notion familiar to us when the subject is an inconvenient one for the Council members who say such things. We also constantly hear that it is not Ukraine that started this war. Well, if in 2013 there had not been an anti-government coup in Ukraine that was supported and blessed by the West, if the Government that took power had not begun a war in the Donbas against its own citizens in 2014, and if the Minsk package of agreements approved by a Security Council resolution had been implemented, none of what happened in 2022 would have occurred.

The representative of Malta mentioned today that Ukraine has the right to defend its citizens. I would like

to ask, does it also have the right to intentionally and indiscriminately kill civilians?

The Permanent Representative of France constantly says that Ukraine is defending itself in accordance with Article 51 of the Charter. What about bombing civilian — not military — infrastructure? Is that also based on Article 51 of the Charter?

Russia does not target peaceful Ukrainian civilians, no matter how many times those here repeat that — not everyone here, of course, but some, and everyone knows who they are. We are only targeting military infrastructure. Neither do we intentionally fire weapons at, or target, civilians. Look at statements by Ukrainian neo-Nazis on social media — how much glee and gloating they express at the killing of peaceful civilians in Belgorod. There is nothing similar in Russian social media about Ukrainian civilians. Council members cannot imagine how disgusted people in Russia — and those in Ukraine who do not support the Kyiv regime — are when they hear the cynical and false claims of Council members. They should be ashamed.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Ukraine.

Mr. Dvornyk (Ukraine): I recognize here the representative of Putin's regime in the permanent seat of the Soviet Union.

The Security Council convened yesterday (see S/PV.9523) and is meeting again today, and it should be ready to meet tomorrow, the day after tomorrow and every day that the Russian war against Ukraine lasts. Because as long as this war, unleashed by the Kremlin dictator, endures, the toll of death and suffering will continue to grow.

Yesterday the delegation of Ukraine informed the Council of the devastating outcomes of the Russian missile and drone attack that happened that day. Unfortunately, the number of casualties of that attack has increased. Today eight more bodies were retrieved from the rubble of a storage facility hit yesterday by a Russian missile in Kyiv. One more victim of the Russian attack died today in Odesa, and as Ukraine is still recovering from yesterday's horrendous strike, new waves of Russian terror persist.

Just hours ago, as the Assistant Secretary-General mentioned, Russia again terrorized Kharkiv with S-300 missiles, hitting a residential building and a hotel. Since this morning, a number of cities and villages in Ukraine have come under Russian fire: Dnipro, Nikopol and Vyshetarasivka in the Dnipropetrovsk region; Kharkiv, Vovchansk, Kupyansk and Velyka Shapkyivka in the Kharkiv region; Mezenivka in the Sumy region; Kurakhove, Avdiivka, Selydove, Progres, Oleksandro-Kalynove and Novoukrainka in the Donetsk region; Semenivka and Arkhypivka in the Chernihiv region; and Antonovka and Tomina Balka in the Kherson region. I reiterate: this is a list of the settlements attacked today.

There is only one way to stop the human suffering and destruction caused by the war — to stop the war itself — and it is baffling that such a simple idea, natural to any diplomat, eludes the minds of the members of the Russian delegation, who identify themselves as diplomats.

The Russian Federation should make the only just decision, as outlined by the General Assembly resolution of 23 February 2023, entitled "Principles of the Charter of the United Nations underlying a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in Ukraine" (General Assembly resolution ES-11/6). That decision can be made immediately by a single person in the Kremlin — to cease aggression, to withdraw troops from the territory of Ukraine and to prepare for what usually follows the end of war, namely, accountability and reparations. Once Russia's bloody war is over, there will be no more human suffering, no more civilian casualties in Europe and no more reason for further Security Council meetings on this issue.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): There are no more speakers inscribed on the list.

I would like to once again express my delegation's sincere gratitude to the members of the Council and to the Secretariat for the support provided to us. I thank in particular the members of the technical team, the conference officers, the interpreters, the translators, the verbatim reporters and security personnel, especially for being ready to serve with professionalism and to do so at any moment. I wish them a prosperous and happy 2024 and a well-deserved break.

The meeting rose at 5 p.m.