

Russia's illegal occupation of Crimea and continued aggression against Ukraine: UK statement to the OSCE

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UK Chargé d'Affaires, Deputy Ambassador James Ford, condemns Russia's attempts to justify its illegal occupation of Crimea. He reaffirms that Crimea is Ukraine and calls on Russia to end its occupation and cease its wider war of aggression.

Thank you, Mr Chair.

Last week, Russia used this Council to “celebrate” the so-called reunification of Crimea with the Russian Federation. Russia even claimed that this “confirms that there are alternatives to violence and hatred”.

Mr Chair that was disinformation not worthy of this forum, and it warrants a clear rebuttal. Russia knows that its invasion, occupation and attempted annexation of Crimea in 2014 was achieved through force. And nothing in the reality of Crimea today supports the narrative Russia presented here last week.

In the drafting of the Helsinki Final Act, the USSR itself was insistent on the inviolability of frontiers in Europe. It is notable that Russia is now the State seeking to erode this foundation of our collective security.

Indeed, Russia's actions in Crimea in 2014 violated multiple Helsinki principles, including: sovereign equality; the inviolability of frontiers; territorial integrity; refraining from the threat or use of force; and the peaceful settlement of disputes. The events of 2014 were not a spontaneous expression of popular will. They followed an anti-constitutional seizure of territory, conducted under military occupation, and accompanied by systematic pressure on local populations. This included Crimean Tatars, whose fundamental rights have since been routinely violated.

Twelve years on, Russia's attempts to retroactively justify its actions do not alter these facts. Nor do they change the reality that Crimea's occupation marked another milestone – alongside Russia's actions in Moldova and Georgia – in Moscow's assault on European security. Russia's actions of 2014 culminated in the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, and of course continue today.

Independent reporting shows that the tactics Russia employed in Crimea have since been applied across other occupied areas of Ukraine: methods like detention, disappearances and deportations, targeting Ukrainian communities and attempting to erode Ukrainian identity.

And Russia's continued large-scale aerial assaults across Ukraine demonstrate how this same pattern of coercion and disregard for civilian life continues today. Earlier this week, Russia launched nearly one thousand drones and dozens of missiles in the largest attack over a 24-hour period since the war began. Among the sites damaged were Lviv's 16th-century Bernardine Monastery – a UNESCO World Heritage site – and a maternity hospital. These attacks are part of a sustained strategy of intimidation that demonstrates, yet again, Russia's contempt for peace talks and its refusal to resolve disputes through diplomatic or lawful means.

Mr Chair, OSCE participating States have repeatedly reaffirmed the Helsinki Final Act and

underlined that its principles are non-negotiable. Russia agreed to these principles freely; in fact, it strongly advocated for some of them. It cannot choose to invoke them when convenient while discarding them in practice.

The United Kingdom reaffirms that Crimea is part of Ukraine, today as in 2014. We call on Russia to meet its OSCE commitments by ending its occupation of Crimean territory, and all occupied territory, and ceasing its war of aggression against Ukraine.

Thank you.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/russias-illegal-occupation-of-crimea-and-continued-aggression-against-ukraine-uk-statement-to-the-osce>