

Russia's escalation during diplomacy undermines peace efforts: UK statement to the OSCE

26.2.2026 - Neil Holland | Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs

Ambassador Holland condemns Russia's intensified attacks on Ukraine, highlighting a clear pattern of escalation during active diplomacy. He highlights the severe humanitarian toll, rejects Russian attempts to shift blame, and reaffirms the UK's commitment to supporting Ukraine in its pursuit of a just and lasting peace.

Thank you, Mr Chair.

We hear regularly from the Russian Federation that Ukraine and its supporters are working to undermine peace efforts, alleging that attacks peak precisely around peace talks to derail diplomacy. These accusations are both hypocritical and revealing. They follow a familiar pattern in which Russia attributes to others what it does itself.

As Ukraine engages constructively in US-led diplomacy, Russia has intensified its campaign against Ukrainian civilians and energy infrastructure. Since October, Russia has launched more than thousand missiles, many impacting power plants and grid nodes.

This month alone, Russia has used an average of more than 170 drones and ten missiles per day, including a sharp rise in ballistic and hypersonic systems. So far in February, it has fired a record 117 ballistic or hypersonic missiles – exceeding the previous monthly record of 98 in October 2025 – and has already used more Zircon hypersonic cruise missiles than in the entirety of the war up until that point.

There is now a clear pattern of Russia escalating its attacks when diplomacy is most active. As delegations gathered in Geneva last week, Russia launched another major combined strike on Ukraine's energy system, using hundreds of drones and dozens of missiles. We have seen this pattern time and again with previous rounds of talks.

This is not the behaviour of a state seeking a settlement. It is an attempt to gain leverage through force while accusing others of doing precisely that.

The humanitarian cost is severe. In 2025, Russian attacks killed more than 2,500 Ukrainian civilians and injured over 12,000. Nearly 600 healthcare facilities were damaged or destroyed. The UN forecasts further large-scale displacement this year. These strikes put millions at risk, disrupt nuclear power safety systems, and deepen the suffering of communities already enduring subzero temperatures.

Mr Chair, this week we entered the fifth year of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. At Tuesday's Reinforced Permanent Council, forty-nine delegations spoke in support of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. That collective stance underscores the unity of this organisation in standing with Ukraine as it defends itself against Russia's unlawful war.

The obstacle to peace is not Ukraine, nor its partners. It is Russia's decision to continue an illegal war of aggression while using this Council to project blame onto others.

But Mr Chair, whatever your opinions are, you can't escape facts, and the fact is that Russia invaded its neighbour Ukraine.

The way forward remains clear: Russia must stop its attacks and engage seriously in good faith negotiations for a just and lasting peace.

Thank you.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/russias-escalation-during-diplomacy-undermines-peace-efforts-uk-statement-to-the-osce>