

Statement by Finland
on behalf of Baltic and Nordic countries
(Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, and Sweden)

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“The situation in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine”

Statement by
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to the United Nations

(check against delivery)

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the eight Nordic-Baltic countries: Denmark, Estonia, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Sweden and my own country Finland.

International law and territorial integrity and sovereignty have been violated in Ukraine by the Russian Federation since 2014. Russia's actions have not only endangered the security in Europe, but also weakened the basis for the maintenance of international peace and security and for the development of friendly relations and cooperation among States. They run against international law including the UN Charter, the Helsinki Final Act and the Paris Charter and therefore, are not only a bilateral or a European concern, but a global one. For this reason, we welcome this timely debate.

The position of the Nordic and Baltic countries is firm. We stand by Ukraine and reconfirm our steadfast support for Ukraine's territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence within its internationally recognised borders, including its territorial waters. We strongly condemn Russia's aggression against Ukraine, including in eastern Ukraine, and the illegal annexation of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol and are fully committed to the EU's non-recognition policy, including restrictive measures. We urge Russia to respect the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine in accordance with the UN General Assembly resolution 68/262.

Mr. President,

We are deeply worried by the constantly deteriorating human rights and humanitarian situation in Crimea. Arbitrary detentions and politically motivated convictions targeting especially Crimean Tatars and Ukrainians, increasing pressure on journalists, human rights defenders and civil society actors, violations of the human rights to freedom of expression, information, peaceful assembly, association and freedom of religion or belief as well as the freedom of the media, and linguistic and cultural rights, deprivation of civil and property rights through forced passportization and conscription are violations of international law and principles which Russia has committed to. Despite the order by the International Court of Justice in 2017, the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatars' remains banned. We call for Russia to abide by its international obligations.

As stated in a number of UN General Assembly resolutions on the human rights situation in Crimea, we urge Russia to release all illegally detained and imprisoned Ukrainian nationals held in Crimea and Russia. We urge Russia to respect its human rights and humanitarian law commitments and to ensure international human rights and humanitarian actors full and unhindered access to the areas currently not under the control of Ukraine, including the Crimean peninsula. The recent decision by the European Court of Human Rights in the case *Ukraine versus Russia (Re Crimea)* clearly sets out Russia's responsibility for its actions in Crimea.

We express grave concern regarding the continuing militarization of Crimea undermining the security in the Black Sea region. We also call for Russia to refrain from impeding the lawful exercise of navigational rights and freedoms to and from the Azov Sea and refrain from discriminatory inspections of vessels passing through the Kerch Strait.

Mr. President,

The humanitarian conditions in eastern Ukraine are severe. Almost 14,000 people have died and over 30,000 have been wounded. The conflict affects the lives of over 5 million people living on both sides of the contact line, 1,5 million are internally displaced and over 3 million

require humanitarian assistance and protection. According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, eastern Ukraine is one of the areas most contaminated by landmines in the world.

Older persons and children are in the most vulnerable situation. International organisations are not able to function freely in the non-government controlled areas due to restrictions imposed by the Russia-backed armed formations. The COVID-19 pandemic has been used as a pretext to excessively restrict crossings of the contact line.

Mr. President,

There is no military solution to the conflict. The only way to find a sustainable political solution is through political dialogue and implementation of the Minsk Agreements. We stress Russia's key responsibility and commitments in this respect. We recall that the duration of the EU's economic sanctions on Russia remains clearly linked to the full implementation of the Minsk agreements.

We welcome the strengthened ceasefire agreed in the Trilateral Contact Group in July 2020, which improved the security situation. However, it is unfortunate, that this has not led to further progress in the political dialogue. We are also concerned about the increases in the number of ceasefire violations since November. We support the efforts by the Normandy Format, the OSCE and the Trilateral Contact Group towards facilitating the implementation of the Minsk Agreements. We commend Ukraine's political will and constructive approach to finding ways to resolve the conflict and urge Russia to act likewise.

We reiterate our support for the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission and its valuable work on reporting and monitoring the ceasefire. We deplore the frequent restrictions imposed on the SMM mostly in the non-government controlled areas and we urge Russia to use its considerable influence over the armed formations it backs to remove all undue restrictions that hamper the SMM's ability to implement its mandate, which covers all of Ukraine's territory, including the Crimean Peninsula.

Mr. President,

The Nordic-Baltic countries reiterate our firm support for Ukraine. We are convinced that the respect for international law and a rules-based world order are fundamental for our common security and multilateral cooperation. We call on members of the international community to adopt the non-recognition policies in line with the resolution 68/262. We urge Russia to abide by international law and uphold its international commitments. We call for the Secretary General and the UN to continue efforts to restore respect for the territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence of Ukraine.

Thank you Mr. President.