



**PERMANENT DELEGATION
OF NORWAY TO THE OSCE**

STATEMENT IN RESPONSE TO AMBASSADORS APAKAN AND SAJDIK

As delivered by Counsellor Hilde Austad
to the Permanent Council,
Vienna, 28 April 2016

Mr Chairman,

I join others in thanking Ambassadors Apakan and Sajdik for their reports. We underline our full support for the work of the SMM and the Trilateral Contact Group, and our appreciation for the work the monitors are doing under very difficult circumstances.

Mr Chairman,

We are concerned about the negative dynamics on the ground. Increased fighting suggests the Minsk process is not moving forward. A sustainable ceasefire must be implemented as a first step. We fully support the disengagement efforts by the SMM and the TCG.

Security threats to the SMM remain a matter of grave concern. We condemn the appalling threats against the monitors, and note that all recent incidents have been committed by the rebels. As Ambassador Apakan reports, the response from the parties and the JCCC have been “insufficient”. All sides must ensure the safety and security of SMM monitors and hold perpetrators accountable. We welcome efforts by the Chairman-in-Office and the Chief Monitor, as well as recent initiatives taken by the mission to improve the safety and security of staff. Norway will continue to follow the security situation closely.

Public perception of the SMM also affects the security of its staff. Efforts by Ukrainian authorities to mitigate negative views are very welcome and should be multiplied. The SMM’s own outreach work is also important, and could be further emphasised. Negative perceptions in separatist controlled areas are on the other hand alarming, especially recent demonstrations against the SMM in Luhansk.

We welcome the SMM leadership’s efforts to strengthen the mission’s management structures and to formalize transparent recruitment of all posts. Clear lines of responsibility and well-established trust in the operation and its management are important for the mission’s efficiency and its ability to deliver on its mandate.

Mr Chairman,

All parties have committed to granting the SMM full and unhindered access. As Ambassador Apakan reports, freedom of movement restrictions in areas outside government control are not a series of random actions, but constitutes a policy of area denial by the rebels. The SMM sees only what it is allowed to see. We also deplore the increasing restrictions on the SMM when conducting human rights monitoring in areas outside government control.

Russia should step up its efforts to secure full and unfettered access for the SMM. Publically calling for the rebels to comply with this crucial commitment would be a good start.

Mr Chairman,

We continue to greatly appreciate the SMM's reporting as an essential source of information from the conflict zone.

We welcome the increased focus on human rights and fundamental freedom in Ambassador Apakan's written report. It enables both a better assessment of the human rights situation in the conflict zone, and a better understanding of the SMM's work in this area. We commend the mission's sound focus on conflict related issues, and hope future reports will be equally thorough. Given the lack of information from other sources, we would appreciate an even stronger focus on the human rights situation in areas outside government control. The situation in these areas is a source of grave concern. The ambassador's report affirms a multitude of problems, including a shrinking space for civil society and religious communities.

We are also increasingly concerned by the human rights situation in Crimea. We deeply regret the recent ban on the Crimean Tatar Mejlis and call for the reversal of this decision.

Mr Chairman,

The conflict has a severe impact on the humanitarian situation. The local population's suffering is exacerbated by unjustifiable restrictions on the activities of humanitarian organizations in areas not controlled by the government. This testifies to lack of concern for the population's well-being. We call on the restrictions to be lifted as a matter of urgency.

In conclusion, let me again thank Ambassadors Apakan and Sajdik, as well as their teams, for their important work on behalf of the organisation.

Thank you, Mr Chairman.