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Prevention of armed conflict: prevention of armed conflict

**The situation in the temporarily occupied territories
of Ukraine**

**Promotion and protection of human rights: human
rights situations and reports of special rapporteurs
and representatives**

Letter dated 6 May 2020 from the Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit herewith a statement by the Committee on Foreign Policy and Inter-Parliamentary Cooperation of the Verkhovna Rada (parliament) of Ukraine addressed to the parliaments of States, international organizations and their parliamentary assemblies regarding attempts by the Russian Federation to ease or lift the international sanctions imposed in response to the military aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine under the pretext of countering the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex distributed as a document of the General Assembly under agenda items 31 (a), 63 and 70 (c), and of the Security Council.

(Signed) **Sergiy Kyslytsya**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative



Annex to the letter dated 6 May 2020 from the Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Statement by the Committee on Foreign Policy and Inter-Parliamentary Cooperation of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine addressed to the parliaments of States, international organizations and their parliamentary assemblies regarding attempts by the Russian Federation to ease or lift the international sanctions imposed in response to the military aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine under the pretext of countering the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic

The Committee on Foreign Policy and Inter-Parliamentary Cooperation of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine welcomes and highly appreciates the unity of the international community in the fight against the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19). The pandemic has become a challenge to the cohesion of the world and our ability to demonstrate genuine solidarity and mutual support in the face of the global threat.

We believe that the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic and its future consequences are a global threat for all countries of the world and an extremely strong challenge for the international community, which demands coordinated actions and responsible decisions from our countries' leaders.

We express our gratitude to all international partners for their assistance and support to Ukraine in curbing the pandemic and returning Ukrainian citizens to the motherland.

Ukraine, as a fully fledged participant in global efforts to restrain the COVID-19 pandemic, provides assistance to the most affected States by sending medical staff and necessary equipment as well as facilitating the return of foreign citizens to their countries.

We are confident that the solidarity of the international community, the bravery of medical staff and other first responders, who provide for daily life in an emergency, the professionalism of scientists and the responsibility of all citizens will allow us to overcome the pandemic and return to the usual agenda, in which international peace and security, human rights and fundamental freedoms as well as welfare and economic growth are the key issues.

In this regard, the Committee is concerned at the attempts by the Russian Federation to abuse not only the situation surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic but also the international community's readiness to respond in a united manner to this challenge. Specifically, the matter concerns calls and actions by the Russian Federation aimed at undermining the international sanctions and restrictions imposed on it following its military aggression against Ukraine, and its violation of the principles and norms of international law in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine.

We underline the vital necessity of ensuring respect for the norms and principles of international law in the context of the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, in particular the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (1950), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966), the

Helsinki Final Act, the Statute of the Council of Europe and other international legal documents.

Instead of the cessation of military aggression, de-occupation of Ukrainian territories and fulfilment of the obligations undertaken within the political and diplomatic settlement process, the Russian Federation views the current emergency situation caused by the pandemic as an opportunity to take the issue of its violations of international law off the international agenda without having corrected them. Such an approach served as a basis for the recent Russian initiative in the General Assembly to submit for adoption the “Declaration of solidarity of the United Nations in the face of the challenges posed by the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-2019)”. We are grateful to our international partners, who together with Ukraine mobilized efforts and blocked the adoption of the aforementioned draft, which in essence would be a “declaration of solidarity with the aggressor.”

The Committee calls on the international community to remain faithful to the principles of international law and to counteract the manipulative and damaging steps taken by the Russian Federation with respect to the goal of combating COVID-19. Under the guise of fighting the pandemic, the Russian Federation wants to make the world ignore the ongoing violations of sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine and the violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms of Ukrainian citizens in the occupied territories.

That is why Russia is manipulating and selectively using international calls and initiatives aimed at enhancing the effectiveness of measures to combat the spread of COVID-19. In particular, Russian high-ranking officials are actively manipulating the appeal of the Secretary-General to lift sanctions for the sake of combating COVID-19 while completely ignoring its humanitarian and medical context. In this regard, we draw attention to the fact that none of the sanctions packages introduced against the Russian Federation hamper its ability to properly protect the health of its people and the population of the occupied territories or to contribute to the global fight against the coronavirus.

On the other hand, another appeal by the Secretary-General – for a general ceasefire in all conflict zones during the pandemic – remains unnoticed by the Russian Federation, which controls and finances illegal armed groups and is using them to continue armed provocations in the area of the Joint Forces Operation. Shelling of the positions of the Ukrainian Armed Forces and other military formations created according to Ukrainian legislation continues on daily basis. Since the beginning of the national quarantine in Ukraine no less than eight servicemen have been killed and 61 have been wounded by the Russian occupation forces in the area of the Joint Forces Operation.

The Armed Forces of the Russian Federation not only continue the shelling of Ukrainian territory despite the call by the United Nations for a truce during the pandemic, but also hamper the work of international organizations by blocking access for representatives of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine, the International Committee of the Red Cross and other international missions to the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine. This deprives the population of the occupied territories of medical assistance and the world of the possibility to receive unbiased information about the real COVID-19 situation in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine. Moreover, owing to the information vacuum created by the Russian Federation in these territories, the local population does not realize the real scale of the pandemic and the threat to their health. This threatens to turn the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine into an “epidemiologic time bomb”.

While urging that sanctions be lifted, the Russian Federation continues to violate international law by attempting to consolidate the occupation regime in the sovereign territory of Ukraine, in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol. The decree of the President of the Russian Federation dated 20 March 2020, designating most of the Crimean Peninsula as so-called “border areas of the Russian Federation”, where persons without Russian citizenship are prohibited from owning land lots, and the regulation of the Government of the Russian Federation dated 19 March 2020 lifting the restrictions of entry into the territory of the Russian Federation for foreigners, introduced in relation to the spread of COVID-19, with regard to the citizens of Ukraine and stateless persons who permanently reside in the temporarily occupied territories of Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine, became yet another flagrant violation of the fundamental principle of international law – respect for sovereignty.

The Committee also expresses its resolute protest over yet another conscription to military service by the Russian Federation in the temporarily occupied part of the sovereign territory of Ukraine, in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol. It is expected that most conscripts will serve beyond the Crimean Peninsula, in particular in the Southern Military District, whose military units and command are directly involved in carrying out an armed aggression against Ukraine in Donbass. Such actions by the Russian Federation constitute a flagrant violation of international humanitarian law, which prohibits Russia, as an occupying power, from forcing protected persons to serve in its armed or auxiliary forces. It is also forbidden to pressure and conduct propaganda in favour of voluntary military recruitment, as well as to move persons under protection outside of the occupied territory.

The Committee draws the particular attention of the international community to the critical situation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, in which Ukrainian citizens are illegally deprived of their personal liberty as a result of the actions of illegal armed groups and the occupation administration and/or authorities of the Russian Federation in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine and/or in the territory of the Russian Federation. In the absence of personal protective equipment and given the denial of proper medical examination to persons illegally detained and exhibiting symptoms relating to COVID-19, the lives and health of such citizens of Ukraine are at serious risk. Moreover, contrary to the calls by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights for urgent action by States around the world to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in detention facilities, including through the release of persons who are particularly vulnerable to the consequences of infection, we have received reports about increasing psychological and physical pressure on Ukrainian citizens who are being illegally held in Russian prisons.

In this regard, the Committee on Foreign Policy and Inter-Parliamentary Cooperation of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine calls for the international community to:

- Counter the disinformation and attempts by the Russian Federation to avoid, under the pretext of combating the COVID-19 pandemic, responsibility for its continuing gross violations of international law.
- Contribute to preserving a clear and uncompromising position whereby the only legitimate reason to change the international policy of sanctions and restrictions against the Russian Federation is the cessation of armed aggression against Ukraine by the Russian Federation and de-occupation of sovereign Ukrainian territory, namely the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, the city of Sevastopol and certain districts of Donetsk and Luhansk regions. Only these actions by the Russian Federation should constitute preconditions for the lifting of sanctions.

- Respond to new violations of international law by the Russian Federation or attacks on the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine and other States by increasing pressure on the aggressor state and imposing new sanctions and restrictive measures that will not affect the ability of the Russian Federation to provide access to medical services to its people and the population of the occupied territories.
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