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President: Mr. Shahid (Maldives)

The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

Agenda item 67

The situation in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine

The President: “To save succeeding generations from the scourge of war” are among the very first words of the preamble of the Charter of the United Nations. They were the main motivation for creating the Organization, whose founders had lived through the devastation of two World Wars by 1945. Article 1 of the Charter mandates that disputes or situations in which peace may be broken shall be settled by peaceful means and in conformity with justice and the principles of international law. It is therefore one of the purposes of the United Nations to maintain peace and security in accordance with the rule of law. If the United Nations has taught us anything in its 76 years of existence, it is that lasting peace is not achieved or sustained by military engagements but through political solutions. The most effective way to diminish human suffering and the massive economic costs of conflicts in their aftermath is to prevent conflicts in the first place.

Let us deploy the tools we have to resolve disputes. Let us give priority to diplomacy, good offices and mediation. Let us give peace every chance it deserves. Fully committing to the Charter of the United Nations, its purposes and principles is the only path to ensure lasting peace. I call on all parties to intensify their negotiations and de-escalate the current trajectory through dialogue. I would like to conclude my

statement by quoting former Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld, who said 68 years ago that “[t]he United Nations was not created to take mankind to heaven, but to save humanity from hell”.

I now give the floor to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, His Excellency Mr. António Guterres.

The Secretary-General: We meet in the face of the most serious global peace and security crisis in recent years, and certainly in my time as Secretary-General. Our world is facing a moment of peril that I truly hoped would never come. The latest development regarding Ukraine are a cause of grave concern. They include reports of increased ceasefire violations across the contact line and the real risk of further escalation on the ground. My thoughts are with all those who have already suffered so much death, destruction and displacement.

The history of this conflict is complex, with at least two permanently opposing narratives. I know that their authors will never agree on what happened in the past, but in the present situation one thing is clear: the decision of the Russian Federation to recognize the so-called independence of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions and its subsequent actions are violations of the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine and inconsistent with the principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

Here in this hallowed Hall, I must emphasize that those actions are also inconsistent with the landmark resolution 2625 (XXV), which was adopted by the General Assembly more than half a century ago, entitled “Declaration on Principles of International

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Law concerning Friendly Relations and Cooperation among States in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations". The so-called "Friendly Relations Declaration" was adopted during the General Assembly session that marked the twenty-fifth anniversary of the United Nations. Having been cited repeatedly by the International Court of Justice as representing international law, it sets out several vital principles that are highly relevant to today's meeting. In particular, I would highlight the principle of the sovereign equality of States and the affirmation that the territorial integrity and political independence of States are inviolable. Other General Assembly resolutions also fully support the sovereignty, political independence and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders.

The Minsk agreements, which were approved by the Security Council and which I strongly supported from the beginning, were surviving in an intensive care unit thanks to a number of life-support devices. But those devices have now been disconnected. We should also be concerned about preserving the integrity of peacekeeping. The United Nations has a long and recognized experience of deploying peacekeeping operations, which take place only with the consent of the host country.

It is time for restraint, reasoning and de-escalation. There is no place for actions and statements that will take this dangerous situation over the abyss. It is time to establish a ceasefire and return to the path of dialogue and negotiations in order to save the people in Ukraine and beyond from the scourge of war. I urge all parties to make full use of Article 33 of the Charter and its diverse instruments for the peaceful settlement of disputes.

The United Nations system is continuing to support the people in Ukraine through our human rights and humanitarian work. Our human rights monitoring mission has seven offices throughout the country on both sides of the contact line, which is documenting civilian casualties, monitoring freedom of movement and reporting on allegations of human rights violations. Our humanitarian operations are independent of whoever happens to control the relevant territory where people are living. Even before the latest escalation, 2 million people in Ukraine needed humanitarian assistance. Since the start of 2022 alone, we and our partners have delivered 140 metric tons of life-saving aid across the contact line. Our actions are based

entirely on humanitarian principles endorsed by the General Assembly.

United Nations humanitarian assistance is guided by four humanitarian principles: humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence. Those principles are central to establishing and maintaining humanitarian access to affected people, including in the context of an armed conflict. The General Assembly has repeatedly underscored the importance of promoting and respecting those principles within the framework of humanitarian assistance. Our humanitarian agencies are committed to staying and providing support to the people in Ukraine and are ready to adjust and reprioritize their operations as necessary.

As we sadly know all too well, civilians, including women and children, always suffer first and suffer most in times of conflict. If the conflict in Ukraine expands, the world could see a scale and severity of need that it has not seen for many years. I urge all sides to allow safe and unimpeded access to humanitarian agencies, including in non-Government-controlled areas of eastern Ukraine. All parties must uphold their obligations under international humanitarian law.

I am fully committed to supporting all efforts to resolve this crisis without further bloodshed. My good offices remain available. We cannot and will not relent in the search for a peaceful solution.

The President: I thank the Secretary-General for his statement.

I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Dmytro Kuleba, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ukraine.

Mr. Kuleba (Ukraine): I am grateful for your leadership, Mr. President, at the helm of this main policymaking and representative organ of the United Nations. You chose the word "hope" as the motto of your presidency. The same feeling currently dominates the mindsets of Ukrainians and people around the globe — hope for peace, hope for common sense to prevail and hope for diplomacy to ease tensions. However, today we need much more than hope. We need swift, concrete and resolute action — a new type of action by the United Nations and the international community that is commensurate with the level of threat facing not only Ukraine but all of us because of Russia's aggressive course.

The people of Ukraine need its strategic partners and the international community to take action. We are

at a critical juncture in world history, and our actions today will define it for decades to come. We all read history books. We have all watched movies about the mistakes made by politicians in the run-up to 1914 and 1939. We have all heard about the feats of our grandparents and the catastrophic price that was paid to defeat a revanchist evil in Europe.

There is no more important task today than to avoid repeating the mistakes of the past. I believe in the power of the free world and our joint ability to avert a new devastating catastrophe in Europe that no nation would be able to sit out. That is why I address the Assembly today on behalf of more than 40 million Ukrainians who wish simply to live in peace and prosperity, not in fear and intimidation and not under Russian fire, bombs and shelling.

We are currently at the centre of the largest security crisis in Europe since the Second World War. The crisis was created and is being escalated by one side unilaterally — the Russian Federation. Russia's accusations against Ukraine are absurd. Ukraine has never threatened or attacked anyone. Ukraine has never planned and does not plan to take any such action. Ukraine has never planned and does not plan to launch any military offensive in the Donbas. Neither has it planned or does it plan to initiate any provocations or acts of sabotage.

It is ultimately absurd to suggest that Ukraine would make such plans and wait months for Russia to amass an enormous military force along our borders before proceeding with those alleged plans. That absurdity defies basic logic. No less absurd are the accusations of Ukraine having escalated the situation by acquiring defensive weapons from its partners. I wish to stress that the only reason for Ukraine seeking to boost its defences are Russia's ongoing and planned military and political actions. Russia's actions and statements are outrageous, horrifying and go far beyond threatening Ukraine.

In his address this week, Russian President Vladimir Putin overtly denied Ukraine's right to exist. Anyone who might think that I am exaggerating as the Ukrainian Foreign Minister should merely watch his horrifying speech. It is with a heavy heart that we all need to acknowledge the grim reality of a new aggressive and revanchist rule rising over Europe.

This is the fourth time that the General Assembly is meeting to debate the situation in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine. However, it is the first

time we are doing so against the backdrop of the new reality created by Russia's illegal recognition of two Ukrainian territories. The backdrop of our discussion today is much more dangerous, as Russia has attacked the fundamental principles of international peace and security, the pillars of the United Nations and, as I mentioned earlier, the very existence of the Ukrainian State — a founding Member of the United Nations.

Ukraine signed the Charter of the United Nations in San Francisco in 1945 and made the principle enshrined in its Article 2 a cornerstone of its foreign policy. Our State voluntarily gave up its nuclear arsenal under the security assurances of the nuclear Powers and has endured years of assault by one of those Powers, which is a permanent member of the Security Council.

Two days ago, on 21 February, the Russian President recognized the so-called independence of the temporarily occupied parts of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine and ordered the deployment of the Russian armed forces to those areas. That is an affront to, and an attack on, the United Nations and the core principles of international law, which is an ultimate blow to years of peace process and constitutes Russia's unilateral withdrawal from the Minsk agreements.

What is happening right now in eastern Ukraine, where Russian tanks are rolling in, and along Ukrainian borders, where Russian forces are amassed in vast numbers, should be of concern to everyone. I warn every nation in this Hall today that no one will be able to sit out the crisis if Putin decides he can move forward with his aggression against Ukraine. All Governments and people will face painful consequences together with our Government and our people, which is why we need to use this last chance for action to stop Russia in its tracks. It is clear that President Putin will not stop of his own volition.

The beginning of a large-scale war in Ukraine will be the end of the world order as we know it. If Russia is not confronted with a severe, swift and decisive response now, it will signify the total bankruptcy of the international security system and the international institutions that are tasked with maintaining the global security order. That is a grim scenario that would throw us back to the darkest times of the twentieth century. Russia will not stop at Ukraine. If a permanent member of the Security Council succeeds in breaking all of the rules, other actors will be inspired and will follow its pattern. Russia is trying to prove that the United

Nations is weak, indecisive and unable to defend its core principles — that the rules do not apply to Russia and Putin.

What role does Russia see for the United Nations? It sees a new League of Nations. We must deny Russia what it wants. I graduated from university with a degree in international law and a strong belief in multilateralism. After many years of practicing diplomacy, I still believe both in rules to curb aggression and the power of our collective and firm action. I am confident that Russia will stop if the United Nations pivots to become a strong and proactive player that is not afraid to take resolute action and use all of its might and power.

In that context, I welcome yesterday's statement by the Secretary-General, which was truly different in tone. We need decisive actions of the same kind to follow those pertinent words. Russia is showing signs of readiness to further escalate its aggression against Ukraine. We have limited time to stop, deter and contain it. Every hour of inaction now is a threat to the lives of Ukrainians, not only those in the military but also civilians, including women and children. It is an escalating threat to our collective global security and our freedom.

Ukraine expects decisive, immediate and proportional action by the international community. The United Nations is the organization that must demonstrate leadership rather than mere condemnation. It must take concrete action to stop the Russian machine of war without stepping into a bloody conflict, which would cause many thousands of casualties, devastation and suffering. I do not want that, Ukraine does not want that and the world does not want that. We need the immediate help of the international community to stop Russia from proceeding with its aggressive plans.

Ukraine believes in diplomacy. We see no alternative to peaceful solutions by political and diplomatic means. There is still an opportunity for diplomacy to have its word, even as Russia continues its escalation and provocations. For months Russia has pretended to pursue diplomacy while sending more and more troops to our borders and the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine. The number of troops now stands at more than 150,000. Under the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's (OSCE) Vienna Document on confidence- and security-building measures, such actions fall under the qualification of "unusual military activities", which require explanation. However, Russia

has persistently refused to provide any such explanation and instead proceeded with threats.

Russia has stuffed the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov with at least 46 military vessels. It routinely closes large parts of those seas under the pretext of carrying out naval exercises. In practice, it all but amounts to a blockade of Ukrainian seaports, which constitutes an attack on the global freedom of navigation — one of the sacred principles of international law. Russia's propaganda machine is in full swing. It is desperately trying to create a pretext for further aggression against Ukraine. We resolutely reject all Russian insinuations regarding any alleged offensive military operations by Ukraine in the Donbas. We have not undertaken and do not plan to undertake any such actions. We remain committed to reaching a political and diplomatic settlement. Together with our partners, we are maximizing efforts to reduce tensions and resolve the situation through diplomatic dialogue.

We are currently seeing the Russian occupying forces significantly increase their shelling of Ukrainian territory and civilian infrastructure. Artillery fire from the occupied territory at the contact line in the Donbas hit a kindergarten in a town called Stanytsia Luhanska and a school in Vrubivka, which are among the latest horrifying examples. Russia's recognition of the so-called "republics" has no legal implications. It merely confirms the country's own involvement as a party to the armed conflict in Donbas, which it has vehemently denied for many years. The situation in the occupied Donbas has been dire for years, with residents living in an atmosphere of fear, lawlessness and insecurity.

The infamous secret prison of Izolyatsia in occupied Donetsk remains inaccessible for human rights and humanitarian missions. It continues to function as a concentration camp in Europe in the twenty-first century. Hundreds of people have passed through the camp and have been subjected to heavy forced labour, humiliation and torture. Cases of extrajudicial killings have also been reported. Russia continues to block the release of illegally detained persons. In September 2021, the President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, handed the Secretary-General a list of more than 100 Ukrainians from Donbas and Crimea who had been unlawfully detained, sentenced or even transferred from the occupied territories to the Russian Federation. We reiterate our call on the Secretary-General to provide good offices and facilitate their immediate release. I

appreciate the readiness of the Secretary-General to do so.

Today, Ukraine is defending not only global security but also freedom, democracy and the fundamental principles of international law. A peaceful life and the future of millions of people in Europe and around the globe rely on the rules that Russia is trying to destroy. Diplomacy and international forums must prevail and put a stop to Russia's aggression. Since 2014, the General Assembly has adopted 11 resolutions reaffirming its commitment to Ukraine's territorial integrity and condemning the temporary occupation of Ukraine's territories by Russia. The General Assembly has not and will not accept the Russian mantra that "the case of Crimea is closed". The occupying Power persists in destroying the identity of Ukrainians and the indigenous people of the peninsula — the Crimean Tatars. Since 2014, more than 64,000 Ukrainian citizens have had to leave Crimea and move to mainland Ukraine owing to fear, persecution for political and human rights activism and discrimination on ethnic and religious grounds. Political persecutions continue unabated.

Among many others, Nariman Dzhelyalov, First Deputy Head of the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatars and a participant in the Crimea Platform international summit, remains behind bars. He is one of more than 100 political prisoners of the Kremlin. On 16 February, a court in Simferopol sentenced journalist Vladyslav Yesypenko to six years in prison based on trumped-up charges. He is one of 14 Ukrainian journalists imprisoned by Russia. Russia may continue to pretend that it does not violate any international norms and principles. Yet reports of the Secretary-General and those of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the OSCE and their missions, as well as the report of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, all testify to the contrary.

If Russia does not agree with the resolutions and reports I have referred to, it should simply provide access to Crimea to the United Nations Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine and the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission. Access for international organizations to the occupied territories is critical. Ukraine guarantees such access throughout its Government-controlled territory and continues to demand that the Russian side do the same in the occupied territories.

Today the whole world has witnessed that Russia will turn to threatening and blackmailing the global community to close the Crimea case, which is one of the points in its long list of recent so-called security demands. Ukraine continues its efforts to achieve the de-occupation of Crimea by peaceful means. The Crimea Platform is a tool designed exactly for that end. We are truly thankful to all countries that support the international Crimea Platform. Their active involvement in the Platform is a sound foundation for our future success. We are open to new members joining, and I call on members of the international community to do so, be it States or international organizations — all are welcome. We expect that the United Nations will find the appropriate modalities to engage with that initiative, which was established based on the principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

Ukraine made a historic contribution to global security when it denuclearized in 1994, thereby giving up the world's third-largest nuclear arsenal. We have no plans to regain nuclear weapons. Today we expect the world to reciprocally ensure our security with relevant scale and resolute actions in the face of a historic level of threat, which is why Ukraine requested urgent consultations under paragraph 6 of the Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances.

The world owes Ukraine its security. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy initiated a new format of negotiations to settle the security crisis created by Russia. The format comprises the five permanent members of the Security Council plus Ukraine, Germany and Turkey. That is the format we are trying to convene. I wish to reaffirm that some years ago Ukraine proposed deploying a United Nations peacekeeping mission to Ukraine. The Security Council has so far failed to take the necessary decisions.

Ukraine proposes combining a stark sanctions policy, strengthening Ukraine and keeping diplomatic channels open in order to persuade Russia to de-escalate and prioritize diplomacy. We urge Member States to use all available means to protect Ukraine and deter Russia. Any action taken to that end is appreciated. We are grateful for the actions already taken by several countries. We expect the international community to do its best to put out the fire at the centre of Europe, which is about to flare up.

The Russian security crisis must end with Russia returning to the path of diplomacy. We call on all States

and international organizations not to recognize any alteration to the status of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine and to refrain from any action or dealings that could be interpreted as recognizing any such altered status. The absence of a firm reaction or bearing a neutral stance will contribute only to further escalation and suffering, which, I regret to say, will not be limited to Ukraine's border and territory. On the contrary, active diplomacy, strong political messages, tough economic sanctions and strengthening Ukraine can still force Moscow to abandon its aggressive plans. Swift and resolute action by the United Nations can reclaim the Organization's leading role at this historic and dark moment.

Russia must withdraw its forces from the sovereign territory of Ukraine. Russia must stop destabilizing the international security situation. We Ukrainians want peace. And we want to resolve all issues through diplomacy. We stand ready for all possible scenarios and to protect our land and our people if Russia perpetrates further attacks. Ukraine will not hesitate to exercise its inherent right of self-defence, as outlined in Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, in response to the armed attacks of the Russian Federation.

The coming days are likely to be the last window of opportunity to do what Russia does not expect the United Nations and its States Members to do, specifically, to demonstrate an unprecedented ability and readiness to act in order to halt aggression. No matter what relations we develop among one another, it is our ultimate duty to defend the Charter of the United Nations.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Baron Tariq Ahmad, Minister of State for South Asia, North Africa, the United Nations and the Commonwealth at the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Lord Ahmad (United Kingdom): The United Kingdom is unwavering in its support for Ukraine's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity. We stand with the people of Ukraine. We stand with their right to determine their own future. President Putin's decision to recognize the so-called Donetsk People's Republic and Luhansk People's Republic as independent States proves beyond doubt that Russia has chosen the path of confrontation over the path of diplomacy and dialogue. Mr. Putin has ordered his

troops into Ukrainian territory, which amounts to a further invasion of Ukraine.

At every step, Russia has rebuffed offers of diplomacy and discarded its international commitments — commitments it had itself agreed and signed up to. It has instead pursued a campaign to redraw Ukraine's internationally recognized borders by force. It is vital that we at the United Nations and in the international community respond. We must understand the grave nature of where we are today. Together we must call on Russia to uphold the very founding principles of the United Nations, which was established, as you said yourself, Mr. President, precisely to end the scourge of war. Peace must prevail.

We must highlight the human cost and respond to the humanitarian consequences of any further Russian military action. We know that such action will take a terrible toll on Ukrainians, but it will also take a toll on Russians, with both countries the victims of an unnecessary war of the Kremlin's choosing. It is therefore essential that we meet Russia's aggressive acts with solidarity and strength, including through coordinated sanctions, in order to impose a severe cost on Russia's interests and economy. Yesterday, the United Kingdom announced new sanctions targeting billions of Russian assets. It is the largest sanctions package against Russia in British history and is part of our coordinated action and sanctions effort alongside our allies.

However, we are clear that those actions with our allies are just the start. If Russia continues its campaign of aggression, we have a further package of sanctions ready to go. We urge the wider international community to join us in that effort. The Kremlin must understand the strength of the world's condemnation of President Putin's war of choice.

Let us pause for a moment. Let us reflect. This very week marks eight years since Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol. It also marks eight years since Russia forcibly seized 10,000 square miles of sovereign Ukrainian territory, in flagrant violation of international law and its own international commitments. And it is also eight years since we in the General Assembly recalled, through resolution 68/262, the obligations of all States under Article 2 of the Charter of the United Nations to refrain from the threat or use of force against the territorial

integrity or political independence of any State Member of the United Nations.

Yet eight years on, tragically, here we are again, confronted by Russian aggression against the sovereignty of Ukraine. As Secretary-General António Guterres has made clear, Russia's unilateral measures directly contradict the very principles of the Charter of the United Nations. Its actions are a fundamental challenge to global peace and security and the international order on which we all rely and which, equally importantly, we must all protect. We must unequivocally condemn Russia's aggression together and halt President Putin's expansionist ambitions.

We must hold Russia true to its commitments under the Charter of the United Nations and tell it very clearly to pull back — to choose peace, not war — while also sending a very clear message to the people of Ukraine that we in the international community and at the United Nations stand with them in their hour of need.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Tobias Lindner, Minister of State of the Federal Foreign Office of Germany.

Mr. Lindner (Germany): We meet today at a time of challenge. A couple of days ago, the President of a State Member of the Organization questioned the statehood of another Member when he said, "Ukraine actually never had stable traditions of real statehood". We must take those words very seriously. Some important questions arise. What does it mean for the Organization if one State construes the existence of another as a regrettable accident of history, thereby questioning its right to exist? What would it mean for our common objective of promoting peace and development if more countries tried to roll back history in a similar way? What does it mean for the multilateral rules-based order if States think they can domineer over other States and put them under tutelage based on their own view of history?

We still do not have the answers to all of those questions. What is now clear is that Russia's decision to recognize the self-proclaimed so-called People's Republics of Donetsk and Luhansk could be a deadly blow to the international rules-based order and the way the Organization has functioned for decades. Russia is violating the core principles of the Charter of the United Nations. We need to close ranks and strongly reject such action. If we do not, then what is happening in Ukraine today could happen to other Member States tomorrow. Everybody in the Assembly should be aware of that. It

is therefore with the utmost gratitude that we took note of the words of the Secretary-General, who said,

"The principles of the Charter of the United Nations are not an à la carte menu. They cannot be applied selectively. Member States have accepted them all and they must apply them all."

There is nothing to add to those crystal clear words. Russia's irresponsible and provocative action comes at a time of a massive military build-up along Ukraine's borders. We have seen a worrisome flare-up of ceasefire violations along the line of contact. We have witnessed a disturbing flow of disinformation and false-flag operations designed to create pretexts for a military incursion.

This time of heightened tensions, when people's lives are at risk, should have been the time for de-escalation and to heed the Security Council's repeated calls for diplomatic efforts. Instead, Russia chose to once again attack Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, eight years after Russia illegally seized and annexed Crimea. The General Assembly condemned that violation of the Charter of the United Nations and should do so again.

I commend Ukraine's continuing restraint in the face of Russian aggression and welcome President Zelenskyy's commitment to finding a peaceful, diplomatic way out. Since 2014, France and Germany have done their utmost to work towards a political solution to the conflict in eastern Ukraine on the basis of the Minsk agreements. Russia's signature is on those agreements. Over the past several weeks, Chancellor Scholz and Foreign Minister Baerbock have left no stone unturned in seeking to engage with Russia diplomatically, in close coordination with our French partners. We are willing to chart a way forward in order to strengthen trust, stability and security in Europe. We have an established framework to do so, namely, in the NATO-Russia Council, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and under the Normandy format.

The ceasefire in the Donbas must be observed immediately. We condemn the use of heavy weaponry and the indiscriminate shelling of civilian infrastructure, which constitute clear violations of the Minsk agreements. That must stop. We commend the OSCE Special Representative for trying to convene an extraordinary session of the Trilateral Contact Group. France, Ukraine and my country, Germany, stand ready

for another meeting under the Normandy format or under the auspices of the summit proposed by Ukraine. The OSCE Special Monitoring Mission (SMM) is vital for monitoring the situation in eastern Ukraine, which is why Germany's seconded staff remain on the ground. The SMM must be allowed to carry out its mandate in full.

We want to resolve this crisis through diplomacy. To that end, Russia must immediately change its course of action. First, I urge Russia to de-escalate now and to withdraw its troops from Ukraine, in particular from the self-proclaimed entities and the Crimean peninsula, as well as from Ukraine's borders. Secondly, Russia must refrain from any action that could further fuel the risk of a full-fledged military conflict with Ukraine. Thirdly, I urge Russia to immediately repeal its decision to recognize the separatist entities.

Do we respect the territorial integrity and sovereign equality of States Members of the United Nations? Do we stand by the Charter of the United Nations? I call on all Member States to reaffirm our commitment to those principles with regard to Ukraine and beyond. Together with our allies and partners, Germany will spare no effort to find a diplomatic way forward. We will be steadfast in our support for Ukraine and the Charter of the United Nations. It is our common duty to remain committed to a rules-based order, trustful cooperation and bringing forward our common goal of lasting peace and stability. We invite every Member of the Organization to join those efforts.

Now is the moment to speak up and defend the international order of the Charter of the United Nations against unilateral aggression jointly and decisively.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the European Union, in its capacity as observer.

Mr. Skoog (European Union): I thank the Secretary-General for his presence and briefing this morning, and for the legal, moral and political authority of his Office in clarifying the implications of what we are currently witnessing on the European continent and how it relates to the Charter of the United Nations.

I will speak today on behalf of the European Union (EU) and its States members. North Macedonia, Montenegro, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Iceland, Norway, Georgia and Monaco align themselves with this statement.

The European Union recalls its unwavering support for the sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders. We strongly condemn the decision by President Putin to recognize the non-Government-controlled areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts of Ukraine as independent entities and the ensuing decision to send Russian troops into those areas. If there was any uncertainty, the Secretary-General has made clear that the decision of the Russian Federation is a violation of the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine and inconsistent with the principles of the Charter of the United Nations. It undermines Ukraine's sovereignty and independence and is a severe breach of international law and international agreements, including the Charter of the United Nations, the Helsinki Final Act, the Charter of Paris for a New Europe and the Budapest Memorandum.

Russia's decision clearly violates the Minsk agreements. The European Union strongly condemns Russia's continuing aggression against Ukraine, including through its unprecedented military build-up near the Ukrainian border and in the Black Sea and by deploying combat forces in, and conducting joint drills with, Belarus. We call on Russia to de-escalate, abide by international law and constructively engage in dialogue through the established international mechanisms. The EU is responding to those latest violations by implementing additional restrictive measures, including on all economic relations with the non-Government-controlled areas, as well as designations against individuals and entities responsible for undermining the territorial integrity of Ukraine, in coordination with our partners.

Russia's past and present actions against Ukraine are a matter not only for Ukraine or Europe. They have severe global implications. Violations of the fundamental principles of international law and the Charter of the United Nations against another State are of serious global concern. Those rules apply to all, and the permanent members of the Security Council have a particular responsibility to uphold the Charter.

The EU fully subscribes to and reaffirms its full commitment to the core principles of European security, as enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, including the commitments that Russia itself has subscribed to. They notably include the sovereign equality and territorial integrity of States, the inviolability of frontiers, refraining from the threat

or use of force and the freedom of States to choose or change their own security arrangements. Those principles are neither negotiable nor subject to revision or reinterpretation. Their violation by Russia is an obstacle to a common security space in Europe and threatens peace and stability in Europe and worldwide. What is happening in Ukraine affects the security of each and every State Member of the United Nations. We therefore call on Russia to respect the principles of the Charter, de-escalate and engage in the kind of meaningful diplomacy that we have offered and that the Secretary-General has reiterated and supported.

We call on Russia to constructively engage in the Normandy format and the Trilateral Contact Group in order to achieve the full implementation of the Minsk agreements, as endorsed by the Security Council in its resolution 2202 (2015). Russia needs to urgently de-escalate the tensions caused by the military build-up along its border with Ukraine and in Crimea and cease its provocation and aggressive rhetoric. Russia must change course and constructively contribute to negotiations in the Normandy format and the Trilateral Contact Group, in line with what was agreed in the recent Normandy Four meetings in Paris and Berlin.

We welcome the attempts by the Special Representative of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) to convene extraordinary sessions of the Trilateral Contact Group to defuse tensions. We expect Russia to accept the invitation to such meetings in the future. We also call on Russia to immediately stop fuelling the conflict and to remove Russian troops and hardware illegally deployed in areas that are not currently under the control of the Government of Ukraine. The EU strongly condemns the recent increase in ceasefire violations and orders for mobilization issued by the de facto authorities in areas not currently under the control of the Government of Ukraine. We condemn the use of heavy weaponry and recall that the shelling of civilian infrastructure represents a clear violation of the ceasefire, the Minsk agreements and international humanitarian law. The EU commends Ukraine's posture of restraint in the face of continuing provocations and efforts to destabilize the country, as we have heard from this rostrum this morning in the remarks made by the Ukrainian Foreign Minister.

The EU underlines the role of the OSCE as the appropriate forum to address the security concerns of all interested parties, including Russia. The EU and its

member States are ready to engage in strengthening the existing mechanisms to ensure military transparency and predictability and support efforts regarding arms control, in particular within the framework of the OSCE. In that regard, we urge Russia to abide by its commitments under the Vienna Document and notably to provide full transparency on its military activities in the region, host visits to the areas that are a cause of concern, take significant and verifiable steps to de-escalate the situation and provide information on the reported redeployment of Russian units from the locations of military exercises.

We also express our support for the valuable engagement of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission (SMM) and its impartial monitoring. We are therefore deeply concerned about Russia's continuing actions to obstruct the presence of the SMM in the non-Government-controlled areas of Ukraine. The SMM is mandated to monitor the entire territory of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders, including in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol. We urge Russia to respect the mandate of the SMM, as agreed by all participating States, and to ensure that all restrictions affecting the Mission's work are lifted immediately. We once again deplore the targeting of the Mission's assets.

The volatile security situation in eastern Ukraine is having an immense impact on the civilian population, in particular those in the most vulnerable situations living in the non-Government-controlled areas and along both sides of the contact line, where people are under the continuous threat of shelling. We share a profound concern for their suffering. As a result of the conflict, 2.9 million Ukrainians are still in need of humanitarian assistance. We call on all sides to respect international humanitarian law and guarantee unhindered and sustained access for humanitarian actors, including the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and other United Nations agencies, as well as national and international non-governmental organizations, to all people in need. The EU, comprising 27 member States, is the biggest donor of humanitarian aid to Ukraine since the beginning of the conflict. The EU will continue to support humanitarian organizations.

Let me turn to the situation in Crimea. This week we are commemorating eight years since the beginning of Russia's hostile political and military actions against the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine, which led to the illegal annexation of the Autonomous

Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol by the Russian Federation. That illegal annexation and Russia's subsequent actions on the peninsula and in the surrounding waters are in blatant breach of international law and key principles of the rules-based international order. They remain a direct challenge to international security with grave implications for international law, which protects the sovereignty, territorial integrity and unity of all States.

In line with the resolutions adopted by the General Assembly, the EU reconfirms its condemnation of those violations of international law and continues to implement a consistent non-recognition policy of the illegal annexation, including through restrictive measures, together with our transatlantic partners. As stated in resolution 68/262, the so-called referendum organized by Russia on the Crimean peninsula in March 2014 has no legal validity. We recall the obligation of all States not to recognize as lawful any territorial acquisition or special advantage resulting from aggression. We call on all States Members of the United Nations to remain steadfast in their policy of non-recognition of Russia's illegal annexation. We welcome Ukraine's efforts to continue to seek justice by using international legal instruments and courts.

Russia's ongoing militarization of the Crimean peninsula continues to have a negative impact on the security situation in the Black Sea region and beyond. We call on Russia to refrain from impeding the lawful exercise of navigational rights and freedoms to and from the Sea of Azov, in accordance with international law. We reaffirm the universal and unified character of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

We remain seriously concerned about the transfers by the Russian Federation of sophisticated weapon systems and military personnel to the peninsula since March 2014. As documented in the relevant reports of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Russian citizenship and conscription into the armed forces of the Russian Federation have been imposed on Crimean residents, in violation of international humanitarian law. Russian legislative elections have been illegally held and a population census conducted in an attempt to legitimize the illegal annexation of the peninsula. All of those developments are extremely worrying and hostile.

The EU remains deeply concerned about the severe deterioration of the human rights situation on

the Crimean peninsula since its illegal annexation by the Russian Federation. The residents of the peninsula face systematic violations of their human rights and fundamental freedoms, such as the right to freedom of expression, religion or belief and association and the right to peaceful assembly. Arbitrary detentions and convictions remain systemic. In particular, the human rights situation of the Crimean Tatars have been targeted.

In accordance with resolution 76/179, adopted in December, it is crucial that regional and international human rights monitoring mechanisms, as well as non-governmental human rights organizations, are granted proper and unimpeded access to the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol. Journalists, other media workers, human rights defenders and defence lawyers should be able to work independently and without undue interference or intimidation.

The EU reaffirms its commitment to further supporting Ukraine's resilience, including by countering cyber and hybrid threats and tackling disinformation. The EU underlines the importance of Ukraine's reform agenda, which is based on democracy, the rule of law and respect for international law and human rights.

In conclusion, let me reiterate once again our firm belief that tensions and disagreements must be resolved through dialogue and diplomacy, and that this issue is a matter not merely of regional concern, but global. Threats and violations of international law, including the Charter of the United Nations, affect all States Members of the United Nations and all people of the world.

Mr. Paulauskas (Lithuania): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the eight Nordic-Baltic countries—Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Norway, Sweden and my own country, Lithuania. All our countries align themselves with the statement made by the observer of the European Union (EU).

Despite the repeated calls of the Secretary-General for a critical de-escalation and the recent intensive diplomatic efforts undertaken at all levels, Russia continues to dramatically escalate its aggressive actions against Ukraine. We strongly condemn the decision by President Putin to recognize the non-Government-controlled areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts of Ukraine as independent entities and the ensuing decision to send Russian troops to those areas under the

pretext of so-called peacekeeping. We call on Russia to reverse those decisions.

As clearly stated by the Secretary-General and the political leaders of our countries, those illegal acts further undermine Ukraine's sovereignty and independence and constitute a severe breach of international law and international agreements, including the Charter of the United Nations, the Helsinki Final Act, the Charter of Paris for a New Europe and the Budapest Memorandum. We underline that the deployment of Russian forces to the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts of Ukraine would be nothing short of an invasion of a sovereign State. Referring to those forces as peacekeepers, to quote the Secretary-General, is a "perversion of the concept of peacekeeping". By carrying out those illegal acts, Russia is breaking its commitment to working within the Normandy format and the Trilateral Contact Group to find a peaceful settlement to the conflict, while also violating Security Council resolution 2202 (2015), which requires the full implementation of the Minsk agreements.

The Russian Federation's use of force against Ukraine is completely unjustified and unacceptable and must be met with unity, firmness and determination, including through additional sanctions, in solidarity with Ukraine. Russia's continuing aggressive actions and threats against Ukraine and recent unprecedented and large-scale military build-up in the country and near its borders, including through the deployment of combat forces in, and conducting joint drills with, Belarus, pose a threat not only to European security but also global security. In addition, Russia's increased military presence in the Black Sea and on the illegally annexed Crimean peninsula, as well as the closure of large parts of the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov, add to the threat of escalation in the maritime sphere.

Non-adherence to international law and its fundamental principles undermines the rules-based international order and effective multilateralism. We underscore the crucial importance of upholding those principles, including the right of all States to sovereign equality, territorial integrity and political independence, as well as the freedom of States to choose their own security arrangements. The Nordic and Baltic countries stand in full solidarity with Ukraine and support its territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence within its internationally recognized borders. Russia has a clear and direct responsibility under international law to work to find a peaceful settlement to the conflict.

We call on Russia to respect the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, de-escalate and choose to engage in meaningful diplomacy.

In three days' time, we will mark the eighth anniversary of the illegal annexation of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol by the Russian Federation. The Nordic and Baltic countries continue to condemn that blatant violation of international law and remain committed to implementing the EU's non-recognition policy, including through restrictive measures. We call on Member States to consider similar measures, in accordance with resolution 68/262. We continue to condemn the increasing militarization of the Crimean peninsula and the severe deterioration of the human rights situation there. We recall the obligation of all States not to recognize as lawful any territorial acquisition or special advantage resulting from the use of armed force.

The conflict instigated by Russia has resulted in around 14,000 deaths, 1.5 million displaced persons, immeasurable damage and the suffering of those living on both sides of the contact line. Furthermore, we are witnessing Russia's ongoing efforts to orchestrate the de facto integration and systematic demographic changes in the illegally annexed Crimea and non-Government-controlled areas in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine, including through the accelerated issuing of Russian passports on a massive scale to Ukrainian citizens and forced conscription into the Russian armed forces. Such moves are making it even harder to undertake conflict-resolution efforts.

We are concerned about reports of arbitrary detentions and arrests, especially of Crimean Tatars and Ukrainian-speaking minorities, and increasing pressure on journalists and other media workers, human rights defenders and other members of civil society. Russia must fully respect international law, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law. We call for the immediate release of all illegally detained and imprisoned persons on the Crimean peninsula and in Russia. It is essential that international organizations and human rights actors have unhindered access to areas not currently under the control of Ukraine and on the Crimean peninsula, in accordance with resolution 76/179 of 16 December 2021.

We urge Russia to withdraw its forces and materiel from Ukraine, including the Crimean peninsula and non-Government-controlled areas in the Luhansk and

Donetsk oblasts, as well as areas adjacent to its borders, and to immediately stop fuelling the conflict. We reiterate our full support for efforts to achieve a peaceful and sustainable resolution of the conflict through the established international mechanisms. We commend Ukraine for its constructive approach and urge Russia to assume its responsibility as a party to the conflict, uphold its commitments, abide by international law and return to discussions within the Normandy format and the Trilateral Contact Group.

It is essential that the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's Special Monitoring Mission have free and unhindered access throughout Ukraine, including the Crimean peninsula and non-Government-controlled areas in the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, in accordance with its mandate. We are deeply concerned about the continuing restrictions to the Mission's freedom of movement, including security incidents involving its staff and assets.

The position of the Nordic and Baltic countries is clear. It is our duty as Members of the United Nations to defend the rules-based international order. Challenges to that order clearly affect the international community as a whole. We urge Russia to abide by international law and uphold its international commitments. Like the Secretary-General, we wish to recall the obligation under the Charter of the United Nations that Members refrain from the threat or use of force and settle their international disputes by peaceful means. We thank the Secretary-General for his clear message on Russia's aggressive actions and call for the United Nations to continue efforts to restore respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity, political independence and unity of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): I would like to begin my statement with a clarification. The agenda item on which we are convened to discuss today has clearly been named incorrectly. If it is to reflect reality, then it should refer not to temporarily occupied territories, but rather territories lost as a result of the misanthropic policy towards its own citizens that Kyiv transformed into a national idea following the illegitimate Maidan coup in 2014. This policy was aimed in particular at those citizens who spoke against the coup. Since coming to power, the current regime, with the tacit endorsement of its Western sponsors, has been systematically infringing on basic human rights, including based on nationality.

We understand that the Russian Federation's recognition of the People's Republics of Donetsk and Luhansk will be the focus of our discussion today, as the main current affairs story. There is a great deal of speculation and insinuation concerning that decision. I would like to underscore that the events are a direct consequence of many years of Kyiv sabotaging its direct obligations under the package of measures approved by the Security Council in its resolution 2202 (2015).

Since the resolution was adopted in February 2015, Russia has been consistently committed to that complicated intra-Ukrainian compromise agreement. We have done everything in our power to preserve the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine, including by convening several Security Council and Arria Formula meetings, participating actively in the work of the Normandy format and the Minsk Contact Group and discussing the situation in eastern Ukraine within the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, all of which we did despite Russia not being a party to the Minsk process.

All of our efforts have been in vain. For eight years, Kyiv has continued to bomb its own citizens and evade direct dialogue with the authorities in the Donbas, while the entire global community has been led by the nose for these past eight years as Kyiv insists on its commitment to the Minsk agreements and its readiness to implement them, but only per its own interpretation, and essentially undermines the work of the Minsk Contact Group. Most delegations present in the Hall today will have no idea about what happened during the meetings of the Minsk Contact Group, during which the representatives of Ukraine sabotaged the taking of decisions not only on political issues but also on economic and humanitarian issues, *inter alia*.

Recently, however, Ukrainian leaders have unscrupulously stated in front of the cameras that they have no intention of fulfilling their obligations. Perhaps the final confirmation of that was the Permanent Representative of Ukraine unequivocally confirming that position during the Security Council meeting convened by my delegation on 17 February (see S/PV.8968). Our Western colleagues did not even call on Ukraine to comply with the Minsk agreements. It therefore became clear that there were no further prospects for Kyiv implementing its commitments under those agreements.

It is precisely because of Kyiv's unwillingness to consider the interests of its general population that Ukraine has been at war since 2014 with its own citizens who do not agree with the Maidan values and the current policy being implemented by the national authorities. Ukraine's Western sponsors have done nothing to convince Kyiv to listen to its own people, thereby demonstrating blatant double standards. In any other crisis situation, States Members of the United Nations would call for inclusive direct dialogue between the parties to the conflict, without which internal conflicts cannot be resolved. With respect to Ukraine, however, everything has been reversed. The key to resolving any crisis is direct dialogue, which has been consistently sabotaged by Ukraine.

We note with regret the statements made by the Secretary-General concerning the situation in eastern Ukraine, which fall outside of his remit and mandate under the Charter of the United Nations. We took it upon ourselves to look back through the archives and found that there has been no other conflict in history when a Secretary-General, past or present, has made such remarks about any country. With regard to the situation in Ukraine, the Secretary-General has never spoken in favour of upholding the requirements in the package of measures provided for in Security Council resolution 2202 (2015), which specifically demand that all matters be resolved through an agreement between Kyiv and Donetsk and Luhansk. No one in the West has mentioned that either, and the Secretary-General has regrettably followed suit. In the light of that, we do not see which good offices that the Secretary-General alluded to can be provided.

The people of Crimea, Donetsk and Luhansk declared their independence in 2014. Crimea was fortunate in that its inhabitants almost immediately voted in favour of being incorporated into the Russian Federation and thus found themselves under our protection. The people of Donetsk and Luhansk, who were promised a fair settlement by Germany and France, have had to wait eight long years for their independence to be recognized by the Russian Federation, during which time there was still a glimmer of hope that Kyiv would come to its senses and initiate dialogue with its citizens. However, the Maidan authorities had no such plans and carried out two heinous and murderous military exercises in that time, which culminated in the defeat of the Ukrainian army by the self-defence militias and the subsequent signing of the Minsk agreements.

Rather than fulfilling those agreements, Kyiv hatched plans for revenge from the outset, ceaselessly shelling residential neighbourhoods and wreaking destruction.

It is also important to bear in mind that Ukraine has become resolutely "anti-Russia" over the years, elevating to State policy its war on the Russian language and culture. A linguistic inquisition has emerged in the country, with the use of the Russian language steadily diminishing and its speakers being subjected to repression. Under the leadership President Volodymyr Zelenskyy — who, during the pre-election campaign, dressed up as a peacemaker and a defender of the interests of all Ukrainians — six opposition television channels have been banned from broadcasting. Lies about the Second World War have been actively disseminated, Hitler's comrades-in-arms have been hailed as heroes and the real heroes have been cast into oblivion.

Those who do not agree with Kyiv's policy have been persecuted, subjected to repression, prosecution and physical violence, including murders of opposition politicians and journalists. It was therefore all too clear to the people of Donetsk and Luhansk what kind of Ukraine they were being asked to return to. However, even in the face of this, they did not abandon the Minsk agreements, firmly believing that the document would be implemented and that they would be granted special status. As it turned out, those hopes were never destined to come true.

Today, we are all aware that there have been a horrifying 14,000 victims of the conflict, including hundreds of children, the vast majority of them in Donetsk and Luhansk. For all these years, there has been an economic, transportation and food blockade imposed against the Donbas. Children and the elderly have been forced to hide from shelling in basements. The number of refugees being rescued by and fleeing to Russia — and I note: Russia, not Ukraine — has reached the tens of thousands over the past few days alone, totalling 96,000 as of today. That is clearly not how people are treated in any civilized State and demonstrates that Kyiv does not need the people of the Donbas, only their land, which was further reinforced by President Zelenskyy telling the region's inhabitants to leave for Russia. The Kyiv authorities are disparagingly calling those inhabitants "terrorists". Having become convinced of the hopelessness of the situation, we decided that the people of the Donbas should have the

right to consider themselves independent. Members know the rest of the story.

In the light of the blatant genocide and violation of the most fundamental human right, namely, the right to life, Russia could no longer remain indifferent to the fate of the 4 million people of the Donbas. We were guided primarily by the fact that human life is of the utmost importance. By criticizing Russia for its decision, members are demonstrating their complindifference to the fate of the people of Donetsk and Luhansk in the same way that Kyiv and its Western sponsors have been doing throughout the past eight years of conflict, which remains far from over. The shelling of residential neighbourhoods in both the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics continues unabated. The West continues to support, encourage and provide arms to Kyiv. We would warn that, at the request of the people of Donetsk and Luhansk, the Russian armed forces will monitor the ceasefire and will not pardon those who violate it. I therefore urge members to focus their efforts on curbing Kyiv's actions and deterring it from conducting new military operations that could cost the whole of Ukraine very dearly.

Mr. Ishikane (Japan): The Government of Japan strongly believes that what is happening in and around Ukraine is not an isolated problem in Europe but a problem for the entire international community and a challenge to the international order. It goes completely against the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

Japan consistently supports the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine. Russia's decision to recognize the independence of certain regions of eastern Ukraine seriously undermines the principles I just mentioned, in violation of international law. Such a decision is absolutely unacceptable, and Japan strongly condemns the series of acts recently taken by Russia. Acting in lockstep with the international community, Prime Minister Kishida has announced sanction measures, including the suspension of the issuance of entry visas and the implementation of asset freezes for individuals concerned.

Japan continues to pay close attention to the development of the situation with serious concern, including Russia's military build-up in the areas around Ukraine's borders and its decision regarding the deployment of its forces outside its territory. Tensions should be de-escalated by Russia withdrawing its

troops, which is essential to restoring the cause of diplomacy. Any threat or use of force against the sovereignty and territorial integrity of States goes against the fundamental principles that underpin the rules-based international order and is a clear violation of international law. What is at stake for Member States is the rule of law and the United Nations Charter itself.

Japan expresses its solidarity with the people of Ukraine and its desire for their hopes to come true. Japan has made its own diplomatic efforts to achieve a peaceful solution and supports the efforts of all countries to find a serious diplomatic solution to the current crisis. Before closing, let me reiterate that unilateral attempts to change the status quo by force or coercion are unacceptable, regardless of where they take place. No Member State can afford to be a bystander. Japan will continue to work hand in hand with its partners.

Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield (United States of America): We stand at a crossroads in the history of the General Assembly. On Monday, President Putin announced that Russia would recognize as independent States the so-called Donetsk People's Republic and Luhansk People's Republic regions, which are part of the sovereign territory of Ukraine that have been controlled by Russia's proxies since 2014. He then ordered Russian military forces, under the guise of so-called peacekeepers, to deploy to those regions. In the hours that followed, Secretary-General Guterres said that was a violation of the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine and inconsistent with the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, which he reaffirmed in his earlier remarks.

At an emergency meeting convened on Monday night, all but one member of the Security Council called for dialogue and diplomacy (see S/PV.8970), which can take place only if Russia abandons its unprovoked further aggression towards Ukraine. Has Russia heeded those calls? No. Instead, it has responded with additional actions to undermine Ukrainian sovereignty, including by disseminating mass disinformation, which we have heard again today, as well as conducting cyberattacks and undertaking efforts to create a false-flag pretext, in addition to Russia's overwhelming military build-up of more than 150,000 troops near Ukraine's borders. Russia's actions have confirmed what we and other nations have been warning others about. Other States Members of the United Nations must recognize the threat before us all today, before it is too late.

There is no middle ground here. Calling for both sides to de-escalate serves only to give Russia a pass. Russia is the aggressor here. History tells us that looking the other way is ultimately the more costly path. And we need only to look back over the past decade for an indication of the path that Russia is taking. Since 2014, Russia has occupied Crimea following its illegal invasion and has been manufacturing and fuelling ongoing military conflicts in eastern Ukraine. In recent years, including in President Putin's remarks this week, Russian leaders have claimed that Ukraine is not a real country. They have questioned its right to exist. Russia's actions are an unprovoked violation of international law and Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity and a direct contravention of the Minsk agreements. Russia's aggression threatens not only the whole of Ukraine, but every State Member of the United Nations and the Organization itself.

President Putin gave us the clearest indication of his intentions on Monday, when he asked the world to travel back in time by more than 100 years — before the United Nations even existed — to an age of empires. He asserted that Russia can recolonize its neighbours and that he will use force. He will use force to make a farce of the United Nations. The United States firmly rejects that course of action. We are in 2022. We are not going back to an era of empires and colonies, or to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics or the Soviet Union. We have moved forward, and we must ensure that, as stated by the Permanent Representative of Kenya in the Security Council meeting held on Monday night, the embers of dead empires do not ignite new forms of oppression and violence (see S/PV.8970).

Unfortunately, the fake reality that Russia wants to create is already having real consequences for the people of Ukraine and the world. To date, Russia's war in eastern Ukraine has already killed more than 14,000 people. Nearly 3 million Ukrainians, half of whom are elderly people and children, need food, shelter and other life-saving assistance. Of course, ordinary Russians should be asking themselves how many Russian lives Putin is willing to sacrifice to feed his ambitions. If Russia continues along this path, it could, according to our estimates, create a new refugee crisis — one of the largest facing the world today — with as many as 5 million more people being displaced by Russia's war of choice, which would put pressure on Ukraine's neighbours.

Given that Ukraine is one of the world's largest wheat suppliers, especially for the developing world, Russia's actions could cause a spike in food prices and lead to even more desperate hunger in places like Libya, Yemen and Lebanon. The tidal wave of suffering that this war will cause is unthinkable. There is also the broader threat that Russia's actions could upend our international system, make a mockery of the Charter of the United Nations and call into question our most fundamental principles of sovereignty, diplomacy and territorial integrity.

Unfortunately, despite those terrible world-altering outcomes, Russia appears determined to proceed. Together with our partners and allies, President Biden has taken decisive action to make crystal clear the cost of Russia's actions. But as much as we all want Russia to de-escalate and choose the path of peace, it is not our choice to make. This is President Putin's war of choice. If he chooses to escalate further, Russia, and Russia alone, will bear the full responsibility for what is to come. What we can do together today is make clear that Russia will pay an even steeper price if it continues its course of aggression; that responsible countries do not bully their neighbours into submission; and that former empires cannot lay claim to sovereign and independent nations. The very first line of the Charter of the United Nations affirms that we are united together, "determined to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war". This — right here, right now — is a moment when we can save the current generation and the next from that terrible fate.

Now is not the time to sit on the sidelines. Now is the time to come off the sidelines. Let us together show Russia that it is isolated and alone in its aggressive actions. Let us stand fully behind the principles of sovereignty, political independence and territorial integrity for Ukraine and all Member States. Let us show Russia that every other State Member of the United Nations believes it is time to de-escalate, come back to the negotiating table and work towards peace so that Ukrainians can live in security and so that the tenets of the Charter of the United Nations can be upheld for future generations to come.

Mr. Imnadze (Georgia): My delegation aligns itself with the statement made by the observer of the European Union. I would like to add following remarks in my national capacity.

Last year we celebrated the seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations, which was created to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war. But today, our generation, the United Nations itself and the rules-based order have arrived at a critical juncture. How events unfold will define the future not only of security and stability in Europe but of the entire international community.

It is deeply alarming that the international norms and principles that we all committed to upholding are repeatedly violated by the Russian Federation — a permanent member of the Security Council whose primary responsibility is to do the exact opposite, namely, to act as a guardian of peace and security. Unfortunately, breaching international law and undermining the international rules-based order has long been a marker of Russia's aggressive policy towards its neighbouring States aimed at forcibly redrawing their borders and curbing their sovereign choices. My country, Georgia, is no exception in that regard.

Russia's decision to recognize the so-called independence of integral parts of Ukraine and deploy its military under the guise of "peacekeepers" represents a grave violation of the Charter of the United Nations and the Helsinki Final Act. Moreover, it is in breach of Russia's own commitments under the Budapest Memorandum and the Minsk agreements, which were endorsed by the Security Council in its resolution 2202 (2015). The Georgian Government strongly condemns Russia's so-called recognition of Ukraine's territories — the so-called Luhansk People's Republic and Donetsk People's Republic. Let me be clear: that decision will never be accepted by the international community, just like the Russian-occupied regions of Georgia will never be accepted.

Eight years have passed since the onset of Russia's aggression against Ukraine, the annexation of Crimea and the instigation of the conflict in the Donbas. The humanitarian cost alone has been tremendous: more than 14,000 Ukrainian citizens have died, more than 30,000 have been injured and almost 1.5 million residents of the occupied areas of Ukraine have been internally displaced. As we speak, another wave of Russian military aggression is well underway against Ukraine. It is aimed at redrawing Ukraine's sovereign borders, and the security repercussions of such actions will go far beyond that country alone. Let me express strong solidarity with and commend the brave

Ukrainian people for their restraint and resilience in the face of ongoing aggression.

The aggression against Ukraine is a repetition of the same pattern of Russia's illegal actions perpetrated against my own country. It started with incitement and support for puppet regimes in Georgia's Abkhazia and Tskhinvali regions. Then came full-scale military aggression in 2008 under fabricated pretexts, which led to the illegal occupation of those regions. Shortly after signing a ceasefire agreement, instead of fulfilling its obligations, Russia recognized the occupied territories as sovereign entities, thereby creating the launch pad for their factual annexation.

As of today, in breach of all the international commitments, including, among other things, the EU-mediated ceasefire agreement of 12 August 2008, the Russian Federation continues its illegal and provocative actions in the occupied regions of Georgia, conducting its so-called borderization process, which in effect is none other than continued aggression and creeping annexation. The humanitarian consequences of these actions are appalling, given the intolerable human rights situation and the conditions that the civilian population, including women and children, have to endure.

We are seeing the very same playbook in action in Ukraine. That pattern of behaviour brazenly undermines the entire international rules-based order, poses a grave threat to regional and global peace and security and is inconsistent with the ways in which responsible States should act in the twenty-first century. It is no longer about Ukraine or Georgia, or other countries that are neighbours of Russia. Peace and security in Europe and beyond are at stake. Silence and acquiescence to land-grabbing today are tantamount to a crime against future generations. We should be united in defending the fundamentals of the international rules-based order and, first and foremost, the Charter of the United Nations, the Helsinki Final Act and the Charter of Paris for a New Europe. With that in mind, we call on Russia to reverse its illegal recognition, immediately withdraw its military forces from Ukraine and its borders and abide by international law. We call on it to do the same with regard to the occupied Georgian regions.

In conclusion, Georgia strongly supports Ukraine's European and Euro-Atlantic aspirations and reiterates its unwavering support for the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders, including

Crimea and Donbas, and Ukraine's navigational rights in its territorial waters.

Mr. Sinirlioglu (Turkey): It has been eight years since the occupation of Crimea, and the international community has maintained a resolute position since the first day. We have never recognized the illegal annexation, and we have always supported Ukraine's independence, territorial integrity, sovereignty and political unity within its internationally recognized borders. That is our legal and moral obligation. Today we face a new act of aggression — this time against another part of Ukrainian territory. This is totally unacceptable. We reject Russia's decision to recognize the so-called Donetsk and Luhansk peoples' republics and to send in additional troops. It is illegal and illegitimate. It is in contravention of the Minsk agreements and constitutes a flagrant violation of Ukraine's political unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity.

We do not need or want a new war in our region. We call on Russia to reverse its decision and return to diplomacy and dialogue on the basis of the Minsk agreements. That is the only path that will lead us away from the precipice. We therefore call for restraint and common sense. We urge the parties to get together around the negotiation table without delay. As a neighbour of both parties, we are ready to facilitate the process and host technical and high-level meetings. We also welcome President Zelenskyy's proposal for a meeting between the permanent members of the Security Council, Turkey, Germany and Ukraine. Finally, we continue to support the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Special Monitoring Mission, led by Ambassador Halit Çevik.

Mr. Malovrh (Slovenia), Vice-President, took the Chair.

I am obliged to repeat that today Ukraine, a founding member of the United Nations, is faced with yet another act of aggression, and the global community is faced with yet another threat to regional and international peace and security. But above all, this is an aggression against the fundamental principles of international law and the Charter of the United Nations. We should make no mistake. We all need the rules-based international order. It is our duty as Member States to defend legality. It is our obligation to ensure that conflicts are resolved through peaceful means. We must make sure that the founding principles of the United Nations are upheld.

That is the only way to save ourselves from the scourge of war.

Mr. Carazo (Costa Rica) (*spoke in Spanish*): Once again, another serious crisis with dangerous global repercussions is knocking on the doors of Eastern Europe and our Organization. By recognizing certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions as independent entities, the Russian Federation is violating the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine. It is contravening the Charter of the United Nations, the Minsk agreements and the Budapest Memorandum, as well as the numerous related Security Council and General Assembly resolutions and many of the most fundamental principles of international law. Costa Rica condemns such actions as contrary to international law and emphasizes that while *faits accomplis* may impose realities on the ground, they do not establish rights. I would now like to make four comments on the current crisis:

First, we must acknowledge that if collective security is to be legitimate, it must respect international law. The Charter clearly defines our rights and duties. Compliance with the Charter is not optional but mandatory, as even the largest nations are subject to international law. It is binding because the non-elected members of the Security Council must be exemplary international actors, as the guarantors of peace and security on behalf of the rest of the membership. As non-elected members they have greater obligations vis-à-vis international law and showing full respect for that law.

Secondly, Russia's aggression, violating the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine, and its violation of the terms that made possible that country's abandonment of nuclear weapons, undermine the international non-proliferation regime. Under the Budapest Memorandum, in exchange for Ukraine's renunciation of its nuclear weapons, the nuclear-weapon States committed to respecting its borders. Costa Rica deplores Russia's non-compliance with its commitment, which will have serious consequences for the nuclear non-proliferation regime. It is a matter of concern for the entire international community, especially countries such as those of Latin America and the Caribbean that have declared themselves free of nuclear weapons. A State is only as strong as its word.

Thirdly, we must exhaust all diplomatic avenues in our efforts to avoid the devastating humanitarian

consequences that an armed conflict would have for millions of people in Ukraine.

Civic spaces and fundamental freedoms in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions have been severely curtailed since the serious armed events that took place in 2014. That has undermined freedom of expression and independent activism. Costa Rica deplores the fact that several human rights defenders — I was one of them — environmental activists, journalists and members of national minorities were forced to flee, which limited their participation in public affairs and peaceful assembly. There is no freedom or pluralism where there is censorship and persecution.

The international community must be meticulous in keeping and maintaining a record of all the violations of international law, international humanitarian law and international human rights law committed by the Russian Federation, in line with the Secretary-General's remarks here today. As we have seen in this crisis, emerging technologies provide a new set of challenges and potential for escalating conflict that requires a diplomatic response. The capacity of some States to use artificial intelligence in cyberattacks and misinformation campaigns makes it more urgent than ever to adopt new multilateral agreements to minimize future risk and ensure international stability. We cannot allow the territory of millions of Ukrainians to become a camp for experimenting with new and vicious forms of mass violence. Those times are over. To be clear, shutting off power is violence. Psychological warfare is violence. That violence should be condemned just as strongly as we condemn armed violence. The law protects civilians whatever their level of suffering. Costa Rica will continue to honour the right of Ukrainian citizens to live every day in peace and safety, without foreign interference.

In conclusion, Costa Rica would like to remind all States that the path to peacebuilding should be paved with people-centred initiatives and led by women. Far from being helpless victims, women have been at the forefront, calling for an end to the fighting and addressing the root causes of conflict. They have also been involved in peacebuilding. Peace will not be sustainable if it is not inclusive.

Our United Nations must be much more than a place that forces States to lay down their weapons. It must be a place where dialogue prevails and where no one feels the need to take up arms in the first place.

Mr. Gómez Robledo Verduzco (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): Mexico is participating in today's meeting on the situation in Ukraine in the hope of helping to keep open the paths of dialogue and diplomacy. Mexico's position is founded on the obligation to respect the sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of Ukraine, within its internationally recognized borders, in strict compliance with international law, the Charter of the United Nations and resolutions 2625 (XXV), 3314 (XXIX) and 68/262, as well as the Minsk agreements. We note that the cumulative effect of the events in recent days violates three key principles — the ban on the use or threat of use of force in international relations, respect for the territorial integrity and political independence of States and non-interference in the internal affairs of States.

Just a few days ago, the representative of Russia made a statement in the Security Council to the effect that it would not invade Ukraine (S/PV.8970). We hope that it will fully adhere to that statement. Mexico supports the statement made by the Secretary-General, as well as his call for a peaceful solution. Security Council resolution 2202 (2015), which was adopted unanimously, is the only framework for resolving the situation in eastern Ukraine. The United Nations has created an extremely broad structure of mechanisms for peacefully resolving disputes, and those mechanisms have not been exhausted. Mexico shared its vision in the Security Council about reducing tensions, promoting dialogue and providing a space for political negotiations via three elements — de-escalation, diplomacy and dialogue. Lastly, we reiterate our call on the parties to facilitate safe, unimpeded humanitarian access and for full respect for the human rights of the entire population of Ukraine.

Situations such as this one test the capacity of the Organization to fulfil its purposes and principles. It is time for us to execute our mandate.

Mr. De Rivièrre (France) (*spoke in French*): France firmly condemns Russia's unilateral recognition of the independence of the separatist regions of eastern Ukraine and its decision to deploy its army to those territories. It is a violation of international law. It is a violation of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine that is incompatible with the Charter of the United Nations, as the Secretary-General said. It is a unilateral renunciation by Russia of the Minsk agreements, to which it is a signatory and which were endorsed by Security Council resolution 2202 (2015). It

is also a clear violation of the fundamental principles of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, as outlined in the Helsinki Final Act and the Charter of Paris, which are the basis for stability in Europe. Lastly, it calls into question the commitments made by President Putin over the past few days. France is seriously concerned about the challenge to the legitimacy of the very existence of the Ukrainian State by the highest authorities of the Russian State. Russia has chosen a path of destabilization and confrontation, despite major efforts to de-escalate the situation in the past few weeks and days, in particular by President Macron and Chancellor Scholz.

We call on Russia to reverse its decision to recognize these separatist entities and withdraw its armed forces from the territory of Ukraine, within its internationally recognized borders. Until then, France and its European Union partners will take suitable measures, including against banks that finance Russian military operations in those territories, and with the aim of preventing commerce with separatist entities.

With regard to the heightened tensions on the Ukrainian border caused by Russia's growing military activity and increasing ceasefire violations along the contact line in the past few days, this new stage of destabilization by Russia poses a serious threat to European security. We call on Russia to refrain from any further destabilizing action, particularly if it could jeopardize the safety and security of civilians. We condemn the use of heavy weaponry and indiscriminate bombing of civilian areas. We reiterate that such actions are blatant violations of the Minsk agreements.

France welcomes the restraint that Ukraine has shown in these difficult circumstances and expresses its full solidarity with the people and the Government of Ukraine. We reiterate our condemnation of the illegal annexation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol by Russia in 2014 and underscore our support for the European Union's non-recognition policy. The annexation is also a flagrant violation of international law and a primary source of serious repeated violations of human rights in that area, and we continue to be concerned about the issue. We condemn Russia's militarization of the territory, which has formed part of its strategy against Ukraine over the past few weeks. We support the efforts of the international Crimea Platform.

In the light of Russia's strategy of destabilization and confrontation, we call for a united response from the international community in defence of the fundamental principles of the Charter of the United Nations. We commend the high level of participation in today's debate and urge the Assembly to continue to pursue the issue.

France aligns itself with the statement made earlier on behalf of the European Union and will continue to work with its partners to support the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine, within its internationally recognized borders.

Mr. Hoxha (Albania): Albania aligns itself with the statement made earlier on behalf of the European Union.

Eight years ago, Russia seized the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol from Ukraine. It was an illegal act against the Charter of the United Nations, the Helsinki Final Act, the Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances and international law. Two days ago, the same country orchestrated the occupation of two additional territories of the same country, Ukraine, which it visibly sees as its prey and believes that it should not even have the right to exist. No other Member State has committed such blatant violations of the commitments and treaties it has signed since the Second World War.

What is happening today in Ukraine follows the same pattern, a predictable script. After months of military build-up on the Ukrainian border, the decision to recognize the non-Government-controlled areas of Ukraine as independent entities makes a mockery of the rules that govern relations between sovereign States and demonstrates a lack of respect for everything we all stand for here at the United Nations. It is a further violation of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity and puts an end to the Minsk agreements, to which Russia itself committed just a couple of days ago in the Security Council (see S/PV.8980). However, as we have seen, what Russia says is not what Russia does.

Today we find ourselves faced with an important choice. Either we defend our shared principles, stand by the Charter, which is our international constitution, and respect international law governing a rules-based world order in the community of nations or we yield to aggression, international bullying and the rule according to which what belongs to someone else can be mine. We should stand firm now to ensure that we do not regret what may happen tomorrow. The General

Assembly should condemn this new form of aggression through the proliferation of phantom republics, which redraws international borders at one person's will. We do not believe that in the twenty-first century the future of any country can be built on the laws, behaviours and errors of the past.

Albania strongly condemns Russia's decision to recognize the non-Government-controlled areas of Ukraine as independent entities, as well as any attempt, idea or hint of exporting that decision elsewhere in Russia's vicinity, Europe or anywhere beyond. It should sound an alarm for every State Member of the United Nations. Albania reiterates its support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, within its internationally recognized borders and territorial waters.

We are very concerned about Russia's decision to send a so-called peacekeeping mission into Ukraine. The Ukrainians did not ask for it and the Security Council did not mandate it. Russia is not going into Ukraine to keep the peace but to exacerbate a conflict. As Secretary-General Guterres rightly pointed out, that is a perversion of the concept of peacekeeping. Ukraine and the whole of Europe will be more secure if the Russian troops stay home. We reiterate our call to Russia for immediate de-escalation and military disengagement. That will prepare the ground for the peaceful settlement of disputes and enable diplomacy and meaningful dialogue.

We reiterate our call to Russia to reverse its decision and engage in talks within the Normandy format and give a chance to the Minsk agreements. We also welcome the quick and united reaction by the European Union, as anticipated, in coordination with the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada and other States, in adopting a proportionate package of sanctions as a response to Russia's decision and behaviour.

Mr. Alateek (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*) I am making this statement on behalf of the member States of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC).

The States of the GCC are following the developments in the situation in Ukraine with concern. We stress our support for all efforts to find a solution to the crisis through dialogue, diplomacy and the implementation of the relevant agreements between the parties concerned, as outlined in Security Council resolution 2202 (2015). We also emphasize our support

for the international efforts aimed at de-escalation and taking calming measures in order to restore stability and initiate discussions on finding a political solution to the crisis. The States of the GCC reaffirm the importance of commitment to the principles of international law and the Charter of the United Nations, in particular the principles of the peaceful settlement of international disputes and of refraining from the use or threat of use of force, as well as of respect for the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of States.

I would like to highlight the close relations between the member States of the GCC and all the parties involved. In the interests of all concerned, we therefore call on the parties to show calm and restraint in order to end this crisis by diplomatic means as soon as possible and ensure that civilians are not harmed by any potential escalation and consequent further humanitarian difficulties.

Mr. Wenaweser (Liechtenstein): Our Organization needs a Secretary-General who speaks up in defence of the Charter of the United Nations whenever it is needed. We are grateful to Secretary-General Guterres for doing that with regard to the situation in Ukraine in recent days and for his presence here with us again today.

The present situation in and around Ukraine, a founding member of this Organization, is a watershed moment and a litmus test for the post-1945 order reflected so clearly in Chapter I of the Charter of the United Nations, including the removal of threats to peace, the suppression of acts of aggression and the settlement of international disputes by peaceful means. In short, today we are discussing our international order, founded on the Charter's collective prohibition of the use or threat of use of force by one State against another, which is of vital and direct relevance to everyone in this Hall committed to the Charter of the United Nations and the principles contained in its Article 2.

Liechtenstein condemns the recognition of certain parts of the Ukrainian regions of Luhansk and Donetsk by the Government of the Russian Federation and is deeply concerned about the subsequent order to send armed forces into the sovereign territory of Ukraine. Those actions are in flagrant violation of the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine and the letter and spirit of the Minsk agreements endorsed by the Security Council and defended by the Russian delegation in the Security Council just last week (see S/PV.8968), as well as the rules of the Charter regulating the use of

force. Liechtenstein affirms its strong support for the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine, the inviolability of its frontiers and its right to determine its own relationships with other States, as well as membership in international organizations. We express our solidarity with the Government and people of Ukraine and call on the Russian Federation to reverse its decisions. We also call for the peaceful settlement of all issues through diplomatic means and in accordance with international law.

At this time, we want to express our gratitude to the brave members of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Special Monitoring Mission, whose work has been vital to the impartial observation of the situation on the ground. The Special Monitoring Mission must be granted unhindered access to all regions of Ukraine in line with its agreed mandate, and anyone responsible for hindering its work must be held accountable.

The recent actions of the Russian Federation, in manifest violation of international law, have further exacerbated an already precarious humanitarian and human rights situation and are putting the lives and livelihoods of the civilian population at grave risk. Ukraine's diversity, including its considerable percentage of Russian speakers, is a strength through which Ukraine can exercise its right to self-determination. Seeking to use Ukraine's diversity to create a pretext for secession and annexation by force violates the core human rights of the people who live there and abrogates the relevant parts of the Minsk agreements, notably those concerning local self-government. Liechtenstein has consistently condemned the illegal annexation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol and will not recognize that annexation, which was carried out in violation of the principles of sovereign equality and territorial integrity.

The situation in Ukraine also brings home the need to enforce respect for the rules governing the use of force in relations between States, which, again, are so clearly defined in the Charter of the United Nations. To that end, we would like to point out that a number of years ago, and by consensus, States agreed on a definition of the crime of aggression (resolution 3314 (XXIX)). That definition, which assigns individual criminal responsibility for persons in leadership positions, is part both of numerous national penal codes and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. The

need for more States to join that legal regime could not be clearer than at a time where there is an attempt to reintroduce a threat of the use of force into inter-State relations. That call is even more urgent considering the new capabilities that exist for carrying out hostile acts through cyber-related means, including cyberattacks on critical infrastructure and other acts of cyberwarfare. According to the findings of the Council of Advisers' Report on the Application of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court to Cyberwarfare, such acts fall within the scope of the crime of aggression.

Acts of aggression such as those committed by the Russian Federation against Ukraine fall squarely within the purview of the Security Council, which should therefore take prompt and effective action to address the situation. If that should fail, the Assembly would have to step in, in line with its competence in matters pertaining to the maintenance of international peace and security.

Mr. Rae (Canada): We are meeting at a time where there is a direct threat to the peace and security of the world community. Over the past few months we have all seen an unprecedented increase in the Russian Government's military activity in and around Ukraine. We are seeing the greatest massing of troops, missiles, artillery and aircraft capability since 1945. As my colleague from Liechtenstein pointed out, this period has also been marked by hostile cyber operations against Ukraine and several other countries. We have witnessed the forcible and unjustifiable removal of civilian populations from Ukraine to Russia and a steady flow of propaganda and disinformation from Moscow and Russian-controlled outlets on every conceivable social media platform around the world.

It has been eight years since Russia invaded and illegally occupied Crimea, in flagrant violation of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity and in clear breach of the Charter of the United Nations itself. In 1945, the Soviet Union was present at the drafting and adoption of the Charter. Today, the Russian Federation is a member of the Group of Friends in Defence of the Charter of the United Nations, so we can only assume that it knows perfectly well what the Charter says and what that means. I happen to have brought my copy of the Charter with me. What does it say? Article 2 says that the Organization — that is to say, the United Nations — is based on the principle of the sovereign equality of all of its members. What does that mean? It means that there are no second-class States in this

Organization. There is no back of the bus in the United Nations. There is no nation that is less integral or less sovereign than any other nation. No nation has the right to undermine the integrity of any other nation. That is what it means. That is what sovereign equality means.

It goes on to say that all Members shall settle their international disputes by peaceful means in such a manner that justice and international peace and security are not endangered. So when we speak of desisting, of dialogue and de-escalation, we are not asking someone to do us a favour. We are asking them to do what they actually signed up to do. That is the challenge. Finally, all Members shall refrain in their international relations from the use or threat of use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any State, or in any other manner inconsistent with the purposes of the United Nations. That is not an option. That is not something where we say, "Well, if you would like to do this, perhaps you would like to consider doing it this way." We are not asking any nation State, any Member State, to do us a favour. We are asking them to follow the rules and the law.

(spoke in French)

Despite those solemn commitments, Russia has done everything possible to undermine the sovereignty and territorial integrity of its neighbour Ukraine. Ever since assuming the presidency of his country, President Putin has made it clear that he will not accept Ukraine as an autonomous sovereign nation. That is exactly what he repeated on Monday. Two days ago, he said the same thing.

In recent years, Russia has continued to destabilize Ukraine and regional security. That is why Canada firmly condemns any support for Russia and the presence of armed formations in Donbas. Russia's actions in that region will have serious consequences. They have already led to the death of more than 13,000 people, including more than 3,000 civilians, and the internal displacement of 1.5 million Ukrainians. Many other Ukrainians are in need of humanitarian aid. We are now on the verge of an even more devastating situation. Despite its denials, campaigns of misinformation, fabrications, lies and propaganda, Russia must accept its responsibility for the loss of human life, the destruction of the country and the chaos that it has created.

(spoke in English)

We strongly condemn Russia's recognition of the so-called Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics and its decision to move troops into Ukraine for purposes of what they call peacekeeping but that anyone else who understands the meaning of language would call war-making. They are not peacekeepers. They are soldiers who are there to invade. Their actions violate several treaties and international agreements to which Russia is a signatory, including the Budapest Memorandum, the Minsk agreements and, of course, the Charter. They come with obligations — obligations that Russia is clearly rejecting.

As we have demonstrated today, Canada and the international community are united and steadfast in our support for Ukraine and its people. We are implementing responsive measures, including economic sanctions. If Russia escalates the situation further, we will follow with more severe measures. Russia and its acolytes can spin and distort all they want, but the violations of international law are theirs. The loss of life, the wounding, the pain and the suffering are all their responsibilities. As has been said, this is President Putin's choice. We will respond to any further violations of the Charter of the United Nations collectively with our allies and with great determination.

It is never too late to stop. It is never too late to make a turn to diplomacy, dialogue and negotiation. Together with our partners in Europe, NATO and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, Canada has made it very clear, and I repeat that today, that we are prepared to talk directly about mutual reductions in threats to the peace of Europe to ensure peace, prosperity and progress for all peoples living in a region that has known too much hardship, tragedy and loss of life in the past century. We are steadfast in our commitment to Ukraine's sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence. It is clear that the Russian Federation's actions directly threaten the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine while undermining the entire rules-based international order. Russia's hostile actions have to stop. Ukraine is not a mistake. It is a sovereign nation. Its autonomy must be respected and its territorial integrity restored. It is the solemn and considered decision of a people who have sought freedom and prosperity on their own terms.

Most of us have referred to President Putin's speech on Monday. I noticed that my colleague from

the Russian Federation did not. In that speech, it is clear that he denied the existence of the other. In doing so, he made it apparent to the whole world that this is not about NATO or about the European Union. It is about the existence and the right to existence of a State Member of this Organization.

Each and every Member State here in this Hall has an obligation to uphold the territorial integrity of other States, oppose invasions and insist on the peaceful resolution of disputes. That is what we all signed up for. We did not sign up just for ourselves. We did not say, “This applies to us, but it does not apply to anyone else.” It applies to all of us, no matter how big or how small a nation may be. It applies to each and every one of us. No nation, no matter how powerful, can take the law into its own hands. No nation has the right to use its might to destroy everyone else’s rights.

Speaking as a proud Canadian, I can say we worked for peace with justice in Korea. We worked hard during the Suez crisis in 1956 and again when we said there was no legal basis for the invasion of Iraq in 2003. Those were not easy decisions and not necessarily popular in all quarters or even among some of our allies, but they were based on a powerful belief in law, in rules, in common decency and in multilateralism that is now embedded in our bones. We need to remember that invasion and war bring with them terrible losses and hardships. There is no cause for celebration or triumph in such wars. There is only the squalor, the poverty and the heartache of irreparable loss. There has been much talk about legacies. We should be clear that that will be the only legacy of those who are responsible for this entirely avoidable conflict.

Every country formerly under the yoke of tyranny, communism and empire shares that right with Ukraine. Canada’s history and our proud association with all the people of Eastern Europe have led us to this point. We are partners in peace. We are partners in the quest for security and prosperity and in the struggle for a world bound together by peaceful, friendly relations among nations and a common commitment to democracy and the rule of law.

In closing, I want to say that in the darkest days of the Second World War, it is said that at the end of a meeting with Winston Churchill, Harry Hopkins, a representative of the United States Government, said, “Whither thou goest, I will go. Whither thou lodgest, I will lodge. Thy people shall be my people.” And so

Canada says to Ukraine and to all who are challenged, “Whither thou goest, we will go.”

Mr. Szczerski (Poland): We are gathered in this Chamber because we, the peoples of the United Nations, together and individually, pledged in the Preamble to the Charter of the United Nations to

“reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small.”

And, as the Secretary-General rightly said, the Charter is not an à la carte menu.

We are gathered in this Hall today to preserve those ideals and to protect the positive developments that the world has seen during the 77 years of our Organization’s existence. No one should be allowed to reverse the course of that history or question our common achievements. There can be no return to the world from before the United Nations — a world of imperialism, colonialism and the superiority of one country over another. And yet today, sadly enough, we are witnessing such actions against Ukraine, with Russia openly questioning the right to statehood of a fellow Member State. Russia’s recent actions have further compounded the deteriorating human rights and humanitarian situation in the non-Government-controlled territories of Crimea and eastern Ukraine. The reports of widespread cases of the arbitrary detention, torture and ill-treatment of detainees, as well as violations of human freedoms and fundamental rights in those areas, are extremely worrying. It seems that we have been driven to the very brink of a major security crisis on what may be an unprecedented scale.

In this situation, we cannot and will not remain silent. Today Poland calls on all Member States of our respected Organization to clearly reiterate their commitment to operating within the letter and spirit of the Charter of the United Nations, whose Article 2 stipulates that

“[a]ll Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any State”.

There is no place for indifference here. We call on every Member State to firmly condemn all acts of aggression and Russia’s continuing policies of *faits accomplis*. This aggression must stop and Russia’s forces must

be withdrawn. We must assertively deplore such manifestations of neo-imperialism and possessiveness. Having learned from its own history, Poland stands with those who choose freedom over bondage, the rules of international law over brutal force and peace over conflict. We shall therefore continue to stand firmly by our neighbour Ukraine and its people. We support Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders. We strongly believe in the right of every State to pursue its own foreign policy, including the freedom to choose alliances and partnerships.

The world would be a better and safer place if all countries respected the fundamental rights of fellow Member States. Today, we cry out — stop denying Ukraine its rights and stop denying them in so many troubled places around the world. Despite recent setbacks, Poland believes in diplomacy and mediation as the only path to the peaceful resolution of conflicts. As the current Chairmanship-in-Office of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, we have proposed launching a new initiative, Renewed European Security Dialogue. We offer our good offices to make it a success.

History has not ended. Let us move it forward together. Let us not allow any old resentments or past frustrations to hold us back.

Mr. Šimonović (Croatia): Croatia aligns itself with the statement delivered earlier on behalf of the European Union, and I would like to add a few remarks in my national capacity.

Croatia reaffirms its unwavering support for the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders. In that spirit, we echo the statements that the Secretary-General made about Ukraine on Monday and yesterday. We reject Russia's decision to recognize the self-proclaimed regions of Donetsk and Luhansk as an act in clear violation of international law, from the Charter of the United Nations to the Minsk agreements. This regrettable step is gravely undermining efforts for a diplomatic solution to the crisis. We reiterate Croatia's consistent and principled position of non-recognition of the illegal annexation of Ukraine's Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol. We also continue to be worried about the militarization of the Crimean peninsula, as well as further attempts to

restrict freedom of navigation through the Kerch Strait, including to and from the Sea of Azov.

Croatia has consistently supported a peaceful settlement of the conflict in eastern Ukraine by diplomatic means. We reiterate our full support for the efforts of the Normandy format, the Trilateral Contact Group and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), as well as other diplomatic initiatives and missions. Now is the time to engage constructively in efforts to reach a sustainable and peaceful solution, with a view to achieving the full implementation of the Minsk agreements.

We also remain deeply concerned about reports of serious violations and the continued deterioration of the human rights and humanitarian situations in eastern Ukraine and Crimea. We continue to support the vital protection, monitoring, reporting and advocacy work of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the United Nations Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine. We are concerned about the numerous ceasefire violations and support the work of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission, and in the current circumstances we particularly ask that Russia ensure the personal safety of the monitors and allow them to carry out their duties unhindered, under their agreed mandate.

After eight years of conflict, the deteriorating security situation in eastern Ukraine will have dire consequences for all Ukrainians, especially the millions of civilians living in or near the conflict zone. We need no further frightening escalation. What is required is an immediate return to dialogue based on international law, in particular the United Nations Charter, the Minsk agreements and the relevant General Assembly resolutions on Ukraine, as well as the recommendations in the reports of the United Nations Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine.

Ms. Brandt (Netherlands): The Kingdom of the Netherlands aligns itself with the statement made earlier on behalf of the European Union, and I would like to add some remarks in my national capacity.

We meet at a time when, as the Secretary-General said, "the United Nations and the international system are being tested". The decision of the Russian Federation to recognize the so-called independence of the separatist-controlled territories in Ukraine and to send troops there is a violation of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine. It is also a violation

of the Charter of the United Nations and the Minsk agreements endorsed by the Security Council. We can only see these actions by Russia as a deliberate choice to further escalate an already volatile situation. The Netherlands strongly condemns those acts and has responded firmly in close coordination with its partners. Any further escalation will be met with a similarly firm response. We call on Russia to reverse its illegal decisions, immediately withdraw its troops and engage seriously and in good faith in dialogue with Ukraine in order to find a diplomatic solution.

Unfortunately, this is not a new situation. Russia's violations of international law in Ukraine started eight years ago. The illegal annexation of Crimea and the ongoing destabilizing role of Russia in Donbas go directly against Article 2 of the United Nations Charter, which the Permanent Representative of Canada quoted just now. Like many others, I therefore reiterate my country's strong commitment to the sovereignty, political independence, unity and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders, including Crimea and its adjacent waters.

The events of the past eight years have already come at a considerable cost for the population. As the Secretary-General said, in a situation of conflict it is the citizens who suffer first and suffer most. We therefore thank the Secretary-General and all United Nations agencies for their continued support to the people through their humanitarian operations and human rights efforts. We also thank the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Special Monitoring Mission for the indispensable work of their monitors.

As the reports of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights clearly show, the human rights situation on the illegally occupied Crimean peninsula and in the non-Government-controlled areas in eastern Ukraine remains deeply concerning. The residents of the peninsula face systematic restrictions on their fundamental freedoms, such as freedom of expression, religion or belief and association and the right to peaceful assembly. The Kingdom of the Netherlands urgently calls on Russia to respect human rights on the Crimean peninsula and to allow human rights monitors full access there.

When talking about the occupied territories in Ukraine, I should not fail to mention Malaysia Airlines flight MH-17, which was shot down over eastern Ukraine on 17 July 2014. That terrible tragedy caused

the death of 298 innocent civilians from 17 different countries, including 196 of my own compatriots. Since that day, the Netherlands, together with many international partners, has called for truth, justice and accountability. That is what the victims and their next of kin deserve. The start of the criminal trial of that case, in March 2020, was a very important step towards finding the truth, establishing justice and holding those responsible to account. At the same time, the criminal investigation continues, and we call on all countries, including Russia, to fully cooperate with the investigation in line with Security Council resolution 2166 (2014).

Let me end by reiterating that sustainable peace and stability in the region will be possible only if the Russian Federation abandons its current path of escalation by showing full respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine and returning to a path of dialogue and negotiations.

Mrs. Baeriswyl (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): Under the Charter of the United Nations, we, the Member States, have committed to practising tolerance, living in peace with one another in a spirit of good neighbourliness and joining forces to maintain international peace and security. As many here have said, today we find ourselves at a crossroads. In the words of the Secretary-General, the principles of the Charter are not an à la carte menu. We must all apply them at all times and in their entirety.

The recognition by the Russian Federation of the Ukrainian regions of Donetsk and Luhansk within their administrative borders as independent States is a violation of the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine and therefore a clear violation of international law, including the Charter. Switzerland condemns Russia's violations. By recognizing the independence of those regions, Russia has also violated the Minsk agreements, to which it is a signatory. Those agreements serve as a basis for the de-escalation and peaceful resolution of the conflict in eastern Ukraine. As a member of the Trilateral Contact Group, Russia is obliged to support the implementation of the Minsk agreements and has also committed to their implementation through Security Council resolution 2202 (2015).

Switzerland is deeply concerned about the deployment of Russian troops in eastern Ukraine and the high risk of military escalation. It calls on Russia

to respect its international obligations and to reverse its actions, as well as to withdraw its troops and work to de-escalate the situation. Switzerland reiterates its full support for the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders. We call on all the parties involved to respect international law, including international humanitarian law and human rights law. The civilian population, which is being severely affected, non-combatants and civilian infrastructure must be protected. There are major humanitarian needs.

In the face of this crisis, Switzerland stresses the essential role of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and its Special Monitoring Mission. This unarmed civilian Mission must be able to fulfil its mandate without interference and have safe and secure access to the whole of Ukraine. My country continues to support the Mission, and our personnel will remain committed to it. We call for continued efforts to achieve a diplomatic and political resolution of the conflict and welcome the Secretary-General's offer of his good offices.

The Assembly has met every year for eight years to reaffirm its support for the territorial integrity of Ukraine in the wake of the annexation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol by the Russian Federation. Like many others, every year my country reiterates its condemnation of the annexation as an act in violation of international law. For eight years, the civilian population affected by the conflict has seen its legitimate hopes for a more secure and peaceful future dashed. It is high time for that to change.

Violence breeds violence. It is never a solution. Conflicts must be resolved through diplomatic means. The path of dialogue must always remain open. Switzerland remains ready to support all efforts to that end.

Mr. Zhang Jun (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China has been paying attention to the evolving situation in Ukraine. China's position on safeguarding the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all States has been consistent. The purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations should be jointly upheld.

At the same time, we note that the issue of Ukraine is rooted in a complex web of historical and current factors. An interplay of those factors has driven the situation to this point. In the current context, all parties

concerned should exercise restraint and avoid taking any action that may exacerbate tensions.

China calls on all parties to recognize the importance of implementing the principle of indivisible security, to continue to engage in dialogue and consultation and to seek reasonable solutions that address each other's concerns through peaceful means on the basis of equality and mutual respect. We welcome and encourage all efforts aimed at facilitating a diplomatic solution.

Ms. Schwalger (New Zealand): Today's annual General Assembly debate on Ukraine takes place at a critical time for Ukraine, for Europe and for our international community.

Consistent with the Charter of the United Nations and as members of the General Assembly, it is our responsibility to do all that we can to avoid the deadly consequences of war. We know only too well that the cost of conflict falls on civilians, with a disproportionate burden carried by women, children and the elderly — death, injury, displacement, loss of critical infrastructure, reduced access to health care and education and the curtailment of human rights and freedoms.

That is why New Zealand stands so strongly opposed to Russia's deliberate and provocative actions taken in the past few days. Russia's actions represent a clear breach of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity and a sharp violation of international law and the Minsk agreements.

New Zealand strongly supports the sovereign right of any State to determine its own future, including in terms of its security relationships. We have been consistent in expressing our strong support for Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty and international diplomatic efforts to find a peaceful solution.

There is no basis under international law for the recognition of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic and Luhansk People's Republic. Their recognition by Russia and the deployment of Russian troops into the Donetsk and Luhansk regions undermine diplomatic efforts towards a de-escalation of the crisis between Russia and Ukraine.

New Zealand is deeply concerned that this is a calculated act by Russia to create a pretext for an invasion of Ukraine. Everyone in this Hall knows that a military invasion is an act of aggression and a

violation of one of the most fundamental principles of international law.

We join the Secretary-General in being deeply concerned about the perversion of the concept of peacekeeping. We agree that when troops of one country enter the territory of another country without its consent, they are not peacekeepers at all.

Recent increases in ceasefire violations and civilian casualties in the conflict zones in the Donbas region are of great concern. Human rights violations in territory controlled by the self-proclaimed republics and in Russian-occupied Crimea are very troubling.

New Zealand joins the international community in calling for human rights violations in the Donbas region to cease. We encourage Russia, Ukraine and other partners to intensify dialogue, including through a return to the Normandy format, with a focus on bringing about an urgent de-escalation of tensions. We call on Russia and all parties to respect international humanitarian law. We call on Russia to commit to dialogue to resolve its security concerns, to act in the interests of peace and the principles of the United Nations and to act consistently with its responsibilities as a permanent member of the Security Council.

Russia's continued efforts to undermine the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Ukraine represent one of the most significant risks to international peace and international security in decades. The impacts of such a conflict will not be confined to Europe. It will further destabilize the international community at a time when geostrategic uncertainty is already high, the international rules-based system is under pressure and the global economy remains fragile, all compounded by the impacts of the coronavirus disease pandemic.

This is a dangerous time. We are at a critical juncture, but it is one where we believe that diplomacy must prevail in preventing a conflict that would have tragic consequences for Ukraine, for Europe, for Russia and for the world.

New Zealand supports the Secretary-General's rallying call to resolve this crisis without further bloodshed. We stand ready to support international diplomatic efforts to de-escalate the crisis in Ukraine in any way that we can.

Mr. Stefanile (Italy): Italy aligns itself with the statement of the European Union (EU) and wishes to add the following remarks of its own.

We strongly condemn the decision by the Russian Federation to recognize the independence of the self-proclaimed republics of Donetsk and Luhansk and to deploy Russian forces in the Donbas region. Those acts are unacceptable violations of Ukraine's democratic sovereignty and territorial integrity, are inconsistent with the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and contradict the Minsk agreements endorsed by the Security Council and to which the Russian Federation is a signatory party.

The EU has already responded to such violations with additional restrictive measures, including on economic relations and trade with the non-Government-controlled areas, in the financial sphere, with asset freezes of some banks and restrictions on sovereign debt, as well as against individuals and entities responsible for undermining the territorial integrity of Ukraine.

In line with resolution 68/262, Italy also reaffirms its non-recognition of the illegal annexation of the Crimean peninsula, and reiterates its unwavering support for and commitment to Ukraine's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders.

That position has also been stated by Italy in its capacity as the current holder of the presidency of the Council of Europe.

We call on Russia to reconsider its decisions, de-escalate tensions, withdraw military forces from Ukraine's territory and fully abide by its international commitments. As the Secretary-General, whose efforts we appreciate, pointed out yesterday and today, we need de-escalation now and now is the time to return to negotiations.

We urge Russia to pursue dialogue on security issues through the United States-Russia strategic stability dialogue, the NATO-Russia Council and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). We commend the Renewed OSCE European Security Dialogue, launched by the Polish OSCE chairmanship-in-office, and we encourage Russia to engage constructively in it.

While the offer of dialogue remains standing, any further military initiative against Ukraine would trigger an additional united and firm response.

After almost eight years of conflict and in the light of the latest developments, we are increasingly concerned about the condition of the civilian population in Ukraine, which continues to bear the heaviest burden. It is of the utmost importance to provide effective and unhindered assistance to those in need and to help preserve the economic and financial stability of Ukraine, which is being further undermined by the current crisis environment. In that regard, Italy intends to support Ukraine with an amount of approximately €110 million in aid credit and grants. Building on the support that

it has provided since 2014, Italy remains committed to doing its part, together with its European partners and in full solidarity with the Ukrainian people.

Italy will continue to be actively engaged, in close coordination with its European partners and its allies, to promote a peaceful solution to this crisis and to avert a conflict at the heart of Europe, which would have disastrous humanitarian and economic consequences.

The Acting President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate on this item for this morning. We shall hear the remaining speakers at 3 p.m. today in this Hall.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.