



# Security Council

Seventy-eighth year

*Provisional*

**9386**<sup>th</sup> meeting

Wednesday, 26 July 2023, 11.35 a.m.

New York

<i>President:</i>	Dame Barbara Woodward . . . . .	(United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland)
<i>Members:</i>	Albania . . . . .	Mr. Spasse
	Brazil . . . . .	Mr. França Danese
	China . . . . .	Mr. Geng Shuang
	Ecuador . . . . .	Mrs. Sánchez Izquierdo
	France . . . . .	Mr. De Rivière
	Gabon . . . . .	Mrs. Ngyema Ndong
	Ghana . . . . .	Ms. Oppong-Ntiri
	Japan . . . . .	Mrs. Shino
	Malta . . . . .	Mr. Camilleri
	Mozambique . . . . .	Mr. Fernandes
	Russian Federation . . . . .	Mr. Grudinskiy
	Switzerland . . . . .	Mr. Hauri
	United Arab Emirates . . . . .	Mr. Abushahab
	United States of America . . . . .	Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield

## Agenda

Maintenance of peace and security of Ukraine

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*The meeting was called to order at 11.35 a.m.*

### **Adoption of the agenda**

*The agenda was adopted.*

### **Maintenance of peace and security of Ukraine**

**The President:** In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of Ukraine to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Khaled Khiari, Assistant Secretary-General for the Middle East, Asia and the Pacific in the Departments of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and Peace Operations, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I give the floor to Mr. Khiari.

**Mr. Khiari:** As we return to the Chamber for the third time in 10 days to address the crisis in Ukraine, we continue to witness the widespread destruction and suffering caused by the war. This week, the port city of Odesa has been the target of devastating waves of air strikes. On Sunday, a Russian missile attack damaged the UNESCO-protected Transfiguration Cathedral and other historical buildings in the historic centre of Odesa — a world heritage site. In that shocking attack, one person was reportedly killed, and several others, including children, were injured. The attack also caused extensive damage to an important place of worship with religious and cultural significance to Ukraine and beyond. Sites such as the Transfiguration Cathedral are protected under the World Heritage Convention. Attacks against them are a violation of 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict. Sunday's attack followed several successive nights of deadly Russian missile and drone strikes targeting Odesa and other cities in southern Ukraine, including Mykolayiv and Chernomorsk, killing at least three people and injuring dozens of others. I reiterate the Secretary-General's strong condemnation of those attacks.

Unfortunately, Sunday's attack was not the first targeting Ukrainian culture and heritage. In fact, since 24 February 2022, UNESCO has verified damage to 274 cultural sites in Ukraine, including 117 religious sites. As the Secretary-General stated this weekend, we

are concerned about the threat that this war increasingly poses to Ukrainian culture and heritage, and we urge the Russian Federation to immediately cease attacks against cultural property protected by widely ratified international normative instruments.

As was underscored by Under-Secretary-General DiCarlo and Under-Secretary-General Griffiths in the Security Council this past Friday (see S/PV.9382), attacks against Ukrainian Black Sea port facilities risk having far-reaching impacts on global food security, in particular in developing countries. We have now seen disturbing reports of further Russian strikes against port infrastructure, including grain storage facilities in Reni and Izmail ports of the Danube River, a key route for shipment of Ukrainian grain, not far from Ukraine's borders with Moldova and Romania. Deliberately targeting infrastructure that facilitates the export of food to the rest of the world could be life-threatening to millions of people who need access to affordable food. These attacks, targeting Ukraine's grain-export facilities, like all attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure, are unacceptable and must stop immediately. I must emphasize that attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure may constitute a violation of international humanitarian law. The Secretary-General stated last week that he would not relent in his efforts to ensure that Ukrainian and Russian food and fertilizer are available on international markets, as part of his ongoing efforts to fight global hunger and ensure stable food prices for consumers everywhere.

The humanitarian response plan for 2023 is 29 per cent funded. We are grateful to donors for ensuring that the humanitarian community in Ukraine can continue to support Ukrainians whose lives have been so brutally disrupted by this war. But further funding is desperately needed to help all of those in need. In the first six months of 2023, some 7.3 million people received humanitarian assistance in Ukraine. The United Nations and its humanitarian partners remain committed to providing life-saving humanitarian assistance and safeguarding the lives and dignity of persons affected by the war.

In the wake of Russia's withdrawal from the Black Sea Grain Initiative, these latest attacks signal a calamitous turn for Ukrainians and the world. Port cities that allow for the export of grain, such as Odesa, Reni and Izmail are a lifeline for many. Now they are the latest casualties in this senseless, brutal war. As

long as the war continues, civilians continue to suffer. Ukrainians have suffered enough. The world has suffered enough. I reiterate the Secretary-General's call for just and sustainable peace, in line with the Charter of the United Nations, international law and the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly.

**The President:** I thank Mr. Khiari for his briefing.

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements.

**Mr. Spasse (Albania):** In a war that has lost its way, as part of a policy that has no meaning and as a terrible result of an erratic judgement since the start, Russia is targeting everything: innocent people, including children; residential areas; civilian infrastructure and cultural heritage. All these amount to war crimes. With its latest decision to kill the Black Sea Grain Initiative, Russia is again disrupting the food supply chain. As if that were not enough, it is intentionally targeting ports and grain storage facilities.

Russia's intention to target the Ukrainian national identity: its history, architecture, language and culture has never been a secret. It is fully in line with the Kremlin's policy, according to which Ukraine is not a nation and does not have the right to exist. As of 20 July 2023, UNESCO verified damage to 116 religious sites, 27 museums, 95 buildings of historical and artistic interest, 19 monuments, 12 libraries and one archive.

Last week, Russian missiles destroyed the Odesa Transfiguration Cathedral, built in 1794. It was not the first time this Cathedral suffered a vicious attack. The Kremlin had already attacked it under Stalin, in 1936. Eighty-seven years later, illegally acquired Iranian drones, used by the Russian army, would hit it with the same intention, to destroy it. The cathedral is one of several historical parts of central Odesa, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. I wonder what explanations Russia will come up with, as it never wastes an opportunity to pretend that Russia never attacks non-military targets.

Russia's intense drone and missile attacks against Odesa sought to damage the port infrastructure, including its grain and oil terminal. The bombardment inflicted serious damage to export facilities and destroyed at least 60,000 tons of grain.

First, Russia withdrew from the Black Sea Grain Initiative, playing with the anxiety of millions unsure of having food in the coming days and weeks; now it wants to destroy ports, export facilities and even silos full of

grain. By blocking and bombing Ukrainian seaports and preventing freedom of navigation in the Black Sea, Russia is not only preventing Ukraine from exporting its grain and agricultural products; it is condemning millions to food insecurity in many parts of the world, mostly in developing countries in the Global South, and is again trying to weaponize food.

We believe that it is time for this Council to act and work to address this issue. Attacks against civilian and critical infrastructure, including infrastructure related to grain exports, must come to an end. We also call on Russia to engage and remove its obstacles to the flow of grain exports through the Black Sea.

Let us not forget that deliberate attacks against critical infrastructure constitute war crimes. Perpetrators must be held to account. This continued deliberate destruction policy only reinforces the need to continue supporting Ukraine militarily, politically, and economically for its self-defence until proper conditions for peace are created — a peace fully in line with the Charter of the United Nations that respects the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine.

**Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield (United States of America):** I thank Assistant Secretary-General Khiari for his very sobering briefing.

Earlier this morning, Russia wasted the Council's time with another sham meeting (see S/PV.9385), and this one was cruelly ironic given that Russian forces destroyed Odesa's historic Transfiguration Cathedral just this week with a targeted Russian missile.

According to UNESCO, roughly 270 cultural sites have been damaged since President Putin launched his full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The loss of Ukrainian cultural heritage is staggering, and it is truly shameful. The attack on the historic Transfiguration Cathedral was just one of the many attacks that Russia has carried out in the Odesa region this week. The Kremlin's campaign of brutality has been relentless, and the Ukrainian people are paying a heavy price. After Russia's 19 July strike, Odesa's city Government reported that one person died and eight people were injured, and this past Saturday, Russia's attacks on Odesa killed one person and injured 22 others. My heart goes out to the loved ones of those killed and injured, to the communities that have been rocketed by Russian missiles and drones and to the children who have endured so much needless suffering and violence.

We all know Russia's attacks have global consequences. These are attacks on the world's food supply, on all who face hunger, malnutrition and famine, especially in parts of the world that can least afford it. Over the past week, the Russian military bombarded Odesa and other port cities. One attack destroyed 60,000 tons of grain, which, according to the World Food Programme, is enough to feed more than 270,000 people for a year. And on 23 and 24 July, Russia struck Ukrainian ports on the Danube, destroying grain-storage infrastructure at the port of Reni, just across the river from Romania. Russia's attacks on Chernomorsk, a port that facilitates nearly 70 per cent of Ukrainian wheat exports to developing countries, caused damage that experts say will take at least a year to repair.

Russia is hell-bent on preventing Ukrainian grain from reaching global markets, which is why it unilaterally suspended its participation in the Black Sea Grain Initiative. Even though Russia never fully implemented the Initiative, that arrangement helped get food to those in need. This arrangement helped to get food to those in need. And as the Secretary-General has said, it has been a beacon of hope. We encourage him to continue his efforts to find a path forward to resuming the initiative.

This initiative, brokered by the United Nations and Türkiye, lowered food prices for all. It has been critical to the World Food Programme's humanitarian work in such places as Afghanistan, Somalia and Yemen. Further, the Black Sea Grain Initiative disproportionately benefited the developing world. As Mr. Khiari said, it was a lifeline to many.

Russia will tell you otherwise. It will say that only Western countries benefited from this arrangement. But the facts are not on Russia's side, and the Russians know it, which is why they have chosen not to speak in the Chamber today, which is another temper tantrum for not getting their way.

According to the United Nations, nearly two thirds of the wheat exported through this arrangement went to developing countries. Global food prices spiked to near record highs after Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine. They rose again after the Russia suspended its participation in the Black Sea Grain Initiative. And this past Monday, wheat prices spiked in response to Russia's missile barrage against Odesa.

The world is paying the price for Russia's barbaric attacks, so let us not "both sides" this issue. Only one country — one country — is weaponizing food. Only one country is cynically using its grain as leverage in order to secure support from other countries, and only one country is responsible for the suspension of the Black Sea Grain Initiative.

We must all urge Russia to cease its attacks on global food security and extend, expand and fully implement the Black Sea Grain Initiative. Furthermore, we must continue to hold Russia accountable for its unprovoked illegal war against Ukraine.

The Security Council cannot be silent. It is time to act. This is a pressing matter of international peace and security. The Ukrainian people need peace. The world needs peace. It is far past time for President Putin to silence his guns, withdraw his troops and end his brutal aggression.

**Mrs. Sánchez Izquierdo** (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Assistant Secretary-General Khaled Khiari for his briefing.

We once again deplore the fact that, after suspending its participation in the Black Sea Grain Initiative, the Russian Federation has decided to follow up on that decision with ongoing attacks on cities and port facilities. We just held a Security Council meeting convened at Russia's request on issues involving religion (see S/PV.9385).

Having expressed our concern to members of the Council in January and May of this year (see S/PV.9243 and S/PV.9321, respectively), I must now add to that our alarm that the military aggression against Ukraine has resulted in the destruction of hundreds of religious sites, most of which were verified by UNESCO in the context of its preliminary assessment of the damage caused to cultural sites. In this regard, I must recall article 53 of the Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts, which prohibits acts of hostility directed against places of worship which constitute the cultural or spiritual heritage of peoples.

We therefore condemn the air strikes on Odesa that have resulted in the destruction of the historic Orthodox Cathedral of the Transfiguration, and recall that none of these acts should be left unaccounted for or without redress. We further condemn the continued attacks on any civilian critical infrastructure as well as threats of

attack against civilian vessels. We call for the cessation of attacks on production and export infrastructure and on major or alternative routes for the grain trade, first, because no provision of the United Nations Charter gives any country the right to invade or attack its neighbour, and, secondly, because such actions will continue to exacerbate global food insecurity.

Finally, we call on the Security Council to insist that the Russian Federation withdraw its occupying troops and end the aggression without further delay.

**Mr. De Rivière** (France) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank Mr. Khiari for his briefing.

For over a week, Russia has been raining missiles and drones down on the Odesa region. These murderous strikes have but one objective: to punish Ukraine for its resistance to Russian aggression, which has kept Odesa a free city.

Since ending the Black Sea Grain Initiative, Russia has launched a campaign of strikes on the port infrastructure of Odesa and Mykolayiv. Grain silos, warehouses and terminals are being shelled. At a time when over 700 million people worldwide are suffering from hunger, Russia has already destroyed over 60,000 tonnes of grain.

Russia is once again using blackmail as a tactic and hunger as a weapon. It is deliberately blocking exports from Ukrainian ports in order to drive up agricultural prices and boost the profits on its own exports. Because, in the end, it is the vulnerable countries that suffer from these actions, Russia compounds cynicism with irresponsibility. For its part, France will continue to provide aid to the populations affected by this food blackmail, through its deliveries of grain and fertilizers and through the European Union's solidarity corridors.

By targeting the historic centre of Odesa, listed as a UNESCO World Heritage site in January, Russia is seeking to destroy Ukrainian heritage and culture. The UNESCO listing obligates Russia to protect the city's exceptional value, both for Ukraine and for humanity. Striking both civilian infrastructure and protected property is tantamount to committing a double war crime. By damaging the Cathedral of the Transfiguration, Odesa's leading and largest Orthodox church, Russia has revealed its powerlessness, but it will not succeed in breaking up Ukraine by attacking its culture and destroying its heritage — quite the contrary.

Russia must stop this headlong rush. Together with UNESCO, France will continue to support the preservation and reconstruction of this Ukrainian heritage, which is also the universal heritage of humanity. To ensure that no crime goes unpunished, our country will continue to support Ukrainian justice and international criminal justice.

The Russian aggression against Ukraine is having catastrophic repercussions for the entire world. But it is also a dead end for Russia, for it is in the process of failing, and our support for Ukraine will not waver.

**Mr. Geng Shuang** (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Assistant Secretary-General Khiari for his briefing.

For some time now, the situation on the ground in Ukraine has been escalating, with expanding clashes and confrontations, rising civilian casualties and ever-greater damage to critical civilian infrastructure. There is no end in sight to this war, which China finds deeply concerning. I wish to make three points.

First, the priority at the moment is to alleviate civilian suffering and prevent the situation from escalating. China calls upon the two parties to the conflict to keep calm and exercise restraint, renounce the logic of military confrontation and prevent the war from getting out of control and beyond the point of no return.

Parties to the conflict must strictly comply with international humanitarian law and relevant international conventions and refrain from attacking civilians, civilian infrastructure and cultural heritage sites and irresponsibly using and transferring cluster munitions. It is especially important not to take any action that might endanger the Zaporizhzhya nuclear power plant. All efforts should be made to prevent nuclear disasters.

Secondly, alleviating the food crisis and containing any spillover effect is an imperative that concerns us all. The Black Sea Grain Initiative and the memorandum of understanding on facilitating exports of Russian food products and fertilizers are important in terms of stabilizing global food prices, maintaining global food security and, in particular, improving the food supply to the most vulnerable countries. At the moment, the window of opportunity to revive the package deal is still open. The international community should act with a heightened sense of urgency and encourage



the parties concerned to accelerate dialogue and consultation, to actively meet one other halfway and to address one another's concerns so as to resume food and fertilizer exports from both countries. China supports the Secretary-General in continuing to make efforts towards that end.

Thirdly, the fundamental solution is to promote peace talks for a political settlement. However difficult a situation might be, the door to diplomatic negotiation must never close. Efforts towards the cessation of hostilities must not stop. It is imperative to encourage and help the parties to step up engagement and search for solutions that accommodate each other's concerns in a manner consistent with regional realities. The international community should support the relevant diplomatic endeavours, create a positive atmosphere for peace talks, find common ground between the parties and help to establish conditions for a political settlement to the Ukraine issue.

On the issue of Ukraine, China consistently advocates that the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries should be protected, the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations respected, the legitimate security concerns of all parties taken on board and all efforts conducive to a peaceful settlement of the crisis supported. We stand ready to continue to work alongside the rest of the international community towards a political settlement of the Ukraine crisis.

**Mrs. Ngyema Ndong** (Gabon) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank Assistant Secretary-General Khiari for his briefing.

Since the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, civilian infrastructure has been regularly targeted by attacks causing extensive and sometimes irreversible damage, as well as much loss of life and countless injuries among the civilian population. The events of the past few weeks confirm that trend and provide evidence of an intensification of violence against civilians. The strategies used by the parties to the conflict to target residential areas with the aim of destabilizing the adversary constitute actions against international peace and security that deserve to be firmly condemned.

The trajectory of the conflict increases our concerns. Despite calls for de-escalation, the violence persists, and attacks and reprisals continue unabated. We call on the parties to respect their obligations under international humanitarian law and not to target essential infrastructure and civilian populations.

The already heavy toll should be a wake-up call to the warring parties to invest in a diplomatic and political solution.

At a time when the global food supply is in danger of being deprived of one third of the world's cereals, the bombing of the port of Odesa is likely to damage the existing structures used for transporting those cereals and raises fears of a true food crisis in several countries around the world. With that in mind, Gabon reiterates its appeal to the Secretary-General to continue to use his good offices to promote the opening of talks between all parties. For its part, the Security Council must support and coordinate the various diplomatic initiatives to promote a negotiated settlement.

Even if the prospects for peace seem remote and the sound of cannon fire persists, we remain hopeful that dialogue and peace will eventually triumph.

**Mr. França Danese** (Brazil): I thank Assistant Secretary-General Khiari for his briefing.

Brazil deeply regrets the attacks over the past few days on populated areas in Ukraine, namely in Odesa, resulting in the loss of yet more human life and significant damage to civilian infrastructure and cultural and historical Ukrainian heritage, such as the Transfiguration Cathedral. We note with concern the destruction inflicted on port facilities and transportation infrastructure.

We once again call on all parties to respect their obligations under international humanitarian law, the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and its two Protocols, the 1972 Convention for the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, and resolution 2347 (2017), adopted by the Council in March 2017.

Since the start of the conflict, UNESCO has recorded damage to 270 cultural sites in Ukraine, including 116 places of worship. Brazil welcomes the expected deployment of a mission of the agency to Odesa in the next few days to ascertain the extent of the destruction resulting from the recent attacks.

Once again, we stress the urgent need for a peaceful solution to the conflict, fully respecting Ukraine's sovereignty and territory integrity, as well as the security concerns of the parties involved. The continuation of hostilities will result in more fatalities, in particular of the innocent and more vulnerable, and jeopardize the future of generations, given the extent of the destruction

of civilian infrastructure and the historical and cultural heritage of Ukraine. Reconstruction will also require considerable human and material resources and will take years.

**Mr. Fernandes** (Mozambique): Mozambique thanks Assistant Secretary-General Khaled Khiari for his important insights.

It is our considered view that attacks on bridges, critical port facilities and grain export infrastructure in the Black Sea signal a significant escalation of the war. Those attacks could lead to a full-fledged commerce war and the unintended expansion of the conflict into international waters. We fear that neutral third nations' ships passing through those crucial naval routes might be targeted, increasing the risk of collateral damage and retaliatory actions.

Mozambique urges all parties to fully comply with their obligations under international law, including the requirement to abide by the principles of distinction, proportionality, precaution and the protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure. In that connection, we strongly urge maximal restraint and remind all parties of their obligations under international law.

As the conflict intensifies and expands, the humanitarian consequences worsen. A refugee crisis looms over the region. In addition, as the chances of reviving the Black Sea Grain Initiative diminish, the global food shortage worsens and diplomatic options to de-escalate the conflict decrease. As we have stated in previous consultations, Mozambique reiterates its call for an immediate halt to hostilities and the resumption of direct negotiation between the parties. We also emphasize the importance of considering various peace initiatives, including those recently proposed by some African countries, in resolving the conflict. We consider the matter to be of the utmost urgency and that it must be addressed in complete accordance with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

**Ms. Oppong-Ntiri** (Ghana): I wish to thank Assistant Secretary-General Khiari for his briefing.

Today alone, the Council has convened two meetings on the situation in Ukraine. That regrettably demonstrates the divergent interests in the ongoing conflict and the evolving complications that arise with the continuation of the war. We once again call on the Council and the wider international community to put aside all differences and make every effort to help the parties to stop the unjustified war.

The recent escalation in violence by the Russian Federation against the port city of Odesa has raised concerns regarding the safety of the civilian population. We know that targeting civilians and civilian infrastructure is morally unacceptable and constitutes a violation of international humanitarian law and human rights law. We therefore join UNESCO in condemning the increased attacks on a number of cultural sites, including the historic city centre of Odesa, a world heritage property. We want to point to resolution 2347 (2017), which condemns any unlawful destruction of cultural heritage during armed conflict, and note that such actions may constitute war crimes. We also recall the obligation of States to respect the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and the 1977 Protocols Additional to the Geneva Conventions.

We emphasize the need for the parties to heed the calls for an immediate cessation of hostilities. We believe that further militarization of the conflict, fuelled by the manifest combative choices of the parties, would not change the dynamics of the conflict on the ground. In our view, it is futile to use force in contemporary relations between States.

While noting the breaches of international law and the Charter of the United Nations, we are also disturbed about the negative effect of the conflict on the global humanitarian situation. The war's impact on world food prices is aggravating socioeconomic conditions in many countries that were already reeling from the adverse effects of the coronavirus disease pandemic. We therefore reiterate our call to the Russian Federation to immediately cease its attacks on cultural property that is protected by widely ratified international normative instruments, and once again call for both the Russian Federation and Ukraine to cease their hostilities. Dialogue is the path we must choose, and dialogue is the choice we must support.

**Mrs. Shino** (Japan): I thank Assistant Secretary-General Khiari for his briefing.

After Russia's termination of the Black Sea Grain Initiative last week, its aggression against Ukraine has continued and in some cases intensified. Russia has used heavy weaponry to target civilian infrastructure, including grain stores in Odesa, and has also launched drone attacks on grain-storage facilities in Reni, which is located approximately 200 metres from Romania, across the Danube. Moreover, it has unjustly marked all

vessels bound for Ukrainian ports as potential carriers of military cargo, which means that Ukrainian grain facilities and civilian shipping across the Black Sea may also be targeted. It is reported that Russia has placed more sea mines near Ukrainian ports.

Russia's reprehensible actions clearly demonstrate its relentless strategy of using global food supplies as a weapon, with severe consequences for vulnerable people all over the world. Since Russia left the Black Sea Grain Initiative, reports say that grain prices have risen rapidly. The Council must do everything it can to alleviate the situation as soon as possible. Japan once again condemns Russia's actions, which are holding the rest of the world hostage while it blames others for the crises it has created by its aggression. We would also like to remind the Council that the destruction of civilian infrastructure may constitute a violation of international humanitarian law.

The aggression's grievous impact on civilians has been compounded by Russia's recent missile strike on Odesa, which resulted in civilian casualties and damaged a number of significant cultural sites that are protected under the World Heritage Convention, including the Cathedral of the Transfiguration. According to UNESCO, as many as 270 cultural sites in Ukraine have been damaged since Russia's hostilities began, including religious sites, museums, historically significant buildings, monuments, libraries and more. Cultural heritage embodies the unique identity and history not just of a nation but of humankind at large. Attacking and damaging cultural heritage is therefore equivalent to attacking peoples' distinctive identities. Japan affirms that any harm to cultural heritage is utterly unacceptable and strongly urges all parties involved to honour all the pertinent international instruments, including resolution 2347 (2017) and the UNESCO 1954 Hague Convention, together with its two Protocols.

We want to express our gratitude to UNESCO for its unwavering support to the Ukrainian authorities in safeguarding Ukraine's cultural heritage. Japan has contributed more than \$4.5 million to UNESCO to assist it in its activities in Ukraine, such as enabling satellite monitoring of priority areas and repairs to damaged sites. Our commitment to supporting Ukraine in protecting and preserving its cultural heritage and properties remains steadfast.

Let us be unequivocal. The suffering we are seeing in Ukraine and around the world is the result of Russia's unprovoked aggression. Russia must stop it and withdraw its troops and military equipment from the entire internationally recognized territory of Ukraine immediately, completely and unconditionally.

**Mr. Abushabab** (United Arab Emirates): I thank Assistant Secretary-General Khiari for his briefing.

The destruction and damage to Odesa are a further reminder of the material and intangible costs of the war for civilians, civilian objects and cultural heritage. Since February 2022, there have been nearly 25,000 civilian casualties recorded in Ukraine, including more than 9,000 killed and close to 16,000 injured. Despite the exhortations of the international community, the destruction of critical civilian infrastructure in Ukraine continues, with estimates of damage in the billions of dollars. And as mentioned earlier, UNESCO has verified damage to 270 cultural sites in Ukraine since the beginning of the war.

The toll wrought by war is heavy, and the road to reconstruction and healing will be long and arduous. As long as the war continues, the level of destruction will only increase. The human price is already too high, but it will be even higher tomorrow and the day after tomorrow. That reality in the ongoing war is causing untold suffering to civilians and leaving wounds that will not easily heal. As we noted earlier today (see S/PV.9385), cultural heritage, particularly in places of cultural exchange, represents a prism through which we can view our common humanity. Its damage and destruction are a loss to all of us.

We once again reiterate our call on the parties to abide by their obligations under international humanitarian law to ensure the protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure. Civilian objects must never be targets of attack. We reiterate today that we must make every possible effort to bring the war to a just, lasting peace that is in line with the Charter of the United Nations and respects Ukraine's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity.

**Mr. Hauri** (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): I thank Assistant Secretary-General Khaled Khiari for his briefing.

Since Russia's decision last week not to extend the Black Sea Grain Initiative, the population of Odesa has been enduring nights that no one should have to live through. Switzerland is appalled by the considerable



increase in the number of Russian attacks on the Black Sea coast, which have resulted in civilian casualties and the destruction of homes, port infrastructure and grain silos. On Sunday, several cultural sites, including, as we have heard, the Orthodox Cathedral of the Transfiguration, were damaged in Odesa's city centre, a key area that is protected under the World Heritage Convention, as a result of another Russian strike. Switzerland condemns the recent spate of attacks as part of Russia's military aggression against Ukraine. I would like to make three observations in that regard.

First, over the past 10 days we have been witnessing an increase in the number of direct attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure. We recall that indiscriminate or disproportionate attacks are prohibited under international humanitarian law and must immediately stop. That also applies to humanitarian infrastructure, including personnel and medical supplies, which also benefit from special protection. In that context, Switzerland condemns the damage recently caused during a Russian artillery attack on a cultural centre that had served as a humanitarian facility in Chasiv Yar, in the Donetsk region.

Secondly, attacks on areas protected by the World Heritage Convention represent a serious threat to Ukraine's cultural heritage. UNESCO has reported damage to 270 cultural sites since February 2022. Switzerland shares the concerns the Secretary-General and UNESCO that Russian military aggression represents a growing threat to Ukrainian culture. It is not just walls that are collapsing, it is the country's cultural heritage that is under threat. We call for strict compliance with the obligations of international law concerning the protection of cultural property, including the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict. We also recall that the intentional destruction of cultural property can constitute a war crime, as provided for in the Rome Statute and as reiterated by the Council in resolution 2347 (2017).

Thirdly, Russia's decision not to extend the Black Sea Grain Initiative and its attacks on Ukrainian port cities have repercussions beyond Ukraine. We reiterate our deep concern about the potentially disastrous consequences for global food security, and we call on Russia to reverse its decision. Attacks on port facilities, including on the stretch of the Danube River near the Romanian border, as well as threats to civilian navigation, represent a dangerous possibility of escalation. We urge for restraint and express our support for the efforts of

the Secretary-General and other actors, including the Government of Türkiye, to facilitate free access to world food and fertilizer markets.

While attacks continue in the southern part of Ukraine, the population is committed to rebuilding its city, country and future. We hope that such efforts will enable the city of Odesa to rise from the ashes, as the Transfiguration Cathedral has done in the past. Switzerland reaffirms its solidarity with and support for Ukraine in its pursuit to rebuild the country.

**Mr. Camilleri (Malta):** I thank Assistant Secretary-General Khiari for his remarks.

Only last week, the Russian Federation decided to withdraw from the Black Sea Grain Initiative. The decision was made with full knowledge of the fact that it seriously risks undoing everything that has been achieved in the past year. It was made intentionally, while knowing that it could exacerbate an already exceptionally difficult food security situation. Since then, the Russian Federation has repeatedly attacked Ukraine's port of Odesa, a key hub for exporting grain, and has deliberately targeted port infrastructure and food storage facilities. The collateral repercussions of those attacks have global ramifications and stand to adversely affect millions of people, particularly in developing countries. As the Council, we must monitor the situation closely and consider exploring new options, if needed, to ensure that the food supply continues to flow as smoothly as possible, despite that decision. Administrative, cultural, religious and residential buildings have also been subject to a barrage of strikes, resulting in a number of civilian deaths.

Russia's destruction of religious sites and places of worship in Ukraine is appalling. Ukraine's Institute for Religious Freedom and UNESCO have catalogued hundreds of religious sites that have been destroyed, damaged or looted as a result of Russia's invasion. To those statistics, we must also add Sunday's attack against Odesa's Transfiguration Cathedral, located in the heart of Odesa's UNESCO World Heritage-listed historic centre. Such actions may constitute war crimes. They are also a direct attack against Ukraine's identity and further compound the immense suffering of the Ukrainian population. They illustrate once again Russia's complete disregard for the Charter of the United Nations, international law and human life itself. We remain firm in our position that the perpetrators must be held accountable for their actions.

In that connection, last week, we welcomed the establishment of the International Centre for the Prosecution of the Crime of Aggression against Ukraine, and the establishment of the register of damage caused by the Russian Federation's aggression. They are two important steps towards achieving accountability and ensuring the right to reparations for the citizens of Ukraine, the legal entities of Ukraine and the State of Ukraine. Let us remember all the damage and devastation that Russia's war of aggression has caused in Ukraine. The deplorable and unacceptable attacks that we have focused on today are yet another worrisome development in a long series of grave and disturbing events directly resulting from Russia's senseless, unjustified and unprovoked war. We must never forget that the attacks against civilians and objects that are vital to the survival of the civilian population are prohibited under international humanitarian law. Equally, we strongly urge Russia to facilitate the tracing of Ukrainian children and ensure family reunifications.

Finally, we also stress that the liberation of Ukraine and the full restoration of its sovereignty and territorial integrity, within its internationally recognized borders, is the only way in which we can achieve a just and lasting peace. In achieving that, we will also be restoring respect for the Charter.

**The President:** I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of the United Kingdom.

I would like to start by joining others in thanking Assistant Secretary-General Khiari for his informative briefing.

Since it terminated the Black Sea Grain Initiative last week, Russia has unleashed a new barrage of strikes on Ukraine's towns and cities. On Sunday, Russia attacked Odesa's UNESCO-listed city centre, injuring dozens, including four children. Among the buildings badly damaged, as we have heard, was the Transfiguration Cathedral — Odesa's largest Orthodox church. The Transfiguration Cathedral has been bombed twice, in 1936 on Stalin's orders and now by Putin's order. That act of cultural and religious vandalism struck at the heart of the civilian community and was condemned by the Director-General of UNESCO. Russia's aggression against Ukraine has left a wide trail of destruction across the country. UNESCO has verified damage to more than 270 cultural or historic sites, including libraries, churches, theatres, museums and memorials. Thousands of artworks and other artefacts have been stolen.

Russia is imposing its laws and education systems in Ukraine, restricting Ukrainian media and indigenous languages and trying to indoctrinate Ukrainian children through forced transfers to Russia. Russia is seeking to destroy Ukraine's history, identity and cultural heritage. With those strikes, Russia is also harming the world's hungriest. By targeting Ukraine's Black Sea and Danube ports, Russia is trying to damage Ukraine's ability to export food. It has already destroyed tens of thousands of tons of food and reduced Ukraine's ability to store its upcoming harvest, pushing up global food prices.

We stand with the people of Ukraine, as they rebuild after Russia's attacks, and we fully support the United Nations continued efforts to bring food onto global markets. Russia is not even trying to hide the cynicism and cruelty of its illegal war. It is trying to bring Ukraine to its knees and to wear down the international community. But Ukraine will not be subjugated, and we will not relent in our support for Ukraine, including in the Security Council.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I give the floor to the representative of Ukraine.

**Mr. Kyslytsya (Ukraine):** I recognize the silent, residual presence of Putin's regime in the permanent seat of the Soviet Union.

I would like to thank the United Kingdom presidency for organizing this meeting of the Security Council at the request of the delegation of Ukraine.

Last Friday we informed the Security Council of Russia's deliberate attacks in the Odesa region immediately after Russia's withdrawal from the Black Sea Grain Initiative. Since that time, Russia has escalated its missile terror against Odesa. On 23 July, Russia carried out its fifth airstrike in a row, shelling the city centre of Odesa with 19 missiles of different types, including anti-ship missiles. We reiterate that using anti-ship missiles against ground targets effectively turns them into low-precision weapons of indiscriminate effect. As a result, the historic centre of Odesa, a designated World Heritage site, sustained heavy damage. The barrage of Russian missiles hit 29 historic and cultural landmarks, including museums and religious and residential buildings. As follows from the statement made by UNESCO:

“Taking place just two weeks after the strike that destroyed a historic building in Lviv, this attack is the second to date in an area protected under the World Heritage Convention, in violation of the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict. This strike also coincided with the destruction of the Culture Centre of Folk Art and Art Education in the city of Mykolaiv, a hundred kilometres away.”

A preliminary assessment in Odesa has revealed damage to several museums inside the buffer zone of World Heritage property, including the Odesa Archaeological Museum, the Odesa Maritime Museum and the Odesa Literature Museum. They had all been marked by UNESCO and local authorities with the Blue Shield, the distinctive emblem of the 1954 Hague Convention. In total, nearly 50 buildings were damaged or destroyed following the attack, including four schools, five kindergartens and two extracurricular educational institutions. The building of the Greek Consulate was also damaged, and it is already the second consular office in Odesa to be hit by Russian terror. Just last week, following another such attack, the Chinese Consulate was damaged.

What is most terrible is that each Russian attack increases the number of fatalities among the civilian population. The last strike on Odesa, on the night of 23 July, killed one civilian and wounded 22 people. We appreciate the clear message from the Secretary-General, who strongly condemned the Russian Federation’s missile attack on Odesa. The Secretary-General’s concerns about the increasing threat to Ukrainian culture and heritage are completely justified, as both are considered by the Russian aggressor to be primary targets in their attempts to eliminate the Ukrainian identity.

Ukrainian grain and other foodstuffs remain another target that Russia is trying to eliminate, not caring at all about the severe implications for global food security. To that end, the aggressor continues its attacks against port infrastructure and grain storage facilities in Ukraine’s south. On 24 July, Russia launched drones of Iranian origin to attack Reni, a port city on the Danube River in the Odesa region. Three storage facilities full of grain were destroyed. Those aggressive actions merit a strong response; otherwise, Russia will be encouraged to further undermine the security situation in the Black Sea by attacking civilian vessels and laying additional mines in the waters

adjacent to the Ukrainian coastline. There are grounds to believe that Russia is preparing such incidents for the purposes of blaming Ukraine and discouraging vessels from other countries from entering Ukrainian waters and using Ukrainian ports.

We reiterate that the Russian blockade of Ukrainian ports, the destruction of their infrastructure, the obstruction of grain exports and the intimidation of foreign merchant vessels should be considered an attack on the freedom of navigation. Those actions also aim at eliminating a market competitor, thereby deliberately raising world food prices and making a profit at the expense of the millions of people around the world who will suffer.

Odesa is not the only place where the Russian army is increasing the scale of destruction and casualties, in particular among children. On 24 July, Russia deliberately shelled with multiple rocket launchers the city of Kostiantynivka in the Donetsk region. Three people, including two children, were killed; six others, including four children, were wounded. Russian forces insidiously and cruelly attacked the city in the evening, targeting a local pond where families with children were resting. The Ukrainian children who have been trapped in the occupied territories of Ukraine are now subject to anti-Ukrainian indoctrination and propaganda aimed at instilling hatred towards Ukraine, its language, culture and history. To that end, the Russian occupation Administration sent children to the occupied Crimea, the Russian Federation and Belarus for so-called vacation and recreation. There is a significant increase in the number of organized trips of groups of children, not only to the territorially closer Crimea and the Krasnodar region but also to Russia’s far east. There are plans to take at least 30,000 children away from the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine. The main goal of such “recreation” for Ukrainian children is claimed to be “to ensure the sociocultural integration of children into Russian society”, which effectively means aggressive brainwashing. According to available information, since the beginning of the invasion, more than 3,000 Ukrainian children have been transported to Belarus from the temporarily occupied Donetsk and Luhansk regions under the guise of so-called health rehabilitation.

Yesterday the State Duma of the Russian Federation adopted a law on increasing the age of conscription. While introducing the draft, the Chair of the Duma Defence Committee, Kartapolov, a former high-ranking

Russian Army general, openly said that “this law has been written for a big war, for general mobilization, and now this big war is already being felt”. Instead of seeking peace, they continue to dream of a big war in which Ukraine would not be the sole target. Threats from Putin’s ally Lukashenko about the intentions of the Wagner Group “to go west to Warsaw, to Rzeszow” serve as another example of their unwillingness to proceed towards de-escalation.

Allow me to also reiterate that, unlike Russia, which seeks only greater war, Ukraine has proposed the peace formula, the fundamental principles of which align with the resolution on principles of the Charter of the United Nations underlying a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in Ukraine (General Assembly resolution ES-11/6), supported by 141 votes in the General Assembly (see A/ES-11/PV.19). It includes, among other things, food security, which the Russian Federation is so desperately trying to undermine through its devastating armed attacks and sea blockades against my country. The peace formula introduced by

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in November 2022 stands today as the only guide pointing the way towards restoring a just and lasting peace and stability in the region and a world order based on the rule of law. We appeal to Member States to join the initiative and to take part in the implementation of the specific points of the formula.

The only way to avoid further deterioration and expansion of the scope of war is to maintain the solidarity and unity of purpose towards the need to restore respect for the principles of the Charter of the United Nations; to ensure the military defeat of Russia in Ukraine and accountability for the crime of aggression, war crimes and crimes against humanity; and to deprive Russia of the capabilities to wage wars and inflict harm on its neighbours and people around the world.

To conclude, I join the demands of the previous speakers who affirmed that the Council must — I repeat — must act.

*The meeting rose at 12.40 p.m.*