

**Address by Ukrainian World Congress President Eugene Czolij
at a Side Event of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly
entitled “Violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms in Crimea”
on 2 July 2016 in Tbilisi, Georgia**

Distinguished Guests:
Ladies and Gentlemen:

As President of the Ukrainian World Congress, I welcome you to today’s Side Event titled “*Violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms in Crimea*” that has been organized jointly by the Permanent Delegation of Ukraine to the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and the Ukrainian World Congress.

I express my sincerest condolences to the Ambassador of Turkey for all the victims of the recent terrorist attack in Istanbul.

The OSCE’s role as a promoter of human rights and fundamental freedoms has taken on even greater significance today as the world has witnessed, in a time of peace, another invasion and illegal occupation by a foreign aggressor of a sovereign country, and the ensuing abuses and gross violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms of innocent civilians.

The international community condemned this Russian military action, imposed sanctions, and rightfully continues to recognize Crimea as being part of Ukraine.

But all of these reactions have proved insufficient as the Russian Federation compounded its blatant violation of the international order and Ukraine’s territorial integrity by fully isolating Crimea and increasingly violating the civic, religious, political, and human rights of the residents of Crimea, as documented by numerous organizations including the UN, the OSCE, Human Rights Watch and Freedom House.

These violations include discriminatory policies against Crimea’s Ukrainians and Tatars, the infringement of property rights, and the intimidation of independent voices through selective use of the law and physical force.

Activists and journalists who have spoken against the illegal occupation and in defense of human rights have been imprisoned, subjected to torture, intimidated into emigration, had their property confiscated and some have gone missing.

One of the more prominent cases against opponents of Russian actions in Crimea involves Ukrainian filmmaker Oleh Sentsov who was arrested in May 2014, subjected to a politically motivated trial on trumped up charges, and remains imprisoned today in the Russian Federation after being sentenced to 20 years in prison.

Holding a Ukrainian passport as a Crimean resident is tantamount to treason. Crimean residents who hold Ukrainian passports are *de facto* disenfranchised from exercising their political and civic rights. They are blocked from accessing social services, including public healthcare, owning property, or finding legal employment.

The Crimean Tatars have endured especially harsh treatment since the illegal occupation by the Russian Federation. For their refusal to recognize the authority of the *de facto* government, Tatar leaders have been exiled or banned from public life, their commemoration of Stalin's deportation of Crimean Tatars prohibited, and their media muzzled. Most recently, the activities of the Tatar Mejlis, the highest executive-representative body of the Crimean Tatars, was banned under the Russian Law on Combating Extremist Activity. The Chairman of the Tatar Mejlis and Member of the Parliament of Ukraine Refat Chubarov will elaborate on this topic.

The publication titled *The Peninsula of Fear: Chronicle of Occupation and Violation of Human Rights in Crimea* produced jointly by five Ukrainian human rights organizations and being presented here today by Oleksandra Romantsova of the Centre for Civil Liberties, provides detailed accounts of the countless examples of persecution of Crimea's residents.

It is important to note that most of the reports regarding the current situation in Crimea are compiled via third parties. Access to Crimea for the OSCE, other human rights monitoring organizations and the media continues to be severely impeded.

Europe and Central Asia Director for Human Rights Watch, Hugh Williamson, confirmed that:

Crimea's isolation has made it very difficult to conduct comprehensive human rights monitoring there. [...] But serious human rights abuses in Crimea should not slip to the bottom of the international agenda.

Russian authorities have also expelled the Crimean Human Rights Field Mission, the only human rights group that was working on the peninsula and publishing monthly reports. Its ouster came after it appeared on the Russian Parliament's preliminary "*patriotic stop list*" of so-called "*undesirable organizations*" in June of 2015.

As Western media shifted its attention first to the war in Eastern Ukraine, and later to other world issues, these widespread abuses, while steadily escalating, continue to be under-reported and the Russian Federation is successfully cutting off Crimea from not only Ukraine, but the rest of the world by creating a so-called "*information ghetto*" on the peninsula. Steps were quickly taken to replace Ukrainian Internet service providers on the peninsula and block websites, access to independent media has been virtually eliminated with closures, censorship and the introduction of prepackaged news stories, and major Ukrainian mobile phone services have been disconnected. Pro-Russian media currently provides the only source of information for the residents of Crimea.

In the words of the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Ukrainian Parliament, Valeriya Lutkovskaya, Crimea has turned into a "*peninsula of fear*." The question is "*why?*" Why is the Russian Federation impeding access for the international community to Crimea and its residents? What does it not want the residents of Crimea to reveal to the outside world?

The Russian Federation is obviously not out to protect Russian-speakers or native Russians in Crimea as it claims to do. The Russian Federation is silencing any opposition to its presence in Crimea and is creating a new militarized zone.

Crimea is a very strategic location from which the Russian Federation can further pursue its imperialist ambitions.

In a new military doctrine announced at the end of 2014, the Russian Federation elevated Crimea into one of its three main geopolitical priorities. Alongside the Arctic and the Russian exclave of Kaliningrad,

Moscow has designated the militarization of Crimea as a key national priority in order to exert influence beyond the borders of the Russian Federation.

This end goal of the Russian Federation must remain at the forefront of all analysis and deliberations on future action with respect to Crimea.

It is critical that Crimea not be forgotten and for the international community to engage in serious discussion on practical ways to return Crimea to the *de facto* authority of Ukraine. This will be the only guarantee that fundamental freedoms and basic human rights of Crimean residents will once again be respected.

As the Russian Federation continues to fortify its control over information and pursue the militarization of Crimea, the local population will continue to be more and more isolated, and extremely vulnerable.

Respect for fundamental freedoms and human rights forms a key part of the OSCE's comprehensive security concept, with the rule of law being the cornerstone of the OSCE's human rights and democratization activities.

All of the 57 OSCE participating states, including the Russian Federation, have an obligation to uphold the principles of the OSCE and as such, any behavior that contravenes the explicit mandate of the OSCE, especially the behavior of an aggressor state, should never be tolerated or tacitly excused.

A recent dichotomy of perceptions of the Russian Federation is very troubling. Whereas the majority of the international community treats the Russian Federation as an aggressor state, there are international institutions that mistakenly believe that the Russian Federation espouses democratic values and has a vital role to play in addressing global issues. The latter is reminiscent of the policies of appeasement that led to the Second World War.

The UWC acknowledges the critical role of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly in cementing unity among its participating states around democratic values. This unity, imperative for global peace and security, can only be based on common values and interests, elements that are severely lacking in the Russian Federation that blatantly violates all international norms with respect to the territorial integrity of sovereign states, grossly abuses human rights and freedoms of individuals, and with its aggressive actions threatens international peace and stability.

Therefore, the Ukrainian World Congress:

- Urges the OSCE to help develop, via the Geneva plus format, a persistent and coordinated approach to the de-occupation of Crimea by the Russian Federation and for the OSCE to act as an observer;
- Appeals to the OSCE to take concrete action to establish a permanent observer mission in Crimea to directly obtain first-hand information, pressure the *de facto* authorities in Crimea to lessen their human rights abuses and restore contact for the Crimean population to the outside world.
- Encourages the OSCE to make every attempt to monitor court proceedings of politically motivated trials on the Crimean Peninsula, as well as in the Russian Federation where many of the political prisoners are forcibly transported to stand trial.
- Appeals to the OSCE to promote economic sanctions against the Russian Federation until it de-occupies Crimea and fully complies with the Minsk Agreements

On a final note, the Ukrainian World Congress also urges the OSCE to deploy a police mission to Eastern Ukraine to assist in restoring order for the local population and to enhance respect for the Minsk Agreements by the Russian Federation.

I thank you for your attention and look forward to our further discussion.