

Speech: “Russian words are not the same as Russian deeds.”

Thank you Mr President – and let me take this opportunity to welcome you in open session to your role as President of the Security Council for the month of February. I commend you for the start that you have made and I support your proposal for a Presidential statement on this important issue.

As our briefers have made clear, we begin your Presidency, sadly, in troubling times for Eastern Ukraine.

The worrying upsurge in fighting in that part of your country should concern us all. It is claiming yet more lives, both civilian and military. It is aggravating the suffering of those living there, forcing more to flee their homes. There is no end in sight.

In cities like Avdiivka, people talk of an endless salvo of artillery and rockets. They talk of failing electricity and falling temperatures, of burying loved ones in the snow.

These events have not come out of the blue, they are not new. This Council knows all too well the root causes of this violence and instability.

This is what happens when Russia disregards Ukraine’s sovereign right to choose its own destiny. This is what happens when Russia undermines Ukraine’s territorial integrity by illegally annexing Crimea. This is what happens when Russian military personnel stand side by side with separatists that they have equipped, armed and trained.

And this is a reality that the Security Council cannot, must not accept. We need urgent action to bring an end to this upsurge in violence before it spirals out of control.

I want to pay tribute to the efforts of the OSCE and the Joint Centre for Control and Coordination to bring about a truce to allow crucial repairs. These will help restore vital utilities and allow for the evacuation of civilians. I urge all parties to support these efforts and facilitate access to the area for humanitarian actors.

But such actions are just a band-aid on a bullet wound. For any fragile, short-term truce to become a comprehensive and sustained ceasefire, all parties must show restraint. This means, in particular, ending the extensive use of high calibre, indiscriminate weapons such as GRAD rocket systems. The use of these weapons from, and against, civilian areas is not only in disregard of the Minsk agreement, it is also an abhorrent rejection of the norms of conflict. They must be withdrawn from the line of contact as stipulated in the Minsk agreement.

We also need to tackle the underlying causes of the fighting. It is clear that any solution to the Ukraine crisis must be political not military, as we

all recognised in Security Council Resolution 2202. The Minsk agreements are the only meaningful path to long-term peace in Ukraine.

So let us urge all sides to recommit to meeting their full obligations under Minsk. We support the continued efforts of France and Germany within the Normandy format towards securing full implementation and we are extremely grateful for the enormous investment that they have made in the process to date.

Mr President, let me close with this final thought.

We frequently hear from the Russian Government, as we did today, that all the problems in eastern Ukraine are the consequence of actions by the Ukrainian Government. This is simply not the case. It is an inversion of reality. The responsibility of the inception and continuation of the conflict in eastern Ukraine lies squarely with Russia and the separatists it supports.

As the British Prime Minister made clear in Washington last week, the United Kingdom will continue to stand by Ukraine in full support of its sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The international community, most recently through the UN General Assembly's resolution on Crimea in December, sent the same clear message to Russia. And earlier this week, this whole Security Council, including Russia, expressed the very same thing in an agreed statement – that we support Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

But, Mr President, Russian words are not the same as Russian deeds.

We need to see Russia comply with its Minsk commitments. We need to see Russia stop equipping and arming the separatists, and instead use its influence to make sure the separatists meet their Minsk obligations.

And we need to see Russia withdrawing its forces from all of Ukraine. This includes Crimea – the illegal annexation of which we do not and will not recognise. Sanctions against Russia cannot be lifted until this happens.

It's for the people of Ukraine to decide their country's future. Ukraine must be allowed to make its own sovereign decisions.

Thank you.