



Statement and right of reply by Permanent Representative Vassily Nebenzia at UNSC briefing on the humanitarian situation in Ukraine

7 March 2022

Mme.President,

We thank Martin Griffiths for his assessments. We welcome the new Executive Director of UNICEF, Ms.Catherine Russell, to this meeting and thank her for the briefing. Over the course of 8 years, we have seen UNICEF give unbiased reaction to the conflict in Donbas. The Fund did not turn a blind eye to the bombings of Donetsk and Lugansk and related problems of children – from humanitarian to psychological. We hope this unbiased approach will continue. We believe UNICEF assessments must base on truthful and verified facts.

We welcome that the humanitarian plan reflects the fact of dangerous spread of small arms and light weapons in Ukraine, most of which ends up in the hands of radical elements, including those who have been purposefully released from prisons following a decree issued by President Zelensky. Consequences of this reckless step are already on hand. The number of victims who got killed by radicals is growing daily, first of all in Kiev. We have long been calling to pay attention to this.

We call on our colleagues in the Council to stick to the humanitarian aspects of the situation in Ukraine. We have had opportunities to give our political assessments to those events. It is clear, that our assessments differ from yours, and that you are still full of determination to cast a shadow over the goals and pace of our special military operation in Ukraine, while proceeding from views of Ukrainian politicians and rather dubious or clearly false materials from social media. We agree with Permanent Representative of Albania that there is an information war in the world, or rather a misinformation war. What he forgot to mention is that in the free Western world, Russian information resources get shut off and any information that runs counter to your narrative and your fakes cannot be aired.

The Permanent Representative of the United States accused us of not complying with our obligations to create safe humanitarian corridors. Let's sort this out.

Let me underscore that a threat to civilians in Ukraine is posed not by Russian military who do not target civil infrastructure, but by Ukrainian radicals and neo-Nazis who hold population of several cities as hostages. Using civilians as a human shield, they do not let them exit cities even despite humanitarian corridors and ceasefires arranged by the Russian forces. This can be proven by numerous examples.

On 4 March, Russian Defense Ministry and Ukraine's Deputy Prime Minister I.Vereshchuk negotiated parameters of humanitarian corridors from Mariupol to Zaporozhye and from Volnovakh to Denepetrovsk. They should have opened at 10 am on 5 March. As requested by Kiev, representatives of

the ICRC were invited to the areas of humanitarian passages. The Russian side was ready to render comprehensive assistance to maintain security during the evacuation. We informed the UN Secretariat about that in due course.

However the Ukrainian radicals who were in Mariupol violated this agreement. As we take it from an intercepted communication of two commanders of the Azov battalion, the radicals in Volnovakh received an order to kneecap those heading towards humanitarian corridors. Those who dared to leave Mariupol at their own peril and risk, were shot by Ukrainian Nazis at checkpoints when trying to exit the city. Again, there is plenty of video evidence proving this.

By our records, 200 thousand civilians are trapped in Mariupol alone and held at gunpoint by the Azov battalion. The humanitarian situation in cities deteriorates rapidly. As for humanitarians who are ready to help, they cannot get in there and prevent the unfolding disaster. People in other regions of Ukraine that have been blocked by nationalist battalions find themselves in the same desperate situation.

Ukrainian radicals show their true face more distinctly by the day. Locals reports that Ukraine's Armed Forces kicked out personnel of natal hospital #1 of the city of Mariupol and set up a firing site within the facility. Besides, they fully destroyed one of the city's kindergartens.

In addition to this, the Ukrainian side strongly refuses to cooperate with regard to evacuation of civilians from Kharkov and Sumy.

Taking into account the deplorable humanitarian situation and its steep deterioration in Kiev, Kharkov, Sumy, and Mariupol, and also following a personal request of President of France E.Macron to President of Russia V.Putin, Russian Armed Forces announced that at 10.00 am on 7 March 2022, a ceasefire would start and humanitarian corridors from Kiev, Mariupol, and Sumy would open to facilitate exit both to the territory of Russia (for those who would like to use this logistically reliable route), and to the territory of Ukraine.

Yesterday evening, this information was communicated to Kiev, specialized mechanisms of the UN, OSCE, ICRC and other international organizations via all available information resources, including Mass Media.

We only received Kiev's official response at 07:10 am Moscow time, and it ignored the humanitarian corridors to Russia. Deputy PM of Ukraine I.Vereshchuk elaborated on this in an official statement, calling the proposal to open humanitarian passages leading to Russia "absurd and unacceptable".

It is clear to us that the Kiev regime tries to prevent exit of civilians and foreign citizens to Russia in every way possible, out of fear that once liberated, people will tell everyone the truth about the acts of Ukrainian radicals. Actually, people who could escape from the radicals, are already doing this – telling the truth about threats, blackmail, physical violence, shooting civilians and foreigners to kill. To illustrate, let me quote the mayor of Sumy, Mr. Oleksandr Lysenko, who made the following statement today jointly with a commander of a nationalist battalion: "There will be no green corridors, no civilian will exit to Russia, and those who attempt doing so will be shot".

While saying that Ukrainian civilians cannot be evacuated to Russia, Ukrainian officials ignore the fact that Ukrainian refugees are already present in Russian regions. More than 168,000 people have been evacuated to Russia from the areas of the special military operation, including 43,469 children. Over the past 24 hours, the total of 5,550 people have been evacuated, including 740 children.

19 256 personal vehicles have crossed the state border of the Russian Federation, including 900 personal vehicles over the past 24 hours.

We organize temporary accommodation facilities, all of them are ready to engage individually with civilians arriving from Ukraine.

Unfortunately, issues of evacuation from other regions also get politicized, as well as issues relating to humanitarian assistance. In particular, Ukraine's request (that was articulated less than 3 hours prior to the opening of humanitarian corridors) to organize evacuation from a number of settlements controlled by the Russian Armed Forces looks absurd. None of the dwellers of those settlements indicated willingness to leave. They live peacefully in their homes, nothing threatens them. In parallel to this, we are requested to organize evacuation of population from cities that are so far controlled by nationalist battalions. Finally, we are asked to deliver Ukrainian allegedly humanitarian cargos to Melitopol and Berdyansk of the Zaporozhye region and the city of Kherson. This also appears cynical with regard to the people of these cities, because currently these areas are under full control of the Russian Armed Forces, and the population lives their peaceful lives while being procured with everything they need, including Russia's humanitarian assistance, 550 tons of which have been delivered to various regions of Ukraine.

Mme.President,

We are particularly concerned that Ukrainian radicals still hold more than 1,500 foreign citizens in a number of cities as hostages to use them as a human shield.

We stand in constant contact with relevant diplomatic missions regarding those foreigners. Besides, foreign citizens who attempted to cross Ukrainian border heading to Europe encountered immense difficulties. Those were nationals of a number of states, including African countries. We have taken note of a statement on this matter that was issued by the Senegalese presidency of the African Union. We were appalled by reported ruthless attacks of nationalists on student dorms that i.a. caused deaths of Indian students.

As for security of the UN personnel in Ukraine, which we regard as a priority, by this moment the Russian military have facilitated exit of 180 UN staff from the territory of Ukraine. This support will continue if needed. We maintain standing contact with the UN Secretariat on this matter.

We approach humanitarian problems that peaceful Ukrainians encounter with all responsibility.

On 2 March 2022, a Joint Coordination Headquarters for Humanitarian Response in Ukraine was established at the platform of Russia's National Defense Management Center. The Headquarters works 24/7 and brings together authorized representatives of all federal executive bodies, state corporations and territorial entities of the Russian Federation.

The main tasks of the Headquarters is to provide of comprehensive humanitarian support to the population of Ukraine in the controlled areas, as well as in the Donetsk and Lugansk People's Republics, ensure safe evacuation of Ukraine's peaceful population and foreign citizens.

Mme.President,

I cannot fail to raise another point. Placement of heavy military equipment, including air defense systems, multiple rocket launchers, and bombardment artillery in densely populated areas are no longer sporadic cases, but rather an established practice for Ukrainian nationalist battalions. To the protests of the local population and demands to withdraw the equipment, they respond with threats to use weapons. This sort of cowardly behavior of combatants who use civilians as hostages breaks not only the rules of morality, but

also the international humanitarian law, including Articles 57 and 58 of the first Additional Protocol to 1949 Geneva Conventions. Besides, in a number of cities, especially in Odessa, they place equipment in vicinity of or inside cultural heritage sites, which violates Article 53 of the mentioned Additional Protocol.

Undermining of evacuation of civilians via humanitarian corridors is a violation of Article 75 of the mentioned Additional Protocol, whereas tortures of Russian prisoners of war, footage of which is published on social media, infringes Article 14 of 1949 Geneva Convention which directly stipulates respect for the personality and dignity of prisoners of war under any circumstances.

Colleagues, I call you to give a proper assessment to these blatant cases. We expect the UN leadership to do the same. Otherwise you only encourage Ukrainian radicals and neo-Nazis to commit further crimes.

Mme.President,

In conclusion let me again strongly call our Western colleagues to make the leadership of Ukraine finally think of safety of Ukrainian and foreign citizens whom radicals hold as hostages, and join the work aimed at opening humanitarian corridors and keeping them safe. Of course, if you still have any leverage over the nationalists, which we come to doubt more and more frequently. On our part, we are ready for such work.

Thank you.

In response to the representative of Ukraine:

Mme.President,

I did not take the floor again to engage in controversy with Ambassador of Ukraine. I have a different task, to which I will get back.

However, I cannot but say a few words with regard to some remarks of the PR of Ukraine. He interpreted the letter “Z” on Russian military equipment, which is deployed in Ukraine now, as the first letter of the word “Zver” (beast). But we have our own opinion as to who are the real beasts. In particular, those are representative of the Armed Forces of Ukraine and nationalist battalions who have thrashed civilians of Donbas for eight years, and keep doing this now. As we speak, there are bombardments of Lugansk, oil reservoirs are on fire. Same in Donetsk, this has not gone away.

We were accused of undermining the evacuation via humanitarian corridors, but the situation is the exact opposite. It is the Ukrainian side that rejected our proposal to have a ceasefire and evacuate people through a peace corridor. As we already said, it is nationalist battalions that keep people in cities and use them as a human shield, placing equipment in residential quarters.

I have just received a video from a Telegram channel. It shows nationalists from the Azov battalion shooting at civilians during attempted evacuation through a humanitarian corridor from Mariupol towards Novoazovsk at M-23 highway. This is available on the Internet.

I took the floor to inform you that I received an emergency statement from the Joint Coordination Headquarters for Humanitarian Response in Ukraine, dated 7 March. I will not read out all of it now. We will circulate this statement shortly among UNSC members. It says that the Russian side offers to establish a ceasefire tomorrow, on 8 March, at 10.00 am Moscow time, and open a humanitarian corridor for evacuation of civilians from Kiev, Chernigov, Sumy, Kharkov, and Mariupol.

My Ukrainian colleague said Ukraine is ready to work on that. Let's see what response Ukrainian authorities give to our proposal.

I must say that this proposal does not stipulate that all evacuated Ukrainian citizens must head to the territory of Russia. The proposal also envisages evacuation towards Ukrainian cities to the west from Kiev. This will be the choice of those who are going to evacuate.

Let me leave the last remark of the Ukrainian representative unanswered. I do not quite understand where he got such good knowledge of addresses of mental health facilities in New York. I would welcome if he could elaborate on that.

Thank you.