



Security Council

Seventy-second year

7876th meeting

Thursday, 2 February 2017, 3 p.m.

New York

Provisional

President: Mr. Yelchenko (Ukraine)

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United States of America.	Mrs. Haley
Uruguay.	Mr. Bermúdez

Agenda

Letter dated 28 February 2014 from the Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2014/136)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Letter dated 28 February 2014 from the Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2014/136)

The President: In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Jeffrey Feltman, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs; Ambassador Ertuğrul Apakan, Chief Monitor of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine; and Mr. Stephen O'Brien, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator.

On behalf of the Council, I welcome Ambassador Apakan, who is joining today's meeting via video teleconference from Kyiv.

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

Two days ago, the Security Council discussed the deterioration of the situation in eastern Ukraine and succeeded in adopting a press statement (SC/12700) on the subject. It became the first document of the Council on the situation in and around Ukraine in almost two years.

Unfortunately, despite the Council's call for an immediate return to a ceasefire regime, the situation in Avdiivka and other areas of eastern Ukraine remains tense, with strong signs of a possible further escalation. Therefore, today's discussion is meant to contribute to the settlement of the conflict. If we find common ground, I suggest we consider the possibility of adopting a draft presidential statement. If the Council agrees with such a proposal, in the coming days we may embark upon drafting it to reflect the main elements of this briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Feltman.

Mr. Feltman: The conflict in Ukraine will soon enter its fourth year. Since the Department of Political Affairs last briefed the Security Council on the situation in eastern Ukraine, on 28 April 2016

(see S/PV.7683), fighting has continued unabated, with only short periods of respite. Almost 10,000 people have been killed — Ukrainian armed forces, civilians and members of armed groups — and more than 23,000 have been injured since the beginning of the conflict, according to the human rights Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine; over 2,000 of those killed were civilians.

Since 7 January, and in particular over the past few days, we have seen a dangerous intensification of the conflict. On 1 February, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Special Monitoring Mission reported over 10,000 explosions in the Donetsk region over 24 hours, the highest number of violations yet recorded by the Mission. While the most serious clashes in the past few days predominantly hit the Avdiivka, Yasnovata and Donetsk airport areas, heavy fighting has also been reported near Mariupol, Popasna and the Svitlodarsk/Debeltseve areas, both in Government- and non-Government-controlled territories. The entire length of the contact line has seen a serious escalation of hostilities, and there is still a risk of further deterioration of the situation.

The OSCE Special Monitoring Mission has also registered frequent use of heavy weapons proscribed by the Minsk agreements, such as multiple launch rocket systems, including in the areas designated for disengagement, as per the 21 September 2016 framework decision of the Trilateral Contact Group relating to the disengagement of forces and hardware. There are reports of civilian casualties, including at least four deaths since the escalation on 28 January, and heavy losses among combatants on both sides. The human rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine also recorded damage to civilian houses and a school in populated areas of Avdiivka, which raises serious concerns about possible violations of international humanitarian law by all sides.

There are now reports of clashes that are directly endangering civilian crossing points, residential areas and critical civilian infrastructure, such as water purification plants and delivery systems, power lines and heating supply lines. Ensuring the urgent disengagement of forces at all checkpoints across the contact line would greatly improve the security of the population in the conflict-affected areas, where more than 20,000 people cross the contact line daily. Hundreds of thousands of civilians on both sides of the contact line are still at risk of losing all access to

heating, water and electricity, bringing the spectre of further displacement closer. That is particularly worrying given the frigid winter temperatures in the region at present.

There are also real threats of serious environmental disasters should any of the major chemical-waste storage locations in the area be shelled. As of yesterday, thousands of inhabitants in Avdiivka, including children, were reportedly at risk of being evacuated. The combatants must stop the shelling in cities such as Avdiivka, on both sides of the contact line, and enable basic services to be restored. The Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Mr. Stephen O'Brien, will shortly provide further updates on the humanitarian situation on the ground.

We welcome the prompt statement (SC/12700) issued by the Security Council on 31 January on the deterioration of the situation in the Donetsk region. The Secretary-General has expressed deep concern about the high level of military readiness and the recently intensified fighting, which is having an increasingly serious impact on the civilian population in the conflict areas. He has called on all parties to halt all hostilities immediately, fully observe the ceasefire, allow immediate and unhindered humanitarian access to the affected population, facilitate full and safe access for the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission so that it can report on the situation on the ground, and renew serious efforts to reach a peaceful settlement of the conflict. He particularly underlines how imperative it is that all sides take every possible measure to protect civilians and refrain from any action that could be seen as provocative or might escalate tensions.

In just a few days, the intensity of the hostilities around the Avdiivka-Yasnuvota-Donetsk airport areas has risen to levels that the Special Monitoring Mission has never before recorded in the area. The escalation demonstrates how precarious the situation continues to be and how suddenly and abruptly the security situation can deteriorate. The statement agreed on at yesterday's meeting in Minsk between the Trilateral Contact Group and representatives from various areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions lays down the urgent measures the sides should take, not only in the area under discussion but along the entire contact line, in order to prevent further ceasefire violations that could in turn spiral out of control. That is a positive development, but the test will be in the implementation of the measures. The pattern of successive ceasefire agreements broken by

fresh violence has left civilians caught in the crossfire and trapped in suffering. With every new day of fighting, the conflict becomes more entrenched and more difficult to resolve. There is no military solution to this conflict.

Despite the commendable efforts of the Trilateral Contact Group and the Normandy four, the recent intensification of the conflict coincides with a period of relative stagnation in the diplomatic processes designed to find a peaceful solution and ensure the full implementation of the Minsk agreements. The international community must remain constructively and actively engaged, however, if we are to prevent this crisis from becoming a catastrophe. In that regard, there is a pressing need to revitalize the negotiation process without delay.

The United Nations continues to strongly support the efforts being made in the Normandy four and Trilateral Contact Group frameworks and of the OSCE chairship in Ukraine. We commend the work of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission, which is carrying out essential work under extremely difficult circumstances in the conflict areas. The United Nations calls on both sides to lift all restrictions on the Special Monitoring Mission's freedom of movement and to immediately end all use of force or threats against the Mission's monitors. We welcomed the January visits of Mr. Sebastian Kurz, OSCE Chairperson-in-Office and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Austria, to Ukraine and the Russian Federation, and hope that his engagement, along with other ongoing efforts, will bear fruit. The United Nations stands ready to support those efforts. I look forward to hearing today from Ambassador Apakan, Chief Monitor of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine, about his assessment of the latest developments the ground.

It has been almost two years since 12 February 2015, when the package of measures for the implementation of the Minsk agreements was signed in Minsk, and in turn endorsed by the Security Council's adoption, on 17 February, of resolution 2202 (2015). That remains the foundation based on which we, the international community, have committed to seeking lasting peace in eastern Ukraine. I urge the Council to continue those efforts with renewed vigour.

In accordance with the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions, the United Nations remains committed to supporting a peaceful resolution

of the conflict in a manner that fully upholds the sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of Ukraine. The United Nations priority continues to be on supporting the peace efforts in Ukraine led by the OSCE and ensuring the full implementation of the Minsk agreements. The parties themselves, however, have the main responsibility to work constructively to that end.

The President: I thank Mr. Feltman for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr Apakan.

Mr. Apakan: I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for this opportunity to brief the Security Council on the security situation in eastern Ukraine. I am reporting to the Council today on the significant escalation of violence that has taken place in the past few days. The Special Monitoring Mission of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) has seen a sharp intensification in fighting in the Avdiivka-Yasnyuvata-Donetsk airport area. That latest upsurge comes after months of sustained ceasefire violations, particularly in five hotspots in eastern Ukraine, including in the Svitlodarsk and Debaltseve areas, Horlivka, in areas east of Mariupol, around Shyrokyne, and in Popasna, Pervomaiske and Troitske, in the Luhansk region. Sporadic fighting has continued, with several spikes in violence recorded from November through January.

Today the fighting in that triangular area is in its fifth day. The tension levels witnessed have increased during that period and the ceasefire violations are becoming more frequent and severe. Since 29 January, the intensity of the fighting in and around Avdiivka has been greater than in any similar period in recent months. On 31 January, the Special Monitoring Mission recorded thousands of explosions in Donetsk caused by incoming and outgoing mortar and artillery fire, including from multiple-launch rocket systems. On 1 February, there were almost 10,000 explosions in the Donetsk region. Today the situation continues to be tense and volatile. This is the highest number of explosions that the Mission has ever recorded. Most were in the Avdiivka and Yasnyuvata areas. The Special Monitoring Mission has also registered a steep increase in the use of all types of weapons regulated by the Minsk agreements, and the use of Grad multiple-launch rocket systems, mortars and artillery is particularly worrying. The use of tanks has also been observed.

The sides' indiscriminate use of proscribed weapons has resulted in civilian casualties and considerable damage to civilian homes and essential infrastructure. The conditions for civilians who have remained in Avdiivka have reached emergency levels. The town lost electricity when power lines in the area were damaged. In the meantime, civilians, including the most vulnerable, have been left without heat in sub-zero winter temperatures. The Avdiivka coke factory, which was providing the area with its main source of heating, has lost its power and water supplies. Repair crews have difficulty conducting repairs owing to the security situation. Efforts to ensure access in order to repair power lines and restore electricity to the coke factory and the Donetsk filtration station are ongoing. The Donetsk filtration station supplies water to the population on both sides of the contact line, and its protection is of the utmost importance. Further damage to Donetsk and other water filtration stations in the region could leave large parts of the Donetsk region without water.

All of those factors demonstrate a blatant disregard for the obligations undertaken by the signatories of the Minsk agreements. Instead of the disengagement of forces and hardware, we see the engagement of forces and a full range of hardware in areas where they are prohibited by the Minsk agreements. The Special Monitoring Mission's safe access and ability to conduct effective monitoring and verification continues to be restricted. The Mission needs full, safe and unhindered access.

At the moment, our teams and monitors are facilitating local ceasefires in the area, in coordination with the Joint Centre for Control and Coordination — the joint military centre for Russian and Ukrainian officers. That window of opportunity, along with the ceasefires, as unstable as they may be, helped to allow repair crews to access the damaged sites. Those efforts are still under way. Local ceasefires show that, if they are willing to, the sides can stop fighting.

Allow me to reiterate that the developments in the Avdiivka/Yasnyuvata and Donetsk airport areas are of great concern. In that context, I welcome yesterday's joint statement by the Trilateral Contact Group appealing for strict adherence to a full and comprehensive cessation of fire, withdrawal into storage sites of all weapons regulated by the Minsk agreements, safe and secure access for members of the Special Monitoring Mission in accordance with the Mission's mandate, and, finally,

the facilitation of efforts aimed at restoring water, electricity and heating supplies, including by way of the repair of infrastructure. I would like once again to say to the Security Council that a ceasefire is a basic requirement. We call for the immediate cessation of fighting.

The withdrawal of heavy weapons is another imperative. I should also mention that work is ongoing in the disengagement areas. In that context, I must say that the verification of heavy weapons is an important step that we are trying to achieve through monitoring, verification and reporting. It is also imperative that the Special Monitoring Mission be given immediate safe and unhindered access to the affected areas in order to verify that sides are complying with their obligations on the ceasefire and the withdrawal of weapons. I would also reiterate that the sides should try to prioritize the protection of civilians and the repair of infrastructure, which is also an immediate need.

We will also continue to monitor the humanitarian situation, which remains a matter of deep concern. Violence on such a scale, involving the loss of life, is unacceptable, and the protection of civilians must be paramount. Access to shelter, water, heat and medical care is limited in many areas. In that respect, the Special Monitoring Mission works closely with the United Nations and its specialized agencies. The Mission will continue to implement its mandate with impartiality and in close cooperation with all sides, in the context of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine. We continue to support the implementation of the Minsk agreements, and thereby contribute to efforts towards peace.

The President: I thank Mr. Apakan for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. O'Brien.

Mr. O'Brien: I thank Under-Secretary-General Jeffrey Feltman and His Excellency Mr. Apakan for their briefings. I am also grateful for this opportunity to join them in briefing the Security Council on the humanitarian situation in Ukraine.

Over three years into the conflict in eastern Ukraine, in what has become yet another protracted humanitarian crisis, we are now faced with a significant deterioration in the situation following the sudden and recent escalation in violence. That escalation on both sides of the contact line in Donetsk oblast near Avdiivka and Donetsk city has claimed the lives of four civilians,

all women, since 18 January, according to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. According to the United Nations team on the ground, it is resulting in widespread fear, panic and a real struggle to survive by civilians. We call on all parties to immediately cease all hostilities in order to prevent a further loss of life and further unacceptable human suffering.

The current escalation in violence is causing severe damage to critical infrastructure — water, electricity and heating. Combined with low winter temperatures, the result is a deteriorating humanitarian situation. Today temperatures are -10°C but, -20°C is not unheard of at this time of the year. Adequate shelter, heating and access to water are therefore essential to people's survival. Shelling has damaged electricity and water systems, with a knock-on effect on the heating supply; once damaged, it could take days, or weeks, for systems to restart. For civilians living on both sides of the front line, that means they are not only traumatized, living a precarious and dangerous existence, but damage to critical services is making survival an issue. We are also concerned about the reported presence of heavy weapons in urban areas, which further heightens the risk to civilians' lives.

For example, critical water and electricity systems in Avdiivka, a front-line town in Government-controlled areas, were damaged by the recent violence on 29 and 30 January. The United Nations and other humanitarian partners joined a Government-led assessment team to the town on 1 February, and are working to ensure that critical needs are met in support of the Government. That is not without risk. For example, two technical teams sent to repair infrastructure were promised a ceasefire for a few hours on 1 February in order to carry out their work, but were subjected to small-arms fire in non-government controlled areas and, as a result, were forced to abandon their work. A similar incident took place earlier today. The arrival of powerful generators on 31 January in Avdiivka provided some temporary respite to 17,000 people, including 2,500 children, but that is not sufficient. Unless repairs are made, the power that keeps the heating system functioning in Avdiivka cannot be fully restored. The result could be displacement on a large scale.

Avdiivka is not alone. Approximately 1 million people in non-government controlled areas in Donetsk city were without water or heating for 24 hours following the shelling. A repair team has managed to

fix some power lines, thereby managing to preserve the city's heating systems and avoid a major catastrophe. Elsewhere, the 500,000 inhabitants of Mariupol are now reliant on a backup reservoir after the water main on which the city depends developed a massive leak. It will take several days — once hostilities are over — to ensure the area is demined and heavy machinery can access the area to carry out repairs. Unfortunately, shelling could be heard again last night in Donetsk and in other areas along the contact line.

I welcome yesterday's statement of the Trilateral Contact Group in Minsk, which called for not only strict adherence to a full and comprehensive cessation of fire but also the facilitation of humanitarian efforts aimed at the restoration of water, electricity and heating supplies, including through the repair of infrastructure. I also acknowledge the efforts of the Government of Ukraine and the de facto authorities to provide critical heating and water for those most at risk, but I highlight that that is not enough. On 31 January, the Government of Ukraine appealed to international organizations to prepare to support civilian evacuees from Avdiivka should it be necessary. The United Nations and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) stand ready to lend their support.

If hostilities continue, we may also face a serious environmental crisis. Damage to the phenol plant near the village of Novgorodske means that waste chemicals, including deadly sulfuric acid and formaldehyde, are now at critical levels. Leakage into the surrounding land and the Seversky Donets River would have disastrous humanitarian consequences in a highly industrialized part of Europe. Similarly, there is a real risk at present that damage to water facilities could have further deadly consequences for the population living in the surrounding areas, with the potential leak of chlorine gas, which is routinely stored at such facilities.

This latest escalation in violence is exacerbating the ongoing needs of an estimated 3.8 million civilians who continue to bear the brunt of this protracted conflict and who require various degrees of humanitarian assistance. There are 700,000 more people in need this year as compared to those identified in the 2016 humanitarian response plan. More than 60 per cent of those in need — approximately 2.3 million people — reside in non-Government controlled areas. Furthermore, over 70 per cent of people in need are the elderly, women and children. Those demographic groups are particularly vulnerable and must be accessed

immediately with lifesaving assistance and protection interventions. When I visited Luhansk and Donetsk just over a year ago, I met an octogenarian woman living in one room in the bombed-out ruins of her house, whose son had been killed in the cracked remains of what was once her front door when he just happened to be visiting to check on her safety and a bomb came down on him — an innocent non-combatant nipping back in the lunch hour from his market store. While tending to her rambling rose bush growing up the charred remains of her house, she told me of her unconscionable grief, of the cold she endures and that she would only light a camp fire during the night, as she was afraid that any smoke during the day would allow others to target her location. It was truly heartbreaking. That is the reality for so many civilians caught in this conflict, trapped by the fighting with minimal shelter, critical services cut-off and in desperate need of assistance and building repair materials to prevent death or injury by either the violence or the elements.

While some humanitarian response efforts continue, since July 2015 the de facto authorities in Donetsk and Luhansk have imposed undue bureaucratic restrictions that are severely affecting humanitarian access. That is in contradiction to their commitments under article 7 of the Minsk full package of measures, as well as their responsibilities under international humanitarian law. Few partners are officially allowed to operate in those areas and, on 25 November 2016, the international NGO People in Need — the last international NGO to have access — was summarily ejected from Donetsk non-Government controlled areas, depriving 140,000 people of immediate lifesaving assistance. The United Nations repeats its appeal to all parties to guarantee secure and unimpeded access for United Nations and humanitarian partners to all people in need, wherever they may be.

Finally, Government-imposed bureaucratic impediments, particularly in relation to the ban on commercial trade and the importation of food and medicines across the contact line, remain a serious constraint to alleviating the humanitarian crisis. In addition, the suspension of social payments by the Government has severely affected hundreds of thousands of displaced people.

I am alarmed about the turn that this conflict has taken and about the increasing toll it has on the civilian population. As the humanitarian situation in Ukraine deteriorates, increasing numbers of people are at risk

and in need — their resilience eroded and their hope fading. The inability to reach a political solution to this crisis is resulting in further civilian casualties, damage to critical infrastructure and more human suffering. This suffering will continue until this conflict comes to an end once and for all.

The President: I thank Mr. O'Brien for his briefing.

I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Ukraine.

I thank the briefers for the updated information they provided on the attack on the town of Avdiivka, in the Donetsk region of Ukraine, by the Russian occupying forces and their proxies, which led to a humanitarian emergency in the area.

Ukraine continues to be fully committed to implementing the Minsk agreements in their entirety. The President of Ukraine has stressed on many occasions that there is no military solution in the Donbas. The Ukrainian Government is sharply focused on peaceful and diplomatic means in that regard. Ukrainian forces continue to respect the ceasefire. They have strict orders to open a fire only in response to the attacks and assault actions of Russia-backed militants.

On the contrary, Russia, as the party to the conflict in Donbas, and its proxies have blatantly violated the Minsk agreements from the very beginning. They have continued their attacks and occupied several Ukrainian towns and localities. As of now, Russian proxies occupy about 1,700 square kilometres, going far beyond the contact line agreed in Minsk on 19 September 2014.

Before the crisis in Avdiivka, there was the battle for Debaltsevo two years ago, which was captured by Russian forces immediately after the Minsk summit on 12 February 2015, contrary to decisions taken by the leaders of Ukraine, Russia, Germany and France.

In the early hours of Sunday, 29 January, the Russian army and its proxies began massive artillery attacks on Avdiivka and its suburbs from residential areas in Donetsk and Yasynuvata, which are under the control of the Russia-led terrorists, and sent assault units to storm positions of the Ukrainian armed forces. The Russian forces used Grad multiple-rocket launch systems, tanks, 152-millimetre and 122-millimetre artillery, and 120-millimetre and 82-millimetre mortars. All those weapons are forbidden under the Minsk agreements. On 29 January alone, the Ukrainian positions were shelled nearly 400 times.

The shelling intensified on 30 and 31 January, when civilian infrastructure sites were also targeted. As a result, the Donetsk water filtration plant and the Avdiivka coke plant, which provides heat for Avdiivka, are now without electricity. The city is left without water, electricity or heat. The current temperature in Avdiivka is -18°C. Without central heat, civilians will not survive. Sixteen thousand people ended up without water, electricity or heat, including 2,000 children. Just imagine: 2,000 children without heat at -18°C. Ukrainian emergency services prepared to evacuate people from Avdiivka.

Numerous attempts by the Ukrainian services to repair damaged infrastructure were consistently blocked until 1 February by the Russia-led terrorists, who continued shelling, and by the Russian part of the Joint Centre for Control and Coordination (JCCC), which were unreasonably delayed in providing security guarantees necessary to reach the destroyed objects.

According to information that we just received 15 minutes before the start of this briefing, the separatist forces resumed the shelling of residential areas of Avdiivka using high-calibre artillery systems. Several residential buildings were hit and there are several fires around the town. One of the shells exploded close to a temporary heating station that had been set up by the Ukrainian authorities to provide Avdiivka residents with warmth in these freezing temperatures.

Destroying critical infrastructure and thus creating a humanitarian disaster is a terrorist tactic aimed primarily at civilians. This tactic obliterates the Russian propaganda myth of so-called peaceful miners who fight the authorities with their own shotguns. Locals would never do this to their neighbours, but those who have come to Ukrainian soil as aggressors to destroy Ukrainian statehood do not hesitate to damage factories, houses and powerlines. This tactic is not new for the Russian forces.

The aforementioned actions by Russia may qualify as a war crime. Ukraine will add evidence related to the recent escalation and indiscriminate attacks on civilian infrastructure to our claim against Russia on terrorism to the International Court of Justice. This is a first but very important step in bringing Russia to justice for its mounting violations of the United Nations Charter and international law.

The Ukrainian Government announced the emergency situation in Avdiivka. We have managed

to sustain the functioning of the heating system at a minimum level and to avoid the rapid degradation of the situation into a real humanitarian disaster. Eleven warming centres have been set up, scores of field kitchens have been deployed, and kindergartens and hospitals are functioning in emergency mode. Additional police units have been deployed to protect civil order and to help provide a timely response to the emergency.

The events of recent days have become a test for monitoring and coordination mechanisms in Donbas. Since the outbreak of hostilities, Ukraine has repeatedly, literally hundreds of times, requested Russian representatives at the JCCC to use their influence to stop the hostilities. Of the 230 requests made during the period from 29 January to 1 February to stop the hostilities in the area around Avdiivka, all but two were ignored. On 31 January, Ukraine called for an urgent video-teleconference meeting of the Trilateral Contact Group (TCG) to defuse tensions. Once again, the Russian side and their proxies in Donbas did not show up, claiming that this was not the right time. Seriously? Not the right time?

Despite calls from all corners for a ceasefire and the withdrawal of heavy weaponry, the militants continue shelling day and night. On 1 February, despite the appeal of the Trilateral Contact Group for an immediate and comprehensive ceasefire in the region of Avdiivka, Russian militants did not stop shooting, and even shot at the repair team that was trying to fix the damaged power line. They shelled residential buildings and last night shelled one of the roads designated for the evacuation of civilians. This is nothing less than a war crime.

I have a picture here that I would ask the Council to look at. This is an apartment building in Avdiivka; at least 1,500 people lived there. It was shelled by terrorists, and the inhabitants rushed out into the freezing cold; it was -20°C outside. This is beyond evil. The perpetrators, those who pulled the trigger and those who gave the orders, should face justice, and they will.

It has to be mentioned that when the content of the aforementioned appeal was being discussed in the Trilateral Contact Group, the Russian side was against the formulations regarding repair work on the energy and power-supply infrastructure. This is additional clear evidence of the Kremlin's intention to create a

humanitarian catastrophe in Avdiivka, as was done, by the way, by the Russian army in Aleppo not so long ago.

Two Ukrainian soldiers have died and 14 have been wounded over the past 24 hours. Altogether, 20 Ukrainian soldiers have been killed and 134 wounded by Russian hybrid forces and Russia-backed militants since the beginning of the year. We call on the Russian Federation to abide by the ceasefire and to ensure the necessary secure conditions for the repair work.

The attacks on and near Avdiivka in recent days as well as the continuing Russian aggression underscore two important trends. First, Russia and its proxies in Donbas continue to block and undermine the peaceful process by pursuing their political objectives through the indiscriminate use of force. There can be no illusion about the Russian role in the implementation of the Minsk agreements. Every bit of progress made in the TCG or on the contact line is flagrantly destroyed by another assault by Russia-led terrorists.

Secondly, the existing mechanisms created to avoid further destabilization and to move forward with the implementation of the Minsk agreements are not efficient enough to fulfil their mandate. Despite the urgency of the situation, the TCG met only three days after the outbreak of hostilities, and the JCCC appears to be an ineffective tool in a crisis situation — all of this due to Russian non-cooperation. Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Special Monitoring Mission observers still face serious restrictions on their freedom of movement on the territories temporarily controlled by Russia-backed militants. They lack 24/7 monitoring capabilities and the relevant technical means.

The events around Avdiivka have created an obstacle to Russia's aspiration to resolve the conflict in Donbas by military means. Yes, the Ukrainian army proved its strength and ability to repeal a Russian offensive. However, Ukraine is paying a dramatically high price, losing its best sons and daughters to this war.

We care about our people. The death of every single soldier or civilian is yet another scar on the soul of Ukraine. I ask the Council to look at this picture; it shows a 26-year-old officer, Andriy Kyzlyo, who was killed on 29 February near Avdiivka. Look at his eyes, Mr. Ambassador; it is your weapons and your compatriots who killed him.

(spoke in Russian)

You killed him.

(spoke in English)

Our people get down on their knees to treat their fallen defenders. Russian invaders are buried in unmarked graves. We are seeking peace and are doing our utmost and taking every step to bring peace back to Ukraine. Therefore, we do not advocate a military solution and believe that the available political means should be used. The armed confrontation could be easily ended. The Russian Federation should stop arming militants and sending its mercenaries and military personnel to Ukraine.

Does anyone seriously think that rockets and artillery shells grow on trees in Donbas? We are talking about tens, if not hundreds, of thousands of rounds of artillery ammunition. Since November, we and international observers have noted an increased supply of ammunition and armour to militants from the Russian Federation. Now we are seeing the consequences.

What is clear is that an international security presence on the ground needs to be enhanced so as to prevent such provocations in future and thus contribute to the implementation of the Minsk agreements and, ultimately, to a peaceful resolution. We once again urge the Russian Federation to exercise its responsibility to implement the Minsk commitments, specifically their security and humanitarian provisions. We urge Russia to halt its support for terrorists and to stop building hybrid terrorist armies in eastern Ukraine as well as its military buildup along Ukraine's eastern borders.

Moreover, we call on the Russian Federation not to expand the framework of the escalation. Yesterday Russian military forces shelled and damaged an Antonov An-26 Ukrainian aircraft while it was conducting a flight over the Odessa gas-deposit region in the Black Sea, in Ukraine's exclusive maritime zone. This time only a lucky coincidence saved the crew from the Russian shelling. God only knows what will happen next time.

There is a rather simple remedy that would stop this Russian aggression against my country and prevent further civilian suffering. What the international community needs to do is to step up the pressure on the aggressor and urge the Russian Federation to get out of Ukraine.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

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

Mr. Churkin (Russian Federation) *(spoke in Russian)*: We are grateful for today's briefings, which painted a disturbing picture of the ongoing events and suffering of the people of eastern Ukraine.

What has basically been happening is quite obvious. Kyiv is attempting to use clashes it has itself provoked as a pretext for a complete refusal to implement the Minsk agreements, signed on 12 February 2015 and endorsed in resolution 2202 (2015). However hard the Ukrainian side tries to portray things differently, including by convening this meeting of the Council and making statements that turn the facts upside down, there is a massive amount of information, including open admissions by Ukrainian officials right up to the level of the country's President, that is too overwhelming to permit denial of the destructive policies of Kyiv and its armed forces.

On 3 January, Ukraine's Defence Minister Poltorak confirmed that the Ukrainian armed forces had seized new positions in the grey zone, with the demagogic claim that that did not violate the Minsk agreements because the occupied territories thereby belonged to Ukraine. On 17 January, Interior Minister Avakov, speaking to Ukrainian border guards, urged them to prepare to seize the State borders in 2017. On 22 January, President Poroshenko declared publicly that Ukraine would not be doing anything about political reform until it regained full control of its border with Russia, in an approach that completely perverts the content of the Minsk package of measures and deliberately renders them unrealizable, practically speaking. Lastly, yesterday Deputy Defence Minister Pavlovsky completed the picture by bragging to the press that his heroic lads were moving forward where they could, metre by metre, step by step.

That overtly militaristic rhetoric has had very real consequences, as is clearly apparent from the latest reports of the Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). Observers have confirmed that the escalation was provoked by Ukrainian security forces. On the night of 27 and 28 January, the Mission's camera at the Oktyabrskaya mine recorded intense crossfire between the Ukrainian armed forces and militias, which was preceded by firing from the north-west to the south-east, that is, from the security forces' positions. At the same time, another Special Monitoring Mission camera

captured an intense artillery exchange in Avdiivka that began with five shots fired from north to south, which also meant from Ukrainian forces' positions. The next night, 28 and 29 January, a Mission camera in Avdiivka recorded 15 shots fired from a north-westerly direction towards the south-east, also from the Kyiv security forces' side, bombarding the militias' positions. That was followed by hours of fighting in the Avdiivka industrial zone. The picture on the southern flank was the same. According to the Mission camera in Shyrokyne, intense crossfire on the night of 28 January was preceded by 20 shots fired from west to east, that is, again from the Ukrainian forces' positions towards the rebels' territory, after which another battle ensued.

According to Mission data for 26 to 29 January, indiscriminate shelling of residential areas under rebel control, coming from areas where Ukrainian security forces were deployed, injured civilians in Brianka and destroyed more than a dozen houses in Brianka, Donetsk, Olenivka, Zaichenko, Kalynove, Novooleksandrivka and Pervomaiske. The Mission continued to observe Ukrainian forces' military equipment in the security zone. Between 26 and 29 January observers discovered four tanks in Avdiivka and three howitzers in Mykolaivka, as well as the disappearance from the security forces' storage of 76 tanks, 10 mortars and 18 field guns. Only about 6 per cent of the stored military hardware was actually there.

Thus began a new spiral of tensions that since then has only been ratcheted up further. According to yesterday's Special Monitoring Mission report, the number of violations has risen daily, reaching 10,300 shell explosions in a span of 24 hours. At the same time, the statistics on restrictions to the Mission's access speak for themselves — in seven of nine cases it was the Ukrainian forces that put obstacles in its way. The numbers testify to the fact that, rather than attempting to normalize the situation in the Donbas region and arrive at reasonable compromises within the Normandy format and the framework of the Trilateral Contact Group, the Ukrainian authorities are desperately trying to achieve a military solution to the conflict.

Another attention-grabbing feature is the fact that any serious deterioration of the situation in the Donbas region, amazingly, coincides with foreign visits on the part of Ukraine's leadership. Evidently that is how Kyiv hopes to keep its self-created crisis on the international agenda while at the same time roping in newly elected Heads of Government with its reckless, confrontational

policies. But, of course, the Ukrainian leadership needs money, which it hopes to extract from the European Union, various European countries, the United States and the international financial institutions by setting itself up as a victim of aggression.

Kyiv seems not to worry very much about the humanitarian cost of such a policy. It is actively using heavy types of armaments around village residential areas, schools and hospitals, including heavy artillery and multiple-launch rocket systems, which according to the Minsk package of measures of 12 February 2015 should have been withdrawn from the contact line long ago. Civilians are among those killed and wounded. Thanks to Ukrainian security forces' attacks, the Donetsk filtration station and the Avdiivka coke plant have been damaged and mineworkers' lives threatened.

In order to prevent a humanitarian disaster and get the situation back on a political track, the international community must be firm and consistent. In that regard, the Security Council sent an important message on 31 January (SC/12700) when it united in calling for an immediate ceasefire and strict respect for the Minsk package. Yesterday the Trilateral Contact Group made an announcement in the same spirit when it called for full compliance with the ceasefire regime and the withdrawal of the heavy weaponry that comes under the Minsk agreements. We expect to see effective action from the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission aimed at de-escalating the situation as soon as possible. The Normandy format participants, and those who can exert the most influence on Kyiv, have a particular responsibility in that regard. We hope that the forces of common sense in Ukraine itself, as well as those who are interested in resolving such situations by political means, will not allow the situation in south-eastern Ukraine to turn into a worst-case scenario, but will instead focus their attention and efforts on ensuring that the Minsk agreements are fulfilled.

Today President Poroshenko said that he had personally ordered the Ukrainian delegation to convene today's Council meeting. When he called to order today's meeting, the Permanent Representative of Ukraine proposed drafting a Security Council document building on the statement we issued on 31 January. Sadly, the unbridled, odious statement we heard today from Ukraine shows that the Ukrainian delegation here in New York is continuing on the path of war, which is deeply regrettable.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): France firmly condemns the resumption of fighting in eastern Ukraine in the past few days, specifically in Avdiivka. We are dealing with the worst upsurge in violence and the highest rate of violations of the ceasefire that we have seen in months. They have been accompanied by a spike in the number of victims, including among civilians, as well as a serious deterioration in the humanitarian situation, which we are following closely. We are forced to conclude that neither the security or the humanitarian situation has improved since the consultations we had on the subject two days ago, despite the fact that the Council called unanimously for the immediate restoration of the ceasefire (SC/12700). In that regard, France calls on all the parties to exercise restraint, and supports the appeal of the Trilateral Contact Group for the immediate restoration of the ceasefire in accordance with terms of the Minsk agreements, in particular with respect to the prohibition against the use and withdrawal of heavy weapons. The disengagement of forces on both sides of the line of contact must also be implemented without delay. We expect each of the parties to refrain from any provocation that might further aggravate the situation. We also call on Russia to use its influence with the separatists.

The work of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Special Monitoring Mission in support of the ceasefire and de-escalation is essential. We call on all the parties on the ground to ensure the access and security of OSCE observers in Avdiivka, as well as in all areas of the conflict, as established in the mandate of the Mission.

The humanitarian situation is of particular concern to us, as the civilian population is facing extreme weather conditions and a disruption to the supply of water and electricity in several areas, including Avdiivka. We urge the parties to act as quickly as possible to improve the living conditions of the civilian population on the ground. Immediate compliance with windows of calm is essential to enable the repair of critical infrastructure in areas affected by fighting and for the relief of populations. We believe that to be crucial. The current crisis also calls to mind the crucial importance of the ongoing presence of humanitarian agencies throughout Ukrainian territory, including in areas beyond the control of the Government.

Faced with the new resurgence in violence, France recalls that the solution to the crisis in Ukraine cannot be a military one; rather, it must be political. That is why

the implementation of the Minsk agreements remains more than ever the only way forward for a peaceful resolution to the conflict. France and Germany remain fully engaged in their diplomatic efforts within the framework of the Normandy format. Although we are aware of the scale of the work that remains to be done and the challenges to be overcome, we are convinced that working in that format, the only one to bring Ukraine and Russia together around the same table at the political level, is necessary and must be continued. In particular, work in the Normandy format has made it possible in recent months to lessen the intensity of the fighting and reduce the number of human casualties on the ground, as well as to implement confidence-building measures in the security and humanitarian spheres, with respect to the re-establishment of the ceasefire, the implementation of areas of disengagement or even the carrying out of exchanges of prisoners.

Despite continued fighting, the number of civilian casualties remains six times lower since the signing of the package of measures for the implementation of the Minsk agreements, according to estimates by United Nations agencies. Our efforts are currently focused on developing a common road map that would enable concomitant progress with respect to the security and political aspects of the Minsk agreements. We can make progress only by moving forward on those two tracks. It is the shared belief of France and Germany that this is now the only way forward and that the European sanctions implemented at the beginning of the crisis are linked to the full implementation of the Minsk agreements.

For France, a resolution to the crisis in eastern Ukraine is more than ever a major priority. Alongside Germany, we will continue tirelessly in our efforts to mediate within the framework of the Normandy format, for there is currently no viable alternative and because every result on the ground counts. Our goal remains the restoration of Ukrainian control over all of its internationally recognized borders, which, we recall, can take place only via the re-establishment of its authority over Crimea.

In this challenging environment, everyone must now shoulder their responsibilities and fulfil their commitments. In our view, that is the main message the Council should send, and it is the spirit with which we are prepared to consider any draft presidential statement that may be adopted by the Council.

Mr. Rycroft (United Kingdom): Let me take this opportunity to welcome you, Sir, in 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 draft presidential statement on this important issue.

As our briefers made clear, Sir, 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 such as 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. And those events have not come out of the blue. They are not new. The Council knows all too well the root causes of this violence and instability. This is what happens when Russia disregards the sovereign right of Ukraine to choose its own destiny. This is what happens when Russia undermines the territorial integrity of Ukraine by illegally annexing Crimea. This is what happens when Russian military personnel stand side-by-side with separatists whom 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 Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the Joint Centre for Control and Coordination to bring about a truce to allow crucial repairs. Those efforts will help to restore vital utilities and to allow for the evacuation of civilians. I urge all parties to support those efforts and to 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 cease-fire, all parties must show restraint. That means in particular ending the extensive use of high-caliber indiscriminate weapons, such as Grad rocket systems. The use of those 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 agreements.

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 recognized in resolution 2202 (2015). The Minsk agreements are the only meaningful path to long-term peace in Ukraine. Let us therefore urge all sides to recommit to meeting their full obligations under the Minsk agreements. 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.

Let me conclude with this final thought. We frequently hear from the Russian Government — as we did today — that all the problems in eastern Ukraine are the consequences of actions by the Ukrainian Government. That is simply not the case; it is an inversion of reality. The responsibility for 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, D.C., last week, the United Kingdom will continue to stand by Ukraine in full support of its sovereignty and territorial integrity. Most recently, the international community — through the General Assembly resolution on the situation in Crimea in December — sent the same clear message to Russia. And earlier this week, the entire Security Council, including Russia, expressed the very same thing in an agreed statement (SC/12700): that we support the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine.

But 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 force from all of Ukraine. That includes Crimea, the illegal annexation of which we do not, and will not, recognize. Sanctions against Russia cannot be lifted until that happens. It is for the people of Ukraine to decide their country's future. Ukraine must be allowed to make its own sovereign decisions.

Mrs. Haley (United States of America): I thank Under-Secretary-General Feltman, Under-Secretary-General O'Brien and Ambassador Apakan for their useful and comprehensive briefings today.

This is my first appearance in the Chamber as the Permanent Representative of the United States. It is an immense honour for me to sit behind the United States placard and to follow in the footsteps of so many giants of American diplomacy. It is humbling to be part of a body whose responsibility is nothing less than maintaining international peace and security. I look forward to working closely with all Council members. The United States is determined to push for action. There is no time to waste.

I consider it unfortunate that the occasion of my first appearance here is one in which I must condemn the aggressive actions of Russia. It is unfortunate because it is a replay of far too many instances over many years in which United States representatives have needed to do that. It should not have to be that way. We do want to better our relations with Russia. However, the dire situation in eastern Ukraine is one that demands clear and strong condemnation of Russian actions. The sudden increase in fighting in eastern Ukraine has trapped thousands of civilians and destroyed vital infrastructure. And the crisis is spreading, endangering many thousands more. The escalation of violence must stop.

The United States stands with the people of Ukraine, who have suffered for nearly three years under Russian occupation and military intervention. Until Russia and the separatists it supports respect Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, the crisis will continue.

Eastern Ukraine, of course, is not the only part of the country suffering because of Russia's aggressive actions. The United States continues to condemn and call for an immediate end to the Russian occupation of Crimea. Crimea is a part of Ukraine. Our Crimea-related sanctions will remain in place until Russia returns control of the peninsula to Ukraine.

The basic principle of the United Nations is that States should live side by side in peace. There is a clear path to restoring peace in eastern Ukraine — the full and immediate implementation of the Minsk agreements, which the United States continues to support. For the people in eastern Ukraine, the stakes are high. With each passing day, more people are at risk of freezing to death or dying from a mortar blast.

The United States calls on Russia and the combined Russian-backed separatist forces to fulfil their commitments in the Minsk agreements and fully restore and respect the ceasefire. The Minsk agreements

require the disengagement of forces and the withdrawal of heavy weapons from both sides of the contact line. That is the formula for a sustainable ceasefire. Pulling back forces and taking heavy weapons out of the area will save lives. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Special Monitoring Mission must also be granted full, unfettered access. The presence of OSCE monitors can help calm tensions.

Cooperation on this issue is possible. Earlier this week, both Russia and Ukraine supported this Council's unanimous call (SC/12700) to return to a ceasefire. It was the first time in years that the Council was able to come together on Ukraine. The parties on the ground should heed that signal and hold their fire. The United States expects that those who can influence the groups that are fighting — in particular Russia — will do everything possible to support an end to the escalation of violence.

Mr. Liu Jieyi (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Under-Secretary-General Feltman; Ambassador Apakan, Chief Monitor of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine; and Under-Secretary-General O'Brien for their briefings.

China has been following the situation in eastern Ukraine closely, and is concerned about the recurring hostilities that have resulted in civilian casualties. We have taken note of the fact that the Normandy format and the Trilateral Contact Group in Minsk held consultations on the implementation of the Minsk agreements and promoting a peaceful resolution to the Ukrainian issue. We call on the parties to the conflict to strictly abide by the ceasefire regime and remain committed to a political solution. There must be a fundamental and long-term solution to this conflict that will both accommodate the legitimate rights and aspirations of all regions and ethnic groups and address the reasonable concerns of all the parties concerned, in order to strike a balance among the interests of all sides.

China is of the view that all parties should fully implement resolution 2202 (2015), enforce the cessation of hostilities and violence and implement the Minsk agreements. They must remain committed to seeking a comprehensive, lasting and balanced solution to the Ukrainian issue through dialogue and consultation, so as to help achieve peace, stability and development in Ukraine, harmonious relations among all ethnic groups and peaceful coexistence between Ukraine and

countries of the region. The international community should continue to support every diplomatic effort for a political solution. Council discussions on the issue should contribute to the easing of tensions on the ground and a proper solution to the Ukrainian question.

Mr. Thöresson (Sweden): Let me start by thanking Under-Secretary-General Feltman, Ambassador Apakan and Under-Secretary-General O'Brien for their very useful briefings.

As today's briefings have reminded us, the conflict in Donbas has now been ongoing for almost three years. Each day that it continues to simmer without a solution results in more deaths and injuries, as well as fear and uncertainty for civilians. The humanitarian fallout of the current deterioration in the region is particularly alarming. Access to basic needs, including water, electricity and heating, has been interrupted. Sixteen thousand people are acutely affected, with reports of 2,000 children in need of assistance in Avdiivka.

We call on all parties to ensure that civilians are protected in line with international humanitarian law. Humanitarian actors must have access to the entirety of the Ukrainian territory, including the zones outside the control of the Ukrainian Government. The recent escalation in violence is a clear breach of the first point of the Minsk agreements, which call for an immediate and full ceasefire. A cessation of hostilities is essential for security, which, in turn, is a basic prerequisite for finding a sustainable political solution to the conflict. In that regard, we fully support the efforts of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the difficult work of its Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine. Safe, full and unhindered access for its monitors must be guaranteed.

As a small country committed to a rules-based international order, Sweden relies upon strict adherence to the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations and respect for international law. Violation of those core principles and commitments poses a threat to the European security order, and are therefore a fundamental concern for all of us.

Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity must be fully respected, as underlined by all of us in the Security Council press statement of 31 January (SC/12700). Let us not lose sight of who is the aggressor and who is the victim in this conflict. We highlight Russia's particular responsibility in that regard, and stress that Russia can bring its influence

to bear to end the violence, should it wish to do so. In that connection, we should not forget Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea and Sebastopol, in clear violation of international law, including the rules and principles of the United Nations Charter.

In line with consistent appeals from the European Union, Sweden calls for an immediate and lasting ceasefire. We reiterate our call for the full implementation of the Minsk agreements. Sanctions against Russia must remain in place until the Minsk agreements are fully implemented. We commend and support the efforts of France and Germany in the Normandy format. Finally, we call for the rules and principles of international law, including international humanitarian law, to be fully respected.

Mr. Lambertini (Italy): At the outset, I would like to thank Under-Secretaries-General Feltman and O'Brien and Ambassador Apakan for their detailed briefings. What we heard from them has reinforced our deep concerns about the escalation of tensions in Donbas over the past few days. That is why we urge all the parties involved to immediately end the intense fighting that erupted around Avdiivka, which involved the use of heavy weapons proscribed by the Minsk agreements and inflicted suffering on the civilian population. We urge them to agree on concrete and immediate steps to reverse the deterioration of the security situation. That includes a return to the ceasefire without delay, to which they have repeatedly committed, as well as to proceed with disengagement in the areas specifically identified in September and to withdraw heavy weaponry in line with the provisions of the Minsk agreements.

Secondly, we are seriously concerned about the dire humanitarian situation in the area. In the current harsh winter conditions, with freezing temperatures, thousands of lives are at risk on both sides of the contact line because of the destruction of the local power and water filtration plants. Every action required to restore full access to water, electricity and heating should be put in place without delay to prevent further suffering. We therefore call upon all the parties to allow the urgent repair of critical infrastructure and to grant safe, full, unrestricted access to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Special Monitoring Mission and to humanitarian organizations. The protection of the civilian population must remain the highest priority for all sides. In that regard, my country promptly responded to the humanitarian call

with a contribution of €1 million to the World Food Programme and UNICEF programmes on food security and mine-risk education in conflict-afflicted areas.

Thirdly, the blatant violation of the ceasefire we are witnessing is not acceptable. The latest developments represent a serious violation of the Minsk agreements. We firmly believe that their implementation is the only path to a political solution to the crisis. In that regard, Italy reiterates its full support of the role played by the Normandy group and the OSCE in facilitating dialogue. We deem it to be necessary to relaunch negotiations without delay and expect a constructive commitment with tangible results to be made with the Trilateral Contact Group. I would like to take this opportunity to recall Italy's well-known position in support of the territorial integrity of Ukraine.

Let me conclude by emphasizing that dialogue and political will must prevail over a military solution. All parties are encouraged to fully honour their commitments in order to achieve an inclusive and sustainable solution to the crisis in Ukraine.

Mr. Bessho (Japan): I thank the briefers for providing us with a vivid update on the situation on the ground. Japan is deeply concerned about the situation in eastern Ukraine and its severe impact on the local civilian population. We are disappointed that, as we have just heard, the ceasefire is not being observed on the ground, even as we speak.

Japan strongly calls for an immediate return to the ceasefire regime, as expressed in the Security Council press statement (SC/12700) issued on 31 January. Japan takes note of the statement of the Trilateral Contact Group yesterday calling for an immediate ceasefire, the withdrawal of heavy weaponry from the contact line and the provision of unhindered humanitarian access to the affected population. The full and prompt implementation of those measures is critical in order to alleviate the suffering of the population and to prevent a further escalation of the situation. Japan calls for all the parties to act swiftly and in good faith.

Japan strongly believes that the situation in Ukraine can be solved only by diplomatic means and in full respect for international law, especially the legal obligation to respect Ukraine's sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence. The full implementation of the Minsk agreements is the only way forward.

Mr. Umarov (Kazakhstan): Kazakhstan is gravely concerned about the dangerously deteriorating situation in eastern Ukraine and its severe impact on the local civilian population, which results in death and injuries and many humanitarian problems. We extend our sincere and deep condolences following the civilian casualties, which we consider to be unacceptable. We express our appreciation to Under-Secretaries-General Feltman and O'Brien and to Ambassador Apakan for their updates, as well as their efforts to resolve the crisis.

My delegation would like to refer to some key points. We are very much interested in the stability of Ukraine, taking into account all that has transpired and the current situation on the ground. We express sincere concerns about the fate of young people, women and all vulnerable groups in the crisis zone, as well as the effect on future generations. Last March, my President, who contributed to the launch of the Normandy format, mentioned at the Nuclear Security Summit that was held in Washington, D.C., that bringing an end to the conflict in eastern Ukraine should be of utmost common priority. Conflicts should be resolved through negotiations.

Kazakhstan is firmly convinced that there is no alternative to resolving the crisis in Ukraine other than through peaceful means based on the observance by all participants of their obligations, in accordance with the norms and values of international law and key principles of the Charter of the United Nations. We therefore call for strict compliance with resolution 2202 (2015), on the Minsk agreements.

Kazakhstan fully endorses the activities of the Trilateral Contact Group and its working groups on implementing confidence-building measures in the four areas they cover. We welcome the results of the Contact Group meeting held in Minsk on 1 February. We also believe that any further escalation of tensions should be prevented in order to avoid a worsening of the situation. Any aggravation of the current circumstances could have unpredictable consequences both regionally and globally. We call upon the parties to withdraw their heavy weapons from the contact line. We stand ready to assist the population, support international mediation efforts and facilitate the negotiation process among all the parties and their leaders, with a view to resolving this situation as soon as possible.

Kazakhstan continues to provide both bilateral and multilateral aid. All parties must follow their obligations

to provide free access to humanitarian assistance in the conflict zone. We believe that the full-fledged normalization of the country's situation can be achieved only with the economic recovery of Ukraine, which should be our primary and requisite consideration. We therefore call for economic confidence-building measures to be established. Kazakhstan intends to work in a balanced and unbiased manner, on an equal basis, with all Security Council members to promote compromise and consensus in order to help achieve an early solution to the crisis, keeping in mind the paramount importance of maintaining and strengthening peace and security. We call upon all parties to demonstrate wisdom, responsibility and political will to ensure an immediate return to a ceasefire regime.

Mr. Seck (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): As this is the first time that I take the floor, Sir, since your country's assumption of the presidency of the Security Council, I would like to warmly congratulate you and to wish you every success. Rest assured of the full support of the Senegalese delegation. I would also like to commend the skill, efficiency and the transparent manner in which the Swedish delegation guided the work of the Council last month.

I should like to thank you, Mr. President, for convening today's briefing with Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs Jeffrey Feltman, Ambassador Apakan and Under-Secretary-General Stephen O'Brien, whose updates are key to our discussions.

Two years after the signing of the Minsk agreement and the adoption of resolution 2202 (2015) by the Security Council, by which the former was endorsed, the situation in eastern Ukraine is still tense and has suddenly worsened now that armed clashes have resumed. The resurgence in hostilities has resulted in a heavy death toll, left many wounded and exacerbated the region's dire humanitarian situation. As others have mentioned, the fighting has disrupted electricity, water and heating for thousands, at this time of year when temperatures drop to as low as -20°C during the night. This alarming picture leads me to urge the protagonists to think about the civilians and immediately cease hostilities, respect the ceasefire and withdraw heavy weapons.

I would like to commend the reiterated call by the Trilateral Contact Group on Ukraine, which met yesterday in an emergency meeting, for an

immediate cessation of hostilities. The withdrawal of heavy weapons from the front lines and access for the observers of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and for humanitarian assistance to affected areas are all crucial.

In conclusion, I want to call for an intensification of diplomatic efforts, in particular through the Normandy format, by which France and Germany seek to support Russia and Ukraine in fully implementing the Minsk agreements for the good of the civilian population.

Ms. Guadey (Ethiopia): I wish to thank Under-Secretary-General Jeffrey Feltman and Under-Secretary-General Stephen O'Brien, as well as the Chief Monitor of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Special Monitoring Mission, Ambassador Apakan, for their briefings on the most recent developments in eastern Ukraine.

The deteriorating security situation in the region and the use of weapons prohibited by the Minsk agreements is a matter of concern. We also note the consequences of the most recent violence in terms of civilian casualties and damage to infrastructure. The humanitarian situation requires an urgent response.

We believe there is a need to do everything possible to de-escalate the situation. In that regard, we fully support the call made by the Security Council two days ago (SC/12700) for an immediate return to a ceasefire regime. No doubt, a resolution of the situation in the eastern region of Ukraine can be achieved only through a peaceful settlement. That is why it is absolutely imperative that the parties remain fully committed to the implementation of the Minsk agreements and strictly adhere to resolution 2202 (2015), which endorsed the package of measures for the implementation of the Minsk agreements.

Mr. Llorentty Solíz (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): The Plurinational State of Bolivia takes note of what we have heard in the briefings by Mr. Jeffrey Feltman, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs; Ambassador Ertuğrul Apakan, Chief Monitor of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine; and Mr. Stephen O'Brien, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator.

We express our concern about the resurgence of tension in Donbas. We deplore in particular the

non-compliance with the ban on the use of heavy artillery, given the urgent need to maintain the ceasefire. In that regard, we approve of the Council's press statement SC/12700, of 31 January, which condemns the use of weapons banned by the Minsk agreements and calls for full compliance with resolution 2202 (2015). Bolivia calls upon the parties to respect the provisions of the Minsk agreements, as endorsed by resolution 2202 (2015), which is essential to strengthen the efforts the parties must make in the search for a peaceful and political solution to the crisis.

We are particularly concerned about the impact of the crisis on the civilian population. We therefore urge the parties to strictly adhere to their obligations in terms of protecting civilians, including the need to guarantee access to humanitarian assistance and basic medical services. With the support of the international community, full compliance with the Minsk agreements and the joint efforts of the Security Council it should be possible in the short term to avoid a military escalation and to reach a peaceful solution to this crisis with a view to preventive diplomacy, which the Secretary-General has called for. Every possible effort must be made to achieve lasting peace, which in the long term will be beneficial not only for the parties but also for the region and the entire world. We also call for the parties to not step up the rhetoric, for we do not think it will contribute to a political solution to this very difficult situation.

Mr. Bermúdez (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): Uruguay is grateful for the detailed briefings by Under-Secretary-General Jeffrey Feltman and Under-Secretary-General Stephen O'Brien, as well as by Ambassador Ertuğrul Apakan.

Uruguay continues to follow with great concern the recent developments in Avdiivka and the recent violations of the ceasefire. Uruguay thinks it is crucial to step up efforts and dialogue to ensure the effective implementation of the Minsk agreements, as they constitute the right way to achieve a political and peaceful solution to this conflict. Along those lines, Uruguay calls on the parties to ensure the effective protection of human rights of the residents of all regions, in particular of the territories of Donetsk and Luhansk.

At the same time, it is also crucial for the parties to the conflict to respect international humanitarian law in all circumstances. This is critical to addressing the situation of internally displaced persons and people

requiring humanitarian assistance, in particular in terms of protection and given the current weather conditions, the continuous supply of water, food, energy and heat, emergency shelter and other critical services in temperatures that drop to -20°C

Uruguay recognizes the important work being carried out by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine and believes that it is vital for the Mission to be allowed access to all conflict areas in order to end to fulfil its mandate. We urge a resumption of the spirit with which the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2202 (2015). The parties must comply with their obligations in that regard.

In conclusion, Uruguay hopes that the challenges in implementing the Minsk agreements can be overcome and that the disputes can be settled exclusively through peaceful means, dialogue between the parties and with full respect for international law and democratic values.

Mr. Moustafa (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to join those who have spoken before me in thanking you, Mr. President, as well as Mr. Jeffrey Feltman, Mr. Ertuğrul Apakan and Mr. Stephen O'Brien for their briefings to the Security Council on the worsening of the situation in the Donbas region.

Egypt expresses its serious concern about the continuation of hostilities in eastern Ukraine, and especially with regard to the supplies of electricity, water and heat, which have been cut off and which affect a great number of civilians in very difficult weather conditions in Ukraine. Egypt calls upon all the parties to respect an immediate cessation of hostilities and to fully implement the ceasefire and prevent any provocation that could create further stress.

Furthermore, we must guarantee full access for humanitarian assistance to the entire region affected by the conflict with a view to improving the living conditions of the citizens, above all in the light of the worsening of the humanitarian situation in the region. In that context, Egypt welcomes the agreement expressed by the Council on press statement SC/12700, which was issued on 31 January.

Egypt believes that we should seek a peaceful solution to the conflict in keeping with international commitments. We support the Minsk agreements and believe that they are the appropriate framework for dealing with this crisis, which must be resolved

in the context of the region, through mediation efforts among the stakeholders and with respect and appreciation for both parties to the conflict and the entire international community. That is essential if we are to reach the ultimate goal of a political solution to the crisis in Ukraine and to achieve peace and stability in the country and a lasting settlement of the conflict in the region.

Egypt also urges full compliance with resolution 2202 (2015) and calls on all the parties involved to implement the Minsk agreements' package of measures and procedures, particularly observance of the ceasefire, the withdrawal of heavy weapons, the institution of essential constitutional reforms and the holding of elections in the Donbas region. Those should be accompanied by a settlement of the military crisis brought on by the conflict in coordination with all the parties, without exception.

Egypt reaffirms its confidence in the various formats for peaceful negotiations between the two parties. We urge those parties to redouble their efforts to reach a peaceful settlement of the crisis that can fulfil the people's aspirations within a framework of international legitimacy, to show restraint and to avoid any military escalation. We reiterate our firm support for all efforts designed to achieve a political solution to the crisis, including those in the Normandy format.

The President: The representative of the Russian Federation has asked for the floor to make a further statement.

Mr. Churkin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): Our meeting is drawing to a close, and I am now perhaps within my rights, as doyen of the Security Council, to welcome our new United States colleague, Ambassador Nikki Haley. From time to time we may have differences on particular issues, but her efforts will greatly influence the Council's ability to effectively carry out its collective functions as the body with the primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and security. I would therefore like to wish her every success.

In her statement, Ambassador Haley touched on the issue of Crimea. In that connection, I would like to remind her that it was the United States Constitution that proclaimed those marvellous, historic words "We the people". The people of Crimea clearly expressed their will in a referendum in which 93 per cent of the population voted for reunification with Russia, from

which Crimea had been unjustly and unlawfully severed. And, by the way, that expression of the people's will has subsequently been confirmed in a number of public opinion surveys conducted by Western organizations.

Still on the issue of Crimea, however, it is the representative of the United Kingdom, as aggressive as ever, who for some reason persists in saying that the crisis in Ukraine began with Crimea. I am compelled yet again to recall that the whole thing began with a coup that owed a great deal to external support. Here is my advice to the representative of the United Kingdom about his position. Give back the Malvinas; give back Gibraltar; give back the part of Cyprus that was annexed; give back the Chagos archipelago in the Indian Ocean, which has been turned into a huge military base. Perhaps then his conscience will be a little clearer and he will be able to speak to other topics.

While we sometimes have to deal in controversy, I believe nonetheless that our job as diplomats in the Security Council is to adopt resolutions and see to it that they are strictly implemented. Ten days from now we will observe the second anniversary of the adoption of the Minsk package of measures and the corresponding agreements, while 17 February is the second anniversary of the Council's adoption of resolution 2202 (2015), giving the Minsk agreements international legal status. From time to time, we hear that Russia is not fulfilling the Minsk agreements; but the President of Ukraine says that the military provisions of the Minsk agreements must be complied with before the political ones are dealt with. It is not hard to figure out who is right and who is wrong here. All we have to do is look at a Security Council document — the same resolution 2202 (2015), to which the package of measures is attached as annex I. It contains some very simple propositions that we can all understand.

Regarding the relationship between military and political measures, paragraph 9 of the annex provides for

"Reinstatement of full control over the State border by the Government of Ukraine throughout the conflict area, starting on day 1 after the local elections and ending after the comprehensive political settlement ... provided that paragraph 11 has been implemented in consultation with and upon agreement by representatives of certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions in the framework of the Trilateral Contact Group."

That means that certain military steps should start only after various political measures have been implemented. Now, what are those conditions in paragraph 11 that have to be implemented? Paragraph 11 provides for

“Carrying out constitutional reform in Ukraine with a new constitution ... providing for decentralization as a key element ... as well as adopting permanent legislation on the special status of certain areas in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions in line with measures as set out in the footnote”.

And the footnote clearly sets out the eight measures that must be taken in order to ensure special status for south-eastern Ukraine. They are extremely precise. The President of France, who made a very active and substantive contribution, and the Chancellor and the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Germany, who made a number of proposals that were then agreed to by everyone, did not spend 17 hours drafting them in vain..

There can simply be no arguing here. And, logically, who could suggest or expect that Donetsk and Luhansk should close off their borders and allow themselves to be walled in? And then what? Throw themselves on the mercy of the Kyiv authorities? Can the citizens of Donetsk and Luhansk trust the Kyiv authorities? At one point — I believe it was 1 July 2014 — President Poroshenko appeared on Ukrainian television and said that the citizens of Donetsk and Luhansk were so beloved in Kyiv that there would be no heavy-artillery shelling of residential areas during their anti-terrorism operations. He said that his valiant warriors had other ways of recovering those territories and that they would not be shelling residential areas with heavy weapons.

Since then, Mr. Apakan can confirm that not a single day has passed when residential areas have not been shelled targets, while high-rise buildings are fired on one day and then fired on again the next. Take the photograph that Ambassador Yelchenko showed us today. If it is a picture of a ruined building in Avdiivka, of course it is terrible. But he could have brought similar photos of other areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, as many as you like. Why did he not do that?

Yes, of course, Ukrainian soldiers have died in the fighting, and there is nothing good about that. But most of those who have died on the Donetsk and Luhansk side have been civilians, including women and children. Why not talk about them? Of course we could draft some document, but if we are serious people representing

serious Governments, especially the Governments that have been directly involved in the process, by the way, let me point out to dear Ambassador Haley that we know how they respect the American authorities in Kyiv, which means that in this regard the American authorities can have some very serious influence on the developing situation. All that is needed is to call for the implementation of the relatively simple provisions in the Minsk package in order to restore Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. And yet Kyiv's actions are in fact bringing about the destruction of its territorial integrity. Ambassador Yelchenko says that the local people cannot do this, cannot wreak such destruction, and so forth. But can the local Ukrainians on the Ukrainian side wreak such destruction on Donetsk and Luhansk? It seems that they can. Do they not consider these Ukrainian citizens their brethren? While that would be very sad, we know that that is exactly what some hotheads in Kyiv think and believe.

I would like to appeal to the common-sense section of the Ukrainian political spectrum. But I repeat that, needless to say, without major influence from those on the external factor side, the Normandy format and others, none of this will succeed. Because they will simply deceive their own people with unsubstantiated claims that own population that Kyiv has somehow complied with the Minsk agreements. They say that they are recapturing their country, metre by metre. How many people will have to die as they progress metre by metre from Avdiivka to the Ukrainian border? How many Ukrainian soldiers and civilians will have to die? And this at a time when a political alternative exists, agreed to at the highest level, and including President Poroshenko's participation two years ago. While it is therefore regrettable that what we heard today from the Ukrainian delegation was totally irresponsible, I hope that our frank discussion will still enable those who really want to resolve the Ukrainian crisis to look at things more objectively and push Kyiv into taking the steps that are essential to establishing peace in Ukraine. It would certainly be a tragedy if the situation we have faced in the past two or three years should drag on any longer.

The President: I shall now make a further statement in my capacity as the representative of Ukraine.

Today is indeed Groundhog Day. The first statement made by the Russian delegation repeats word for word what was said in the consultations two days ago. As

far as the second statement is concerned, I do not even wish to comment on that cocktail of demagoguery.

I wish to stress that such frivolous interpretations of the reports of the Special Monitoring Mission of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) are more than ridiculous. There is no reference to Ukrainian forces in OSCE reports; that is a known fact. I would rather trust the assessment of Ambassador Apakan, who is with us today.

The Russian Ambassador asserted that the coal factory in Avdiivka was shelled by Ukrainian forces. I have to clarify once again that this factory is located on territory controlled by the Ukrainian Government, so the shells that rained down on the factory were propelled by Russian guns. This was reported by all three briefers.

Russia blames President Poroshenko and other high Ukrainian officials for stirring up the violence around Avdiivka. However, it is not Poroshenko who is supplying the terrorists with ammunition and armour. Indeed, one of them, captured during the recent attack on Avdiivka, already confessed, just yesterday, that the Russian officers commanding his unit had given orders to capture the town before the end of last week; this is all documented.

The reality is very simple. It is Russian weapons that are killing Ukrainians. It is Russian soldiers and

mercenaries who have come to Ukraine to earn money for murder. Recalling my remarks about the resumption of shelling in Avdiivka about an hour ago, I would like to inform my colleagues that, as a result, at least two civilians were killed and another injured. The shelling continues to batter residential areas even as we speak, including the school building used for the distribution of humanitarian supplies.

Thus, we do not exclude any escalation or provocation in and around Donetsk, in further attempts to discredit the Ukrainian armed forces and the Ukrainian leadership. We have information about the evacuation of civilians in Donetsk that we believe to be a preparation for a possible provocation similar to what happened in August 2008, when Russia prepared to attack Georgia.

As I stated at the beginning of the meeting, we expected a serious, professional dialogue that would put an end to the violence and help to avert a humanitarian disaster and save lives. Denying reality is not the way to achieve this. It seems that Russia is living in a parallel reality created by current Russian propaganda, a parallel reality that becomes even more twisted when Ambassador Churkin starts to talk about Crimea.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

The meeting rose at 4.55 p.m.