

34th Special Session of the Human Rights Council
Special Session on the deteriorating human rights situation in Ukraine stemming from
the Russian aggression

12 May 2022
National statement by Iceland

Thank you, Mr. President.

IHL and the Geneva Conventions are clear on the do's and don'ts in international armed conflicts. Human Rights law is also clear. We thus should not be having to reconvene today, but Russia's unimaginable violations and disregard for international law and the rules of war have made this essential.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has caused widespread destruction and unspeakable suffering of civilians in Ukraine, including women and girls. We are witnessing torture and other ill-treatment, arbitrary detention, enforced disappearances, and sexual and gender-based violence. In Bucha, Mariupol and elsewhere, we have seen images of civilians executed and buried in mass graves. Civilians must never be a target and every precaution must be taken to ensure their safety.

There should be no impunity. The Commission of Inquiry will play a central role in collecting evidence and ensuring accountability for the crimes committed. We fully support the investigation launched by the ICC and the work of the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine and other accountability mechanisms. These are necessary to ensure justice for victims, but also to prevent future violations.

I thank you.

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Statement by Estonia on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries
Eva-Maria Liimets, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Estonia

Mr President,

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Nordic-Baltic countries. We welcome the convening of this Special Session and thank the High Commissioner and the speakers for their statements.

It has been more than two months now since Russia launched the unprovoked and unjustified war against Ukraine in grave violation of international law. Russia has consistently ignored the calls by the UN General Assembly, this Council, other international bodies as well as the order of the International Court of Justice to cease aggression and immediately withdraw all forces and military equipment from the territory of Ukraine.

The General Assembly has voted in favor of suspending Russia's membership rights of this very Council – a clear sign that the world has strongly condemned Russia's actions, including the grave violations of human rights.

Unfortunately, all this has not been enough. We are still facing one of the fastest-growing displacement and humanitarian crises where innocent civilians suffer the most. We are seeing devastating consequences globally, including for food and energy security. Developing countries and persons in vulnerable situations are the most affected.

As said by the High Commissioner, Russian armed forces have indiscriminately shelled and bombed populated areas, wrecking hospitals, schools and other civilian infrastructure. We are witnessing torture and other ill-treatment, sexual and gender-based violence, used as a weapon of war, arbitrary arrests, abductions, enforced disappearances and deportations, especially of children and their illegal adoptions in Russia. We are witnessing what may amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity on a daily basis.

We strongly denounce Russia's actions as well as the denials, deceptions, lies and disinformation.

We also support the need for national and international, transparent, independent and prompt investigations into all violations and abuses of international human rights law and international humanitarian law.

We welcome the work already done by the independent international commission of inquiry on Ukraine. We fully support the investigation by the International Criminal Court and other initiatives. We encourage efficient and effective coordination among all relevant parties in the collection and documentation of the evidence.

Last but not least, we once again urge Russia to immediately end its aggression and to comply with its obligations under international law.

Thank you.

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Statement by the Marshall Islands on behalf of the “Group of Friends of Accountability following the Aggression against Ukraine”, that Iceland is a member of.
Hon. Casten N. Nemra, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade of the Republic of the Marshall Islands

Thank you, Mr. President,

I am pleased to deliver this statement on behalf of the Group of Friends of Accountability following the Aggression against Ukraine.

77 days have passed since Russia’s unprovoked, unjust and illegal invasion of Ukraine. For 77 days, Russian armed forces have indiscriminately shelled and bombed populated areas of Ukraine, targeted civilians and destroyed and damaged hospitals, schools and other civilian infrastructure, as reported by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. Bucha, Kramatorsk and Mariupol are but some of the names now associated around the world with suffering and devastation because of the Russian Aggression.

We deplore the thousands of civilian casualties, including hundreds of children. We are appalled by the continued reports of the use of torture and other ill-treatment, arbitrary killings and detention, enforced disappearances and sexual and gender-based violence. These are actions that may amount to war crimes and other crimes under international law. Such atrocity crimes are crimes against all of us.

The Russian state-sponsored massive disinformation campaign is an affront to democratic processes and human rights, and requires all states to be vigilant in exposing the truth. We are gravely concerned about the devastating spillover effects of Russia’s invasion on global food and energy systems. Least developed, lower-income, and middle-income countries as well as persons in vulnerable situations in all regions around the world will be most severely impacted.

Excellencies, we stress the importance of preserving the long record of non-use of nuclear weapons. We call on the Russian Federation to exercise restraint and de-escalate its nuclear rhetoric.

It is imperative that all perpetrators of violations and abuses of human rights and violations of international humanitarian law be held to account. Justice for victims is the foundation for future peace and reconciliation and for the prevention of further atrocities. For this, the collection and preservation of evidence is essential.

The Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine has a central role to play in this regard. We welcome the swift appointment of its three members and thank them for their update provided to the Council today. We encourage continued efforts to ensure the prompt and full operationalization of the Commission of Inquiry to investigate all alleged abuses and violations of human rights and violations of international humanitarian law, and related crimes, in the context of the Russian Federation's aggression against Ukraine. The Group of Friends also welcomes the investigation launched by the International Criminal Court and the recent report by the experts appointed under the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe's Moscow Mechanism as critical steps towards accountability. Importantly, these efforts are complemented by national investigations in Ukraine and other countries, including on the basis of universal jurisdiction, and by the work carried out by the OHCHR, especially the Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine, and civil society actors.

Coordination of efforts among the different actors is of crucial importance. Therefore, we call on all those involved in the collection and preservation of evidence to coordinate proactively to ensure complementarity and the meticulous collection of the most precise evidence available.

Finally, we reiterate the importance of comprehensive, verifiable and transparent records of casualties in situations of armed violence and conflict, which can contribute to better protection of civilians and help prevent violations of international law.

The process towards accountability will bring challenges but we will not let ourselves be discouraged. The Group of Friends is committed to information-sharing, awareness-building and advocacy. Impunity must be fought, justice must prevail, and international law and human rights must be protected.

Thank you.

Signatories:

1. Albania
2. Australia
3. Austria
4. Belgium
5. Bulgaria
6. Canada
7. Colombia
8. Croatia
9. Cyprus
10. Czech Republic
11. Denmark
12. Estonia
13. Finland
14. France
15. Georgia

16. Germany
17. Greece
18. Guatemala
19. Iceland
20. Ireland
21. Italy
22. Japan
23. Latvia
24. Liechtenstein
25. Lithuania
26. Luxembourg
27. Malta
28. Marshall Islands
29. Montenegro
30. Netherlands
31. New Zealand
32. North Macedonia
33. Norway
34. Poland
35. Portugal
36. Romania
37. Slovakia
38. Slovenia
39. Sweden
40. Switzerland
41. Ukraine
42. United Kingdom
43. United States