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Permanent Mission of Ukraine
to the International Organizations in Vienna

Statement on political persecution of Pavlo Hryb and other Ukrainian citizens illegally detained by Russia

As delivered by Ambassador Ihor Prokopchuk,
Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the International Organizations in Vienna,
to the 1221st meeting of the Permanent Council,
28 March 2019

Mr. Chairperson,

The delegation of Ukraine draws attention of the Permanent Council to yet another travesty of justice performed by the Russian authorities by delivering through the Severo-Kavkazskiy district military court on 22 March 2019 an unlawful verdict to the Ukrainian citizen Pavlo Hryb, convicting him to 6 years in prison on fabricated charges of terrorism. The case of Pavlo Hryb is well-known to the OSCE participating States as it was regularly raised in the Permanent Council since his abduction on the territory of Belarus in 2017.

Expressing a strong protest against the verdict, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine emphasized that “the Russian side blatantly violated the norms and principles of international law – from the brutal kidnapping of Pavlo Hryb in the city of Gomel (Republic of Belarus) on 24 August 2017, to the failure to provide information on his location for a considerable period of time, illegal detention in the cities of Krasnodar and Rostov-on-Don, denial of medical assistance up to the delivery of the unlawful verdict.”

Throughout the court hearings all testimonies provided by Pavlo Hryb about intimidation, physical influence and psychological coercion by the Russian law enforcement representatives were plainly dismissed.

The health condition of Pavlo Hryb who from birth has suffered from serious illness is critical. He requires continuous medical assistance, regular complex medical examination and stay in a specialized medical facility. Before his abduction and illegal detention by the Russian authorities, Pavlo was awaiting a scheduled operation which is now an urgent necessity. The Russian authorities have flagrantly violated his human rights, in particular the right to a fair trial and now they deny his right to life by continuing to enforce the illegal detention in the inhumane conditions of the Russian penitentiary system. In this unbearable situation Pavlo Hryb announced a hunger strike from Monday, 25 March 2019. The Ukrainian Ombudsperson has appealed to her Russian counterpart requesting her immediate interference.

Ukraine demands that the unlawful verdict in the case of Pavlo Hryb be rescinded, that he be provided with constant medical assistance with access of Ukrainian and international doctors. We demand that he be released and ensured unhindered return to Ukraine.

We also draw attention of the Permanent Council to the plight of many other Ukrainian citizens who had been placed in illegal detention by the Russian authorities and are held in captivity as

hostages. Among them Oleg Sentsov, Oleksandr Kolchenko, Roman Sushchenko, Volodymyr Balukh and many others who had been thrown in jail on fabricated charges.

Ongoing severe repressions in the Russia-occupied parts of Ukraine rapidly multiply the sufferings and the number of illegally detained Ukrainian citizens. According to the lawyer of Edem Bekirov, about whom we spoke at the recent side event in the OSCE and who remains in illegal detention, because of lack of due medical care he now has to sleep in a sitting position. Yesterday the Russian occupation administration in Crimea staged another large-scale raid on over twenty families of Crimean Tatars, again enlarging the numbers of people in illegal detention. We face the tragic reality when the brutal repressions of the Russian occupation regime make the notions of basic human rights and freedoms obsolete in the Russia-occupied parts of Ukraine.

Ukraine takes this opportunity to reaffirm the readiness of the Ukrainian side to release 25 Russian citizens convicted for crimes in Ukraine against Ukraine, in exchange for release by Russia of 25 illegally detained Ukrainian citizens. If the Russian authorities are interested to give at least some weight to their claims of care for the Russian citizens abroad, they could now return 25 citizens of the Russian Federation back to their home country – the citizens who appealed to the Russian president for their return. Unfortunately, for now we do not see such interest on the Russian side.

Mr. Chairperson,

Since the armed attack of the Russian forces on the Ukrainian Naval Forces vessels near the Kerch Strait on 25 November 2018, Ukraine and the overwhelming majority of the OSCE participating States have consistently and strongly urged the Russian Federation to immediately release the captured Ukrainian servicemen and vessels and ensure their return to Ukraine. However, they remain in captivity of the Russian Federation, which defies their status of prisoners of war and breaches the norms of international humanitarian law by taking the captured military personnel to a civilian court. Russia further exacerbates its flagrant violations as last week all 24 captured servicemen were ordered to undergo a psychiatric examination.

We draw attention of the Russian delegation and all members of the Permanent Council to the conclusion of the UN Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights that all 24 captured Ukrainian servicemen “shall enjoy the status of a prisoner of war until a competent tribunal determines otherwise”. The OHCHR also recalls that prisoners of war must *inter alia* be humanely treated, protected against violence or intimidation, and provided with the medical assistance if needed.

Ukraine demands from Russia to release the captured Ukrainian servicemen without further delay and, until that happens, to respect unconditionally their status as prisoners of war. We urge Russia to respect the norms of international humanitarian law, enshrined in the Geneva Conventions, to allow access of ICRC representatives, the necessary medical assistance and correspondence.

Mr. Chairperson,

Against the backdrop of clear, gross and uncorrected violations by Russia of OSCE principles and commitments as well as the blatant grave violations of human rights by the Russian authorities, it remains imperative to strengthen politico-diplomatic pressure on Russia to make it release the Ukrainian citizens, who are in Russia’s illegal detention and captivity.

We call upon the OSCE Chairmanship and the Secretary General to attach the highest priority to the issue of immediate release of illegally detained Ukrainian citizens by Russia.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.