



Key Messages Regarding the Territorial Integrity of Ukraine

The issue of territories is primarily a matter of security, the rights of Ukrainian citizens, and the ability to live, express one's identity, and exercise civic, socio-economic, and political rights. During the Russian occupation of Crimea and other Ukrainian territories, Ukrainian citizens face systemic repression, torture, enforced disappearances, and other forms of persecution and/or international crimes. The Russian occupation regime targets Crimean Tatars, Ukrainian activists, journalists, and all those who express dissent against the illegal occupation. The policy of the occupation administration is aimed at eradicating Ukrainian and Crimean Tatar identity, enforcing violent passportization, and altering the demographic composition of the population, which constitutes human rights violations and international crimes. A distinct component of this policy is the systemic Russification and assimilation of the Indigenous people of Ukraine—the Crimean Tatars: restrictions on the use of the Crimean Tatar language, pressure on educational and cultural institutions, the banning of the Mejlis (designated an extremist organization), and the creation of conditions that force Crimean Tatars to leave the peninsula.

Moreover, the violation of Ukraine's territorial integrity creates a dangerous precedent for the entire world, enabling both the Russian Federation and other authoritarian actors to continue violating international law and redrawing borders by force. The occupation of Crimea was the first annexation attempt since World War II, and recognizing the outcomes of this attempt—Crimea and other temporarily occupied territories being so-called “joined” to the Russian Federation—would undermine the principles of the international order, which guarantee the sovereignty and independence of all states.

The lack of an adequate international response to the violation of international law in 2014 was not only a moral failure but also a strategic miscalculation. It facilitated the transformation of Crimea into one of the main staging grounds for further Russian aggression against Ukraine, including the full-scale invasion in 2022. Occupied Crimea has become a military base used to launch attacks on mainland Ukraine, supply resources for war, and deploy nuclear rhetoric as a tool of intimidation. Thus, Crimea has become not only a symbol of impunity but also a tangible source of threats to regional and global security.

1. The European Court of Human Rights has determined that the Russian Federation established effective control over the Crimean Peninsula as of 27 February 2014, nearly a month before the so-called “referendum” took place. Therefore, the “referendum” was conducted under conditions of Russian occupation and military control, rendering it devoid of any legal meaning or consequence (<https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng?i=002-14347>).
2. In its annual reports, the Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court classified the 2014 events in Crimea as an international armed conflict, noting that the Russian Federation used its Armed Forces to seize the territory of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol

<https://www.icc-cpi.int/sites/default/files/itemsDocuments/2020-PE/2020-pe-report-eng.pdf>).

3. According to the Constitution of Ukraine, any changes to the country's territory can only be decided through an all-Ukrainian referendum. The "vote" held in Crimea on 16 March 2014 does not meet this constitutional requirement (<https://www.president.gov.ua/ua/documents/constitution/konstituciya-ukrayini-rozdil-ii>).
4. United Nations General Assembly Resolution 68/262 (27 March 2014) affirmed Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, declaring the "referendum" in Crimea illegal. Additionally, Resolutions 71/205 (2016), 72/190 (2017), 73/263 (2018), 74/168 (2019), 75/192 (2020), 76/179 (2021), and 77/229 (2022) address the human rights situation in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, temporarily occupied by the Russian Federation, documenting numerous cases of persecution of the pro-Ukrainian population, torture, and enforced disappearances (<https://docs.un.org/en/A/RES/68/262>, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/RES/71/205>, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/RES/72/190>, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/RES/73/263>, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/RES/74/168>, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/RES/75/192>, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/RES/76/179>, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/RES/77/229>).
5. On 9 April 2014, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) adopted a resolution condemning the actions of the Russian Federation related to the occupation of Crimea and criticized Russia's initiatives regarding the federalization of Ukraine. The Assembly also declared the so-called Crimean "referendum" to be in contradiction with both the Constitution of Ukraine and Crimean legislation. The resolution emphasized that the results of the vote and the joining of Crimea to Russia have no legal validity and are not recognized by the Council of Europe. Russia's actions were officially defined as an act of aggression against Ukraine (<https://pace.coe.int/en/files/20873/html>).
6. Following the onset of the Russian occupation, a wave of enforced disappearances of journalists, Ukrainian, and Crimean Tatar activists began. This was documented by the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine in its information note dated 31 March 2021, titled "Enforced Disappearances in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the City of Sevastopol (Ukraine), Temporarily Occupied by the Russian Federation." Specifically, "In the spring of 2014, an armed group known as "Crimean self-defense," along with similar armed groups, targeted individuals who supported Ukraine's territorial integrity, participated in the Revolution of Dignity protests, opposed the illegal "referendum" of 16 March 2014, or were otherwise considered pro-Ukrainian. Among the first victims of enforced disappearances were six media workers, including those who came to Crimea from mainland Ukraine to cover the early stages of the occupation" (<https://ukraine.un.org/uk/download/64938/123652>).
7. A separate set of UN General Assembly resolutions—73/194 (2018), 74/17 (2019), and 75/29 (2020)—confirmed the non-recognition policy regarding the annexation attempt of Crimea and called upon all states, international organizations, and institutions not to recognize any change in the peninsula's status and to refrain from any actions or statements that could be interpreted as such (<https://docs.un.org/en/A/RES/73/194>, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/RES/74/17>, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/RES/75/29>).
8. In 2023, the UN General Assembly adopted Resolution 77/275, which condemned the attempted annexation of additional Ukrainian territories, including parts of

Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia, and Kherson regions. The resolution confirmed that no actions taken by the Russian Federation can have legal effect in altering the status of any part of Ukraine's territory.

9. Neither Ukraine, nor the European Union, nor the United States recognized the results of the so-called "referendum vote." The OSCE declared the "referendum" illegal as it contradicted the Constitution of Ukraine and international law and refused to send observers, citing non-recognition of the process (<https://www.osce.org/cio/116313>).
10. In 2018, the U.S. Department of State issued the Crimea Declaration—an official statement clearly asserting that the United States does not and will never recognize Russia's illegal attempted annexation of Crimea. The declaration reaffirmed unwavering support for Ukraine's territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders and a commitment to the principles of sovereignty, border inviolability, and non-interference in the internal affairs of states, which are fundamental norms of international law.
11. Article 2 of the Charter of the United Nations (1945) prohibits the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state. No state has the right to intervene in the internal affairs of another. Furthermore, the 1974 Declaration on the Definition of Aggression states that the invasion or attack by the armed forces of a state on the territory of another state, any military occupation, the annexation of a state's territory by force, or a blockade of ports or coasts constitutes an act of aggression (https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/No%20Volume/Part/un_charter.pdf).
12. The Helsinki Final Act, signed by OSCE member states, affirms: the inviolability of borders in Europe; state sovereignty and non-interference in internal affairs; and the peaceful resolution of conflicts (<https://www.osce.org/helsinki-final-act>).
13. The 1994 Budapest Memorandum, signed by Ukraine, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Russia, declared respect for Ukraine's territorial integrity in exchange for its renunciation of nuclear weapons (https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/998_158#Text).
14. In 2014, the Russian Federation grossly violated a series of international treaties in which it had committed to respect Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. These include: the 1997 Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation, and Partnership between Ukraine and the Russian Federation, in which Russia formally recognized Ukraine's borders, including Crimea; the 2003 Treaty between Ukraine and the Russian Federation on the Ukrainian-Russian State Border, which confirmed the boundaries between the two states; the 1997 Partition Treaty on the Status and Conditions of the Black Sea Fleet, which acknowledged Ukraine's sovereignty over Crimea; and the 1991 Agreement on the Establishment of the Commonwealth of Independent States, which reaffirmed the independence and territorial integrity of all member states, including Ukraine (https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/643_006#Text, https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/643_076#Text, https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/997_077#Text).

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