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auprès de l'OSCE

**STATEMENT BY FIRST SECRETARY RICK STEENWEG
ON THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION'S ONGOING AGGRESSION AGAINST UKRAINE
1427th SPECIAL MEETING OF THE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

6 June 2023

Mr. Chair,

Over the past 468 days, we have raised the systematic targeting of civilians by Russian forces, their use of torture chambers, the separation and abduction of Ukrainian children from their families, the attempts to freeze Ukrainians and limit their food supply, the forced conscription of prisoners and those under occupation, as well as ongoing dismissal of international humanitarian and human rights obligations. To quote the Permanent Representative from Poland last week: “all this is a glaring proof of the criminal face of the Russian choice. [...] Indeed, the objective [is] to kill, to erase, to annihilate. “

And now as a result of Russia's war of aggression, the Nova Kakhovka dam has been severely damaged, flooding eight settlements so far, untold square kilometers of agricultural land, putting tens of thousands of civilians at risk, and creating a potential ecological disaster. Homes, fields, and towns are being flooded, reducing access to potable water, destroying the local economy and infrastructure, and creating a severe deterioration in the humanitarian situation for thousands of civilians now in need of assistance. If the dam were to completely collapse, putting the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant in harm's way, the environmental consequences could be catastrophic. Already, the damage is leading to a significant reduction in the level of the Kakhovka reservoir which supplies essential cooling water for the ZNPP.

This would not have happened had Russia not invaded Ukraine in February last year. Russia's war is to blame for this disaster, and for the thousands of people currently evacuating their flooding homes. Russia can help them by ending this war now and unconditionally withdrawing all troops and military equipment from the internationally recognized territory of Ukraine. We call on it to do so immediately, to release all SMM staff and assets, and to abide by its obligations under international law and by its commitments to OSCE principles.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.