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**STATEMENT BY
AMBASSADOR VÉRONIQUE PEPIN-HALLÉ, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE
OF CANADA TO THE OSCE, AT THE 1490th MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

3 October 2024

On the Russian Federation's ongoing aggression against Ukraine

Madam Chairperson,

I should like to begin by drawing attention to Defenders Day, celebrated in Ukraine every year on 1 October. My country joins the Ukrainians in honouring the courage of the men and women who defend their country against the Russian aggression. We remember those who have paid the ultimate price for freedom, and the families of those whose fate we do not know.

Madam Chair,

Last Saturday, on 28 September, the Russian Federation attacked a medical center in Sumy, killing at least 10 people.

According to Ukrainian officials, the first strike was followed by a second one shortly after, just as patients and staff were evacuating. The Russian Federation is known to use “double-tap” strikes to hit the same target twice, the second time when first responders rush to the scene to assist victims. Russia's double-tap strikes are reminiscent of its infamous military track record in Syria.

Earlier this year, the World Health Organization expressed grave concern about a new trend of health transport workers, like ambulances, facing three-times the risk of injury and death compared to other healthcare service workers, because they come under fire in responding to emergency calls or at their bases.

International humanitarian law affords special protection to medical facilities and personnel, the sick and the wounded. Yet, we recall with horror the Russian attack on a children's and maternity hospital in Mariupol in March 2022, which killed and injured pregnant women, babies, and healthcare workers. We remember with the same horror the more recent attack on Ukraine's Okhmatdyt children's hospital which treated pediatric cancer patients. Images of heavily injured and pregnant women on stretchers and pediatric cancer patients sitting outside a bombed hospital have become two of the most recognizable images of Russia's brutal aggression against Ukraine.

Madam Chair,

The WHO warned earlier this month that focus on health is more critical than ever, as Ukrainians prepare to face a third winter with limited electricity supply under Russia's aggression.

WHO noted the consequences of attacks on energy infrastructure, which can directly compromise the functioning of health facilities: they can lead to jeopardized storage and distribution of vaccines, increase in waterborne and foodborne diseases, rise in respiratory infections, and the threat of antimicrobial resistance which could have implications beyond Ukraine.

When it comes to the spread of diseases in today's interconnected world, the COVID-19 pandemic serves as a recent reminder of how devastating a breakdown of medical infrastructure can be.

The effect of Russia's war on mental health and well-being is an additional burden on Ukrainians, who face a third year under constant menace of attack. Security is crucial to ensure psychological health. It is imperative that Ukrainian families be allowed to live in safety.

For its part, Canada is supporting the World Health Organization with a \$10 million CAD grant to improve the mental health and psychosocial well-being of conflict-affected Ukrainians and strengthen the systems and delivery of mental health and psychosocial support in Ukraine.

WHO's Regional Director for Europe, Dr Hans Henri Kluge said "Ukraine needs health and security – security from attacks, from vaccine-preventable diseases, from AMR, from a range of issues that compromise health and well-being."

Dear colleagues,

The Russian Federation puts us all in danger with its unilateral and unjustifiable war against Ukraine.

We call upon the Russian Federation to put an end to this brutal aggression and to withdraw from Ukraine's internationally recognized borders.

The majority of participating States want to live in peace with one another while co-operating on questions of common interest, within international organizations, including the OSCE.

The Russian Federation is one of the sole exceptions. Through its act of aggression against Ukraine and its malicious activities directed against other participating States, it continues to demonstrate its true nature as a partner for peace.

Thank you, Madam Chairperson.