



AUSTRALIA



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UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL
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***Arria Formula meeting – 75 years from the end of
the Second World War on European soil – lessons
learned for preventing future atrocities,
responsibility of the Security Council***

**Statement by H.E. Mitch Fifield
Ambassador and Permanent Representative
of Australia to the United Nations**

(As delivered)

The Second World War was unprecedented in its destruction, claiming an estimated 85 million lives.

The toll of this war on civilians was staggering – it is telling that the mass atrocity crimes of genocide and crimes against humanity were born of its horrors.

A million Australians served in the theatres of this conflict, in Africa, Asia, the Pacific and Europe, to end fascism and totalitarianism.

This institution was also conceived in the ashes of this war.

The recognition that peace is indivisible is at the heart of the UN Charter. A breach of the peace anywhere threatens peace everywhere.

Our obligations, under the Charter, to settle disputes peacefully, under the law, and to refrain from the threat or use of force are pillars of the post-war order.

The annexation of Crimea six years ago, by a member of this Council, can only be described as a flagrant violation of this critical norm.

The General Assembly, our highest representative body, rightfully recognises this action as illegal.

Australia remains steadfast in our support for Ukraine's sovereignty, territorial integrity and the rights of its citizens.

Mr President,

The Charter bestows significant powers on this Council.

But, as the Charter makes clear, this power comes with responsibilities and duties owed to all Member States *to act* to preserve international peace and security.

The veto entrusted to this Council's permanent members is a privilege. It must not be abused.

Australia has always harboured concerns about the veto and led efforts to expand the General Assembly's powers.

Indeed, our opposition in 1945 led one Permanent Member, a traditional friend of Australia, to call our Foreign Minister "the most frightful man in the world".

It is particularly difficult to see exercise of the veto and paralysis of this Council in situations where mass atrocity crimes are being committed.

This is entirely inconsistent with the intention of the Charter's drafters.

At this harrowing point in history, as we face escalating threats to human security due to the COVID-19 pandemic, these concerns about the use of the veto are amplified.

While we support initiatives for voluntary restraint, we are also interested in exploring ways to use the General Assembly, our high representative body, to increase transparency on the use of the veto.

Thank you.

(373 words)