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UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY
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The situation in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine - Item 67

Statement by H.E. Gillian Bird
Ambassador and Permanent Representative
of Australia to the United Nations

As delivered

It is now almost five years since Crimea's annexation. An act this chamber recognised as illegal in resolution 68/262. And, today we mark the fifth anniversary of the *Maidan* protests in Ukraine.

It is critical that this Assembly keeps the situation in Ukraine – and the ongoing violations of international law there – on its agenda.

Mr President,

Australia is firmly committed to Ukraine's sovereignty and its territorial integrity, within internationally recognised borders.

Australia backs up this commitment with a robust set of sanctions designed to respond to ongoing threats to Ukrainian sovereignty.

We deplore Russian-backed authorities' reportedly unfair administration of justice in Crimea and their attacks on basic freedoms of expression and association there.

We note with concern the de-registration of Jehovah's Witnesses in Crimea.

Australia is also concerned by the recent escalation of tensions in the Kerch Strait and adjacent Seas. We are particularly concerned by the Russian Federation's seizure of Ukrainian naval personnel and vessels in waters near the Kerch Strait.

We reiterate calls on Russia to release, immediately and unconditionally, Ukraine's sailors and vessels.

We also call on Russia to refrain from impeding the lawful exercise of navigational freedoms and rights in the Black Sea, the Sea of Azov and the Kerch Strait. Ukraine must be allowed unhindered access to its ports.

Mr President,

It is close now to five years since 298 innocent people on Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 – including 38 who called Australia home – were killed.

Australia remains committed to the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 2166, which condemned this horrific act and resolved to hold those responsible to account.

Australia's determination to establish the truth of the circumstances surrounding the downing of MH17 will not wane.

Mr President,

Australia does not recognise actions that seek to legitimise the Russian Federation's interventions in eastern Ukraine, including the so-called 'elections' in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions in November 2018.

The Minsk agreements remain the only agreed basis for resolving the situation in eastern Ukraine. We call on all parties to fulfil their commitments, particularly the implementation of a comprehensive and lasting ceasefire and the return of Ukraine's borders to Ukraine's control.

The purported annexation of Crimea and ongoing conflict in eastern Ukraine is having a severe impact on civilians. More than 3,300 have been killed, up to 9,000 injured, and 1.5 million internally displaced.

As ASG Jenča noted last week, the half a million people living within five kilometres of the ‘contact line’ are exposed to periodic shelling, gunfire, landmines and unexploded ordnance. This area is among the most mine-contaminated in the world.

The impacts of the conflict fall disproportionately on vulnerable groups, such as the elderly and children.

Australia urges all parties to guarantee unimpeded access to Crimea, Donetsk and Luhansk for the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the OSCE’s Special Monitoring Mission and other international organisations.

And, finally, we call on all parties to redouble efforts to resolve the conflict.