

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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## **Ukraine: OSCE Monitoring Mission needed to calm tensions and prevent further human rights violations**

With the stand-off between Ukraine and Russia in Crimea intensifying and tensions in several towns and cities in the east of the country showing no signs of abating, there is an urgent need for the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) to establish a monitoring mission with a strong human rights component and access to all parts of the country, including Crimea.

The last few days have seen a growing number of threats and intimidation of human rights monitors, independent observers, journalists and pro-Ukrainian protestors in Crimea.

On 6 March, representatives of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), Tim Guldemann, Personal Envoy of the Swiss OSCE Chair in Office, and Astrid Thors, High Commissioner for National Minorities, were forced to cut short their visit to Crimea due to security concerns. On both 6 March and again on 7 March, a team of observers from the OSCE was prevented from entering Crimea by unidentified armed personnel.

On 5 March, the UN Special Envoy Robert Serry arrived in Crimea, but was threatened by an aggressive crowd chanting pro-Russian slogans when he stopped at a cafe, and forced by some armed men to get back in his vehicle, together with his companions, and go to Simferopol airport and leave Crimea. While international media outlets are continuing to report from Crimea, it is clear that even these are facing increasing restrictions. Amnesty International has spoken to a number of journalists and human rights defenders in Crimea. Their accounts of events on the ground in Yalta, Kerch and Simferopol, present a consistent picture. Peaceful protesters who attempt to express their support for the unity of Ukraine and opposition to Russian military presence on the Crimean peninsula face intimidation from pro-Russian activists. Police are often absent, present in small numbers, or fail to intervene when journalists and protestors are attacked.

On 5 March 2014, a group of about 40 women staged a peaceful protest in front of the Ukrainian Naval headquarter in Simferopol. They were holding handwritten placards calling for peace and denouncing Russia's military intervention in Crimea. Within minutes, they were confronted by some 100 aggressive men who identified themselves as the Crimean Self Defence League and grabbed and tore to pieces their placards, and forced them to leave.

Journalists and human rights defenders trying to document the events and report violations have been confronted by aggressive groups, some of them armed, including military units. For example, on 5 March, a group of human rights monitors from EuroMaydan-SOStravelling from Simferopol to Evpatoriya tried to follow a column of around 20 military vehicles that had no number plates and no markings that would indicate which forces they belonged to. Their car was stopped, and all those inside ordered to get out at gunpoint. The military personnel ordered the activists to stop following them and go back. They refused to explain who they were and what they were doing in Crimea. When the activists insisted on their right to travel freely in Ukraine and refused to drive away, the men punctured the tires of their car and left.

A journalist from the media outlet "Topics of the Week – Crimea" told Amnesty International how he was attacked by a group of men identifying themselves as the Crimean Defence League when he tried to film the demonstration by the group of women in Simferopol on 5 March. The men pushed him into the road and told him to go away or they would beat him. The Crimean police officers who were standing about 30 metres away did not react to the incident. A journalist from Kerch.fm was

attacked at 1pm on 6 March when she and a colleague visited the border ferry crossing which they heard had been occupied by Russian forces. She was threatened by men wearing Russian Cossack uniforms and men from the Crimean Self Defence League who told her “Switch off your camera or we will kill you.”

In the atmosphere of growing tensions and conflicting allegations, there is an urgent need for international human rights monitors and for an independent fact-finding mission in Crimea but also in other parts of Ukraine where tensions remain high. Such a mission has been proposed by a number of OSCE member states, but is reportedly opposed by Russia and the new de facto authorities in Simferopol, the capital of the Republic of Crimea, loyal to them.

Amnesty International calls on the de facto authorities in Crimea and the Russian forces present there to:

- respect and protect the rights to freedom of expression and assembly, in order to ensure that those who are opposed to the new authorities and Russia's military presence in Crimea can express their views peacefully;
- ensure that nobody is subjected to discrimination because of their ethnic origin or political views;
- ensure that journalists, human rights defenders and international observers are protected from attacks by third parties and that they are able to carry out their work without hindrance or intimidation;
- give full and unimpeded access to Crimea and any communities and groups within it to independent observers and international human rights monitors, and ensure their safety;
- instruct all armed units under their effective control to comply fully with international standards as set out in the UN Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials and the UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials and thereby respect and protect the right to life, liberty and security of person;
- respect and protect the right to freedom of movement of anyone within and between the Crimea and the rest of Ukraine.

Amnesty International calls on the Ukrainian authorities to ensure compliance with its international human rights obligations elsewhere in Ukraine and in particular to:

- ensure that the rights to freedom of expression and assembly are guaranteed so that those who are opposed to the new authorities can express their views peacefully;
- ensure that nobody is subjected to discrimination because of their ethnic origin or political views;
- ensure that the police comply fully with international standards as set out in the UN Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials and the UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials and thereby respect and protect the right to life, liberty and security of person.

Amnesty International calls on the OSCE Permanent Council to take a prompt decision on sending a Monitoring Mission with a strong human rights component to Ukraine, including Crimea, and for all authorities to ensure that they have unimpeded access to all parts of the country.

## **Background**

The Crimean peninsula is an autonomous republic within Ukraine, and the home to the Russian Black Sea Fleet, in Sevastopol, according to a bilateral Ukrainian-Russian agreement.

On 26 February, clashes were reported in the regional capital city Simferopol and elsewhere in Crimea, between supporters of the so-called EuroMaydan protests in Kyiv that resulted in the ousting of President Viktor Yanukovych and creation of an interim central government, and pro-Russian activists. On the night of 26 to 27 February, buildings belonging to the local authorities across Crimea, were simultaneously taken control of by armed groups. A number of objects belonging to the

Ukrainian military forces and fleet have been effectively blocked and sieged by organised units of armed men in military uniform without insignia driving military vehicles.

Meanwhile, a new regional administration opposed to the interim central Ukrainian authorities was formed in Simferopol. On 27 February, the Crimean parliament in the presence of armed unknown men elected a new Prime Minister.

On 1 March Russian President Vladimir Putin requested, and received, permission from the upper chamber of the Russian parliament, the Council of the Federation, to deploy Russian military forces abroad.

On 6 March, the Crimean parliament voted to hold a referendum in Crimea on 16 March on the question of the region's status and accession to Russia. Since then, the region has been effectively controlled by military and paramilitary forces. There is overwhelming evidence – including unofficial admissions by some of the officers – suggesting that the military are Russian personnel, although Moscow has consistently denied that it had deployed its forces in Ukraine's Crimea. The paramilitaries – men brandishing firearms and other weapons and wearing unidentifiable military-style uniform – are self-styled "Crimean defence".

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