



Security Council

Seventy-eighth year

9523rd meeting

Friday, 29 December 2023, 4 p.m.

New York

Provisional

President: Mr. De La Gasca/Mr. Montalvo Sosa. (Ecuador)

Members:

Albania	Mr. Hoxha
Brazil	Mr. França Danese
China	Mr. Geng Shuang
France	Mr. De Rivière
Gabon	Mr. Nanga
Ghana	Mrs. Hackman
Japan	Mr. Yamazaki
Malta	Ms. Gatt
Mozambique	Mr. Fernandes
Russian Federation.	Mr. Nebenzia
Switzerland	Mr. Hauri
United Arab Emirates	Mr. Abushahab
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Dame Barbara Woodward
United States of America.	Mr. Kelley

Agenda

Maintenance of peace and security of Ukraine

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The meeting was called to order at 4 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Maintenance of peace and security of Ukraine

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Poland and Ukraine to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Khaled Khiari, Assistant Secretary-General for the Middle East, Asia and the Pacific in the Departments of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and Peace Operations, to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I also invite His Excellency Mr. Olof Skoog, Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I give the floor to Mr. Khiari.

Mr. Khiari: Overnight, the Russian Federation armed forces carried out a massive aerial attack on Ukraine, reportedly launching 158 missiles and drones in several waves targeting locations across the country, including in the Kyiv, Lviv, Kharkiv, Khmelnytskyi, Dnipropetrovsk, Sumy, Cherkasy, Odesa and Zaporizhzhya regions of Ukraine. Preliminary reports indicate that at least 30 civilians were killed and at least 160 injured. The strikes constituted some of the largest aerial assaults since the Russian Federation's full-scale invasion in February 2022, launched in violation of the Charter of the United Nations and of international law.

According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the latest attacks resulted in extensive damage to a wide range of civilian infrastructure, including residential buildings, a maternity hospital, schools, kindergartens, parks, a metro station and a shopping mall, as well as to energy infrastructure. Electricity was cut in several regions, following damage to transmission lines. Rescue groups are still searching for people trapped under the rubble of residential buildings.

Regrettably, today's appalling assaults were only the latest in a series of escalating attacks by the Russian Federation. Since the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs last briefed the Security Council on 6 December (see S/PV.9494), we have continued to see daily reports of attacks on Ukrainian cities and towns, including on critical civilian and energy infrastructure, with many resulting civilian casualties. During the Christmas period alone, attacks on the city of Kherson reportedly killed several people and wounded many others. Apartment buildings and a medical facility, as well as a railway station packed with more than 100 civilians awaiting evacuation, were struck. Similarly, almost daily shelling has been reported across part of the Kharkiv region.

According to OHCHR, in 2023, the war in Ukraine claimed the lives of 1,888 civilians and left 6,334 others injured, resulting in 8,222 civilian casualties. That brings the total number of civilian casualties to 29,113 since the Russian Federation's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. The actual figures are likely considerably higher.

The Secretary-General unequivocally condemns, in the strongest possible terms, today's appalling attacks on cities and towns across Ukraine. Attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure violate international humanitarian law, are unacceptable and must stop immediately.

Tragically, the year 2023 is ending as it began, with devastating violence against the people of Ukraine. Once again, Ukrainians are forced to spend the holidays seeking shelter, clearing the rubble and burying the dead, amid freezing temperatures. As we look to the New Year in the hope of avoiding further escalation, we recall the Secretary-General's appeal to all concerned to do their part to help lay the foundations for sustainable peace in Ukraine — in accordance with the United Nations Charter, international law and resolutions of the General Assembly.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Mr. Khiari for his briefing.

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements.

Mr. Hoxha (Albania): Let me thank Assistant Secretary-General Khiari for his second briefing today.

Allow me to first thank you, Mr. President, for your quick reaction to a request sent today by 20 Member

States, Albania included, to organize this meeting. Your understanding, flexibility and prompt response reflect the very professional way in which you have conducted business during this entire month.

In two days, we will say goodbye to this year. Everyone on Earth is preparing to end this difficult year in the best and most joyful atmosphere, surrounded by loved ones and with hope and wishes for a better tomorrow. Well, maybe not everyone, because in the Kremlin they seem to have other plans and are busy thinking of ways to destroy and inflict more pain on those whom they have been assaulting in every possible way during the past two years, showing once more what we already know: their total disregard for human life.

Russia's unjustified and unprovoked military aggression against Ukraine — which, let us recall, was meant to be a walk through Ukraine but turned horribly wrong — has never fallen short of the worst of war crimes and crimes against humanity, or of deliberate destruction, with a view to bringing an entire nation to its knees. We have exposed them continuously during the past two years, and the General Assembly has been loud and clear more than once.

But today this reckless behaviour has reached a new record: a massive Russian air attack, as we heard, the biggest since February 2022, using hypersonic and other missiles along with illegally acquired Iranian drones, hitting different targets all over the country, including Kyiv, Lviv, Odesa and many other major cities. The latest count includes 31 persons killed, with more than 160 injured. In an already recognizable Russian signature attack, nothing was spared — a hospital, a shopping mall, a train station, educational facilities and residential buildings were hit simultaneously. They were military targets, they always say, but in reality they turned out to be civilian, social and critical infrastructure, over and over again.

The latest attack is hardly a message of peace. It is not a sign that Russia seeks to resolve what it started. It is instead a stark reminder to the world that the Kremlin objective remains the same — to destroy Ukraine and terrorize and subjugate its people. And when they are caught red-handed, they simply accuse Ukraine of self-destruction, self-immolation and suicide. No one believes such absurdities, but it does not matter. The muted domestic opinion, unfortunately, will believe them, and that is enough. Russian pundits and news anchors were competing today to joyfully portray the

attack in the most macabre and cynical way as the end-of-year fireworks for Ukraine.

We condemn those horrific attacks in the strongest terms, and we are not the only ones. The head of the United Nations, the Secretary-General, has condemned in the strongest terms the overnight large-scale missile and drone attack by Russia on Ukrainian cities and towns across the country, including — as he says — against civilian and civilian infrastructure.

The Security Council has deemed attacks on civilian infrastructure to be flagrant violations of international law and international military law. It has also decided that the responsible persons should be held accountable. The world public opinion agrees, but until that accountability is pursued in a court of law, we must show all possible support and solidarity with Ukraine and embolden international support for its just and right cause.

We said it in the very beginning: Russia's war in Ukraine represents the most acute threat to the European security architecture. There are reports that a Russian missile entered the airspace of Poland, a NATO member, while an investigation is under way to determine the facts. Such provocations, if verified, could bring the situation to another level of escalation, something that should worry and concern us all.

It has been clear since the very first day that Russia is the aggressor, the invader, the transgressor, and that the Ukrainian people are defending themselves, their freedom, their country and their dignity. Therefore, there cannot be calls on both sides — as we hear here and there — but on one side only, on those who started and continue this madness. We will continue to support Ukraine until a just and lasting peace is achieved, in line with the Charter of the United Nations — a peace that respects the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders. We must not allow Russia to succeed and impose its imperial vision on others. If we allow Russia to do this to its neighbours, Russia will see it as a licence to do so to others, to the entire continent. That is why we should continue to support Ukraine — because we support peace, stability and prosperity on the entire continent.

Ms. Gatt (Malta): I thank you, Mr. President, for scheduling this meeting on such short notice. I also thank Assistant Secretary-General Khiari for his remarks.

Malta joined others in calling for this emergency briefing following today's barrage of missile and drone attacks carried out by the Russian Federation against Ukraine. Several cities across the country were targeted, including Kyiv, Lviv, Kharkiv, Odesa and Dnipro. At least 30 people have been killed and more than 100 have been injured.

Since the beginning of its aggression, the Russian Federation has fired at least 7,400 missiles against its neighbour, an average of 11 per day. Today's aerial barrage, the biggest since the beginning of the war, resulted, yet again, in the tragic loss of life. It continued to add to the misery that the civilian population of Ukraine has been forced to endure since 24 February 2022.

We unequivocally condemn these barbaric attacks on populated areas in the strongest possible terms. We also condemn the targeting of civilian infrastructure, including maternity hospitals, apartment blocks and schools. Let us be clear — attacks targeting civilians and civilian infrastructure are deplorable and constitute a blatant violation of international law. We reiterate our full support for the ongoing processes aimed at bringing the perpetrators to justice and holding them to account.

We are also deeply troubled and concerned about reports that a Russian missile flew through Polish airspace for a few minutes. Such reckless provocations constitute a clear threat to international peace and security. They serve only to escalate tensions and must be condemned.

Meanwhile, the humanitarian situation in Ukraine keeps deteriorating dramatically, especially now during the cold winter months. The most vulnerable, including children, will continue to bear the brunt of this illegal war of aggression. Hospitals and schools must never be targets. Full access must be granted to the United Nations and humanitarian actors in all territories so that the much-needed assistance can reach those who need it.

It is once again clear that Russia is deliberately trying to worsen the humanitarian situation in Ukraine by its intentional and repeated choice of targets. Moreover, Russia continues to weaponize food and undermine global food security, as well as to attempt to deprive Ukraine of its legitimate income by unilaterally withdrawing from the Black Sea Grain Initiative.

We once again urge Russia to fully comply with its international obligations and ensure the freedom of

navigation in the Black Sea. Malta will also continue to fully support the Ukrainian people by providing humanitarian aid and assistance as long as necessary.

In conclusion, we once again underscore our conviction that to achieve a just and lasting peace, Russia must immediately cease all hostilities. It must unconditionally and completely withdraw all its forces and military equipment from the entire territory of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders.

Until then, Ukraine has the right to defend itself from Russia's aggression, as enshrined in Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations. It has the right to rely on its allies to do the same. It has the right to protect its citizens, its borders, its sovereignty and its territorial integrity, just like any other member of the Organization.

Mr. Kelley (United States of America): On behalf of the United States, let me strongly congratulate Ecuador on a very successful presidency, particularly with everything we have had to traverse this month. I thank Assistant Secretary-General Khiari for his remarks for the second time today.

We mourn this tragic loss of life as we do the loss of each civilian life in conflicts around the globe.

Two days ago, the Russian Federation organized an Arria formula Council meeting to discuss events from 10 years ago. Russia claimed that a discussion on the Revolution of Dignity would allow Council members to better understand how those events affected the present situation in Ukraine. It is preposterous that this is what Russia demanded the Council be distracted with this week while it was planning its largest aerial assault against Ukraine, its cities and its critical infrastructure since the beginning of its illegal full-scale invasion. Russia launched 158 combined drones and missiles against Ukraine, including 36 Shahed attack unmanned aerial vehicle systems and 122 missiles.

As President Biden said, this assault is a stark reminder that after nearly two years of this devastating war, Putin's objective remains unchanged. He seeks to obliterate Ukraine and subjugate its people. He must be stopped. We ask all Council members here today to join us in condemning in the strongest terms this abhorrent attack on cities and civilian infrastructure across Ukraine. Rather than opting for peace, Putin chose to mark this holiday season and usher in the new year with

an unprecedented number of drone and missile attacks against another United Nations Member State.

Current estimates are those strikes killed at least 30 and injured more than 120 others. And those numbers are expected to climb. The blasts were nationwide. There were reports of strikes hitting a maternity hospital, a kindergarten, a shopping mall, a metro station and other civilian areas. We expect Russia will claim that it attacks only military targets, even when the evidence is clear for the world to see. The Kremlin's rhetoric and lies do not erase or conceal the horrifying wreckage across the country and the thousands of innocent lives lost since the start of its war. Russia has employed such tactics before. What we saw today are likely a harbinger of what the Kremlin has in store for the people of Ukraine in 2024. The most recent report by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights noted in no uncertain terms that continued attacks by Russian armed forces have resulted in significant casualty numbers in residential areas. The report makes clear that, in the investigation of the missile strike on the village of Hroza that left 59 dead, the findings indicate the Russian armed forces either failed to do everything feasible to verify that the target to be attacked was a military objective or deliberately targeted civilians or civilian objects.

This attack is yet another warning of what is at stake. It shows us why the international community must continue to support Ukraine. It shows us why the international community must continue to demand that Russia cease its aggression and immediately withdraw from Ukraine's internationally recognized territory. The United States stands with Ukraine and will continue to call for accountability for the crimes of Russian officials and forces against the people of Ukraine. We will not abandon the brave people of Ukraine, who are fighting today for their freedom, their country and the values and principles outlined in the Charter of the United Nations.

Dame Barbara Woodward (United Kingdom): I join others in thanking Assistant Secretary-General Khiari for his briefing.

It is with deep regret that we find ourselves here to respond to yet another brutal attack by the Russians against the Ukrainian people. Last night, Russia launched the largest wave of missile and drone attacks since the war started, using more than 158 weapons of different types. This was not a push on the front lines.

Those missiles were aimed at population centres across Ukraine — at Kyiv, Lviv, Dnipro, Odesa, Kharkiv, Khmelnytskyi and many more cities. They struck homes, apartment buildings, shopping centres and metro stations. A maternity hospital and a regional oncology centre have been damaged. In short, that is civilian infrastructure. These reports are unfortunately no longer surprising, but they are still shocking. The reports indicate that at least 30 people have been killed and hundreds wounded — and the death toll is still rising. The toll would much higher if it were not for Ukrainian air-defence systems, which have been supplemented by the international community.

This war, which a permanent member of the Security Council — Russia — chose, continues to inflict a devastating human cost on ordinary Ukrainians. Earlier this month, during my visit to Kyiv, I met children recovering from injuries caused by Russian missile strikes in Kherson and at the Kramatorsk railway station. Those children lost limbs. They lost their parents. They lost their childhood. But they are brave and resilient children, and they are determined to rebuild their lives, homes and country. Russia's illegal and brutal aggression will, however, last long in Ukraine's history.

Last night's attack was, as my Defence Secretary said, a desperate and futile attempt by Russia to regain momentum. It will not succeed. Ukraine has already forced Russia's Black Sea fleet to retreat from its Crimea base. Ukraine is defending its territory. It has already retaken more than half the land seized by Russia since February 2022 and, as I said, it is pushing Russia back in the Black Sea. We therefore again praise the bravery and resolve of the Ukrainian people and the country's armed forces. The United Kingdom continues to stand by them. We are sending hundreds more missiles to restock the air-defence systems, which are helping to protect Ukraine's civilians and its infrastructure from Russia's brutal attacks. Our support will remain for as long as it takes, and I join the Secretary-General in condemning those attacks in the strongest terms.

As this is likely the final meeting of the year, I want to express my appreciation to the presidency for its excellent stewardship of the Council during this very busy month. I would also like to extend my appreciation to Albania, Brazil, Gabon, Ghana and the United Arab Emirates, who have been excellent partners, made vital contributions to our work and each brought their unique perspective. We will miss them.

Mr. De Rivière (France) (*spoke in French*): We are concluding the year 2023 with another emergency meeting of the Security Council in response to the massive strikes currently being carried out by Russia on several major Ukrainian cities. We would note, once again, that the Charter of United Nations is being trampled upon by one of the Council's permanent members. As the Secretary-General did this morning, France condemns those strikes, which left at least 24 people dead and 134 wounded. We express our condolences to the families and loved ones of the victims.

Russia is pursuing its strategy of terror aimed at weakening the morale of the Ukrainian people in this second winter of the conflict. At a time when Russia is lecturing us on a daily basis about respect for international humanitarian law in the Middle East, it is deliberately targeting civilian infrastructure and killing innocent people. This most recent violation of the rules of international humanitarian law by Russia adds to the long list of atrocities it has already committed since the launch of its war of aggression, of which the Ukrainian people are victims every day.

This conclusion to the year 2023 is distressing, and we must not allow ourselves to accept it. That is why France's support will not waver. Everyone understands that it is our collective duty to ensure that Russia's aggression is not rewarded. Otherwise, more aggression will follow, in 2024 and beyond. We will continue to provide military and civilian support to Ukraine to enable it to defend itself and to resist Russia's aggression. We will continue to support Ukrainian and international courts in combating impunity for Russia's crimes. We will continue to support the Ukrainian vision of peace — the only peace that is possible, one that respects Ukraine's national sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Before I conclude, I too would like to commend the Ecuadorian presidency for its work during the month of December. I also wholeheartedly thank the delegations of the five outgoing Council members — Albania, Brazil, Gabon, Ghana and the United Arab Emirates.

Mr. Abushahab (United Arab Emirates): I join others in thanking Assistant Secretary-General Khiari for his second briefing today.

We meet today following one of the largest waves of air strikes across Ukraine since the start of the war nearly two years ago. These deadly strikes have killed scores and left more than 150 people injured. Hospitals

and schools have been hit. Towns and villages across Ukraine have been hit. No region has been spared.

The laws of war require the protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure. Civilians and civilian objects must not be the target of attacks, and parties to conflict must take constant care to spare civilians from their military operations. Special protections are afforded to hospitals that give care to the wounded and sick, and under no circumstances may they be the target of attacks.

As this year comes to a close, civilians around the world find themselves under aerial bombardment. Peace is nowhere in sight. The year 2023 has seen new escalations in existing conflicts, such as in Ukraine, and fresh outbreaks of seemingly frozen conflicts, such as in Gaza. It has seen precious few conflicts resolved.

It is an unfortunate truth that war is sometimes easier than peace — not easier for the civilians and communities left devastated, but for the powerful, who take such monumental decisions. Making peace is hard work. Dialogue and diplomacy require serious and sustained efforts. Compromises are always required. Risks are high, and success is far from guaranteed. Yet without dedication to peace, the world will further spiral into violence and disorder.

The war in Ukraine continues to reverberate around the world. Ending it is necessary for the people of Ukraine and to prevent a further slide into regional and global instability. Over the past two years, there has been no movement towards such an outcome. We are deeply concerned that this escalation takes us further from those efforts. We reiterate our consistent position in support of all serious efforts to achieve a just and lasting peace — one that preserves Ukraine's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity in line with the Charter of the United Nations.

It is our sincere hope that 2024 is a more peaceful year than 2023. But that will not happen without bold and courageous decisions that prioritize peace over escalation. We encourage all Member States to redouble their efforts towards dialogue and diplomacy. Many around the globe today are yearning for a more peaceful, safe and prosperous world. They deserve no less, and it is up to us all to deliver on those aspirations.

As this is likely our last statement during our Council term, on behalf of the entire United Arab Emirates team, I want to end by congratulating

Ecuador on how it has ably conducted its presidency of the Council. I also wish to thank all Council members for their partnership and cooperation over the past two years and wish the very best to the incoming five elected members.

Mr. Yamazaki (Japan): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening this meeting. I also thank Assistant Secretary-General Khiari for his briefing.

We are appalled by the reports of a massive and widespread missile attack across Ukraine. According to the United Nations, the attack resulted in at least 30 civilians being killed and more than 160 injured, and the numbers are rising. It appears that the attack deliberately targeted civilian infrastructure, such as residential buildings and hospitals.

We condemn in the strongest terms the attack by Russia on Ukraine and echo the statement by the United Nations Secretary-General today. Our heartfelt condolences and sympathies go out to the families and friends of the victims in Ukraine. We also hold in our thoughts those who have been injured and wish them a swift and full recovery. The loss of loved ones and homes amid the harsh cold of winter is a profound tragedy. There must be no impunity for war crimes and other atrocities, including attacks against civilians and critical civil infrastructure. Justice must be done, and those who are responsible for those acts must be held accountable.

It has been almost two years since the unprovoked war of aggression by Russia began. It is crucial to reiterate that point. As the overwhelming majority of the General Assembly has recognized, that heinous war of aggression was started by Russia. Russia must end its own flagrant violation of the Charter of the United Nations now.

We once again urge Russia to stop its ongoing aggression and immediately, completely and unconditionally withdraw its troops and military equipment from the entire internationally recognized territory of Ukraine. We remain steadfast in upholding and strengthening the free and open international order based on the rule of law, respecting the Charter of the United Nations. Our unwavering commitment remains steadfast in supporting Ukraine, which is valiantly defending its people, independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations. We have been with Ukraine and will stand by Ukraine for as long as it takes.

As we believe this to be the last Security Council meeting of the year, I would also like to end my statement by congratulating Ecuador on its very able and successful presidency. On behalf of Japan, I would also like to express our heartfelt gratitude to the Council's outgoing elected members for the excellent and constructive working relationship, which our team has very much enjoyed.

Mr. Nanga (Gabon) (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Khaled Khiari for his briefing.

We are particularly concerned by the stagnation and perpetuation of the conflict in Ukraine. We are all the more concerned as the intensification of the fighting continues to increase the war's terrible toll and revives the risk of disaster at sensitive installations such as the Zaporizhzhya nuclear plant, which has been the subject of many attacks and requires an update of its compliance with the seven principles guaranteeing the security of nuclear sites.

The conduct of military activities around the nuclear site must absolutely stop. The parties have a responsibility to ensure that those installations do not present any risk likely to cause a disaster with irreparable consequences. The scale of the risks incurred by the militarization or non-compliance of nuclear sites must be of concern to the belligerents and the entire international community.

My country reiterates its opposition to the war and its call for dialogue with a view to achieving a ceasefire and initiating a process to end the war. We encourage all diplomatic efforts and initiatives aimed at conducting negotiations in good faith with a view to establishing a lasting peace between the parties.

Mr. Hauri (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening today's meeting at such short notice. I thank Assistant Secretary-General Khiari for his briefing, and I welcome the participation of the representative of Ukraine, as well as the representatives of the European Union and Poland, in this meeting.

We have learned that last night, Russia launched one of its heaviest waves of missile and drone attacks against several regions of Ukraine since the start of the military aggression. We echo the warning by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs regarding the heavy impact of those attacks on civilians. We condemn the attacks on residential areas, which,

according to initial reports, led to the death of civilians, as well as those launched during the Christmas period. The persistence of such attacks, which affect schools, hospitals and energy infrastructure, only worsens human suffering, particularly given the harsh winter conditions. The attacks must stop immediately.

We once again call for respect for international humanitarian law and human rights. We recall that international humanitarian law prohibits attacks against civilian objects, in particular those essential for the survival of the civilian population. The consequences of such attacks for the civilian population are particularly serious during the harsh winter. In an effort to ease the suffering of the civilian population, this winter, Switzerland is once again supporting the population under duress and has increased its contribution by \$14 million. In all, Switzerland has invested the equivalent of more than \$30 million in winter relief, including support for the Ukraine Humanitarian Fund.

In addition, we reiterate our gratitude for the tireless work of humanitarian actors in Ukraine. They must be protected. Since the beginning of 2023, according to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, almost 560 humanitarian partners have provided vital aid and protection services to more than 10 million people. We reiterate the need to facilitate and guarantee rapid and unimpeded humanitarian access throughout Ukraine, including to territories under Russian military control, such as the occupied city of Donetsk. Switzerland does not recognize the Russian Federation's integration of Ukrainian territories and condemns that grave violation of Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty.

We once again call on Russia to immediately de-escalate the situation, cease all military operations and withdraw its troops from Ukrainian territory without delay. Switzerland will remain committed to a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in Ukraine, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, international law and General Assembly resolutions.

I conclude by thanking the Ecuadorian presidency for its outstanding work during the month of December. We also express our heartfelt and warm appreciation for the cooperation and contribution of the five outgoing Council members: Albania, Brazil, Gabon, Ghana and the United Arab Emirates.

Mr. França Danese (Brazil): I thank Assistant Secretary-General Khaled Khiari for his briefing, and I

welcome the representatives of Ukraine, Poland and the European Union to this meeting.

We learned with dismay of yesterday's air strikes on several Ukrainian cities, including Kyiv, Odesa and Lviv. We mourn the dozens of civilian deaths. Brazil expresses its solidarity to the families of the victims and to those injured in the attacks. As we have reiterated many times during the nearly two years of conflict, attacks on populated areas may represent a violation of international humanitarian law. We remind the parties of their obligations to respect international humanitarian law and the fundamental principles of distinction, proportionality, precaution, necessity and humanity. We also reiterate the imperative to protect critical civilian infrastructure, particularly nuclear power facilities. Whether accidental or not, any damage can have grave and unprecedented consequences.

The indefinite continuation of hostilities will only bring further suffering to civilians on both sides of the front lines. We renew our call on the parties to engage in pragmatic talks, with a view to achieving a just and lasting peace. Article 33 of the Charter of the United Nations provides the means to achieve a just, comprehensive and lasting peace. Diplomatic negotiations and compliance with international law are the only way to achieve it. Brazil believes that the international community has an important role to play in exerting its influence on the parties to find a way out of the crisis. We welcome the efforts of other international actors and remain ready to contribute to initiatives to find a peaceful solution to the crisis, once the parties are ready to negotiate.

As I already took leave of the Security Council last week, I just wanted to congratulate Ecuador on its wonderful presidency during this difficult month of December and would like to wish all incoming members the best of luck in faithfully discharging their duties in the Council, as all five outgoing members have done.

Mr. Fernandes (Mozambique): I thank the presidency for convening this briefing. I also would like to thank Assistant Secretary-General Khaled Khiari for his valuable insights on this important issue.

Mozambique reiterates its deep concern about the ongoing conflict in Ukraine. We empathize with the immense suffering of the thousands of civilian casualties and hundreds of thousands of military casualties. The conflict has brought about devastating human consequences, with thousands of civilian

casualties and internal displacement on an immense scale. The humanitarian crisis deepens with each passing day, threatening food security, infrastructure and human rights. Despite all our calls for peace from both inside and outside the Security Council, the situation keeps escalating and worsening. The Ukraine conflict is a serious threat to international peace and security. The situation on the ground tends to worsen, with multidimensional impacts at the local, regional and international levels. We firmly believe that any military solution will ultimately fail and that diplomacy and dialogue remain the best options and the only sustainable path towards peace.

As I said, the situation in Ukraine is deteriorating, with the increase of the displacement of the population, the destruction of basic infrastructure and the disruption of agricultural activities and food production being the regrettable outcome. In view of the current negative developments, we urge both parties to consider all constructive avenues that pave the way for a credible and meaningful start towards genuine dialogue and peace. Mozambique once again appeals to the parties for an immediate cessation of hostilities; the resumption of direct negotiations, without preconditions and in good faith; and the adoption of a constructive, inclusive and results-oriented approach focusing on mutual benefits.

Lastly, I would like to commend Ecuador on the outstanding and able manner in which it has conducted the work of the Security Council during the month of December. I would also like to highlight the work that was well done by the outgoing members of the Council, namely, Ghana, Gabon, Albania, the United Arab Emirates and Brazil, at the service of the Council during their terms.

Mr. Geng Shuang (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Assistant Secretary-General Khaled Khiari for his briefing.

The Ukraine crisis has continued to drag on with sporadic and destructive attacks. The war has exacted heavy casualties among innocent civilians, and many major civilian objects have been destroyed in the conflict, which China finds deeply worrisome and distressful. Since our first deliberations on the issue in the Security Council, China has repeatedly called on the parties to the conflict to exercise calm and restraint, abide strictly by international humanitarian law, respect the principles of necessity, distinction and proportionality and do everything in their power to

protect civilians and civilian objects. I would today like to repeat our calls.

There is no military solution to the Ukraine crisis. We urge the parties concerned to respond constructively to the international community's call for peace, to strengthen engagement and to expand their common ground, with a view to putting out the flames of war as soon as possible. We call on the international community to ramp up diplomatic efforts, with a greater sense of urgency, and contribute positively to a political solution. In parallel, the international community should work together to alleviate the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine and provide the populations affected with additional assistance to help them get through the harsh winter and challenging times. China's position on the issue of Ukraine has not changed. We did, do and will stand on the side of peace and dialogue. We have never relented in our commitment to encourage a negotiated peace and ending of hostilities. We remain ready to stay engaged with all parties concerned and to work tirelessly towards a political solution.

Assuming there are no more surprises laying in store, this is likely to be the Security Council's last meeting of 2023. I would like to take this opportunity to commend Albania, Brazil, Gabon, Ghana and the United Arab Emirates for their efforts and contributions in support of the Council's work over the past two years. We also welcome the incoming Council members — Algeria, Guyana, the Republic of Korea, Sierra Leone and Slovenia, whose terms are to start in 2024. Our wish for 2024 is that the Security Council can better discharge its responsibility to maintain international peace and security; help reduce the flames and miasma of war, disputes and confrontations in our world; better practice true multilateralism so that there is more solidarity, mutual trust and cooperation among Council members; and better defend the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, with a view to bringing more equity, justice, peace, calm and hope to this world.

Mrs. Hackman (Ghana): My delegation would like to begin by thanking Assistant Secretary-General Khiari for his solemn briefing.

Six hundred and seventy-four days into the war in Ukraine, the international community is nowhere near a resolution of this most unfortunate conflict. In recent times, the front lines of the conflict have hardly moved, and it is clear that the war will persist over the

long haul with its debilitating impact on the global economy, military expenditure and the derogation of respect for international law in relations between and among States.

As was reported overnight, Ukraine has suffered its biggest aerial attack since the beginning of the conflict, with 31 dead and more than 150 others injured. We regret that previous appeals for a reduction of the intensity of the conflict during this cold winter season have gone unheeded and that, unfortunately, the safety, security and well-being of many innocent people — especially women, children, the aged and the sick — have been deepened by the reported widespread and intensive missile attacks across several regions of Ukraine.

We renew our call for peace in Ukraine, in the firm belief that there can be no military solution to the long-standing dispute between the two neighbouring countries. We continue to maintain that there is no alternative to winning the peace in Ukraine. Therefore we urge the Security Council, which is charged with the distinct mandate for the promotion of international peace and security, to help end the carnage wrought by the war upon the people of Ukraine. We take this opportunity to call for the de-escalation of tensions and encourage the intensification of diplomacy and dialogue in support of the immediate and unconditional cessation of hostilities.

We urge the parties to refrain from direct attacks against civilian populated areas and other critical infrastructure required to support and sustain the lives and livelihoods of the people. In that respect, we urge all sides to uphold the fundamental principles of international humanitarian law relating to humanity, distinction, proportionality and military necessity. We must also not lose sight of the interlinked reaction of the international community to other conflicts and the present one and urge the need to maintain an even and firm reaction to breaches of peremptory international norms relating to the use of force.

As we draw closer to the dying embers of a particularly challenging year, we unite our voice with the global calls for a new dawn of peace, mutual cooperation, solidarity and trust all across our world. We urge a recommitment by the international community to support peace efforts aimed at restoring the primacy of the principles of international law and the values of the Charter of the United Nations in our international system.

Finally, I wish to reiterate Ghana's unwavering support for the sovereignty, political independence and territorial integrity of Ukraine and call once more on the Russian Federation to end the war with the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all its troops from the internationally recognized borders of Ukraine.

Ghana joins others in congratulating Ecuador on its successful leadership of the Council this month. We also take this opportunity to express our profound gratitude to all the members of the Council for the support extended to Ghana during its term on the Security Council.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We are not in the least surprised by the rushed decision of Zelenskyy's regime and its Western backers to request today's meeting. Many experts predicted that, in suffering defeat on the front line and rapidly losing support even in the West, the Kyiv clique would use any pretext to draw the attention of the global community to itself.

Unfortunately, they have chosen an unfortunate pretext because, if there is anything to talk about today, then it is exclusively the actions of Ukrainian air-defence systems deployed in residential areas of Ukrainian towns and cities, in violation of international humanitarian law. There have long been no doubts on that front among the users of Ukrainian social networks, who are directly warning their fellow citizens about it. They are posting more and more videos online of Russian missiles and drones hitting military infrastructure targets and arms stores, causing the characteristic detonation, while Ukrainian anti-air missiles, misfiring or straying off course, hit residential buildings and civilian objects. Harm is also being caused by debris falling in residential areas solely because Ukrainian air-defence systems are located there. That was the case with the Spaso-Preobrazhensky Cathedral in Odesa, the destruction of which they tried to attribute to Russia. That was also the case this morning in Kyiv, Odesa, Lviv, Kharkiv, Dnepropetrovsk and other cities from which reports of casualties have been coming.

The representative of the United Kingdom categorically stated that there would have been more victims if it had not been for the work of the Ukrainian air defence. It is hard to imagine anything more cynical. If the Ukrainian air-defence systems had not operated, then there would not have been any victims among civilians at all. Therefore, we would advise the United

Kingdom to be more cautious in announcing that it will deliver an additional 100 air-defence missiles to the Kyiv regime, the use of which is leading to the deaths of civilians. The Nazi regime is prepared to use Western weapons and those same anti-air missiles to kill not just the residents of Donbas but also their own citizens in their homes and in civilian facilities.

If Ukraine had not violated international humanitarian law, there would have been no casualties despite the truly massive strike launched by the aerospace forces of Russia yesterday and today on military targets across Ukraine: targets of the military-industrial complex; military airfield infrastructure; arsenals; storage sites for artillery shells, unmanned boats, arms and fuel for military hardware; and places where Ukrainian armed force units, nationalist formations and foreign mercenaries are deployed. That is evident not only to experts but also to any unbiased observer.

Here, for example, is a link to a video of today's impact on a residential building in Kyiv, which shows a burning object falling slowly on the building. Only the upper floors of the house were damaged. An attack missile does not fly at such speed and along such a trajectory. Obviously, this is the result of Ukrainian air defence operations.

By way of comparison, here is a link to another video showing an Israeli missile hitting an apartment building in Khan Younis in the south of the Gaza Strip today. It shows not only the moment the missile hit, but also the fact that only ruins remain of the multistorey building. One can only imagine the number of victims of this barbaric targeted strike, which is one of dozens that hit Gaza every day, but that is certainly no reason for our Western colleagues to call an urgent meeting of the Security Council. Here is a link to another photo from Ukrainian social media, taken after a hit on a high-rise building in Lviv. It shows that all of the walls of the building are covered with traces left by submunitions of air defence missiles that had hit the building. Dozens, if not hundreds, of such photos and videos have been posted on social media today. They have been posted by Ukrainians who are outraged, not only at the yet further impact of Ukrainian air defence systems, but also at the incessant lies of the Zelenskyy regime, who have brought their country to an almost fatal point.

Ukrainians are also angry because they are being forced to fight for this corrupt, paid-for and anti-national

Government, contrary to the assurances of the leader of the Kyiv junta. Men of conscription age are being approached in the streets, on public transportation. Intimidation and violence are being used against them. It has even come to the point that conscription notices are being handed to priests, who are threatened with reprisals against their relatives. Then, without any training, they are thrown onto the front line. One Ukrainian commander recently complained that these fighters are not even assigned call signs because they die too soon. Such senseless slaughter is about to befall not only men but also women.

At a recent press conference, Zelenskyy raised the stakes. He wants to send 500,000 people to certain death. To that end, he has prepared a draft law on new conscription rules. It involves bringing the conscription age down to 25 years, reducing the list of persons who are not covered by conscription, a voluntary-mandatory census of men, a ban on leaving the country and any property transactions and freezing bank accounts. That list is not exhaustive, for the crackdown essentially continues. It is not without reason that some commentators are comparing it with serfdom.

Against that backdrop, even pro-Western Ukrainians have seen their optimism diminish considerably. Society has long since not harboured any illusions. People understand perfectly well that the country has betrayed them, or rather, the authorities of the country have betrayed them — that their husbands, brothers and sons are being sacrificed to serve the geopolitical goals of the West to contain Russia and so the corrupt regime can hold on to its cushy spot. Recent studies confirm this: 75 per cent of Ukrainians are willing to give up their citizenship in order to avoid conscription. Such trends are clearly demonstrated by the panic activity of those residents of the country who have managed to travel abroad. They are now storming Ukrainian consulates abroad in hopes of renewing their expired documents and transferring their property to their wives. As soon as that law comes into force, they will be deprived of almost all rights in their country.

That is the reality in which Ukrainians have to live today, but of course we have not heard any assessments of such lawlessness from any of our Western colleagues. The reality is that Ukraine is surviving exclusively thanks to colossal financial injections from Washington, London and Brussels. Ukrainian civil servants, including diplomats, receive their salaries from foreign countries. Military equipment

and uniforms of the Ukrainian armed forces are also coming from abroad. The Zelensky regime has long since lost everything of its own. In fact, Ukraine today is nothing but a private military company in the hands of Western countries, whose task is to inflict maximum damage on Russia. That is what the Western sponsors of the Kyiv regime are guided by, allocating money and supplying arms, and they could not care less about the lives of ordinary Ukrainians.

The reality of today is that Ukraine does not, and will not, have the resources to change the tide or even to preserve the situation on the contact line. It is not so much about the inefficient use by the Maidan regime of the weapons supplied to it. For example, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Kuleba, directly linked the failure of the counteroffensive to “the pathetic, deplorable state of the defence industry and warehouses in NATO countries”. There is only one conclusion from all that, and it is a disappointing one for our enemies — the Kyiv regime’s military plans have failed completely. So our enemies and their Ukrainian proxies can expect the very worst news in the near future.

It does not matter whether new military and financial aid packages for Zelenskyy and his gang are going to be approved in Washington or Brussels or not. That will only delay the demise of his regime, but will not prevent it. It is clear that betting on solving the Ukrainian crisis on the battlefield was a mistake and a failure, and a military victory over Russia is an absolutely unattainable goal. The threats that come from the territory of Ukraine and have been posed by NATO countries will certainly be eliminated, either within the framework of the special military operation or by using political and diplomatic instruments. We never renounced the latter. We gave the Ukrainian leadership a good chance to preserve territorial integrity — of course without the Crimea, which, as far back as 2014, chose to become part of Russia — and save the lives of hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian citizens. That was back in March-April 2022. Recently, a member of Ukraine’s negotiating team, Chalyi, admitted that it was an excellent option for Ukraine. But the bosses in London and Washington did not let Kyiv take that chance, which has become a confirmed fact by now. After that, the head of the Kyiv junta for some reason signed a decree expressly forbidding him to conduct negotiations with the Russian leadership. That decree is still in effect. But those who reproach us for allegedly not willing to negotiate try not to mention that.

Time is therefore quickly running out for the Kyiv regime. Its future really is under serious threat. Meanwhile, Ukrainian civilians and the Ukrainian language and culture are not exposed to any threats, no matter how hard the West tries to prove the opposite. Our special military operation is not against them, but against the criminal Kyiv regime, which did not want to end the war on its own population in the Donbas. Zelenskyy and his clique made their criminal choice — and they made it for all Ukrainian people. And now our task is to prevent Zelenskyy from annihilating his own people once and for all. We hope that, at some point, his Western sponsors will also realize that. The sooner that happens, the better for Ukraine.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as representative of Ecuador.

I would like to thank Assistant Secretary-General Khaled Khiari for his informative briefing, and I recognize the presence of the representatives of Ukraine, Poland and the Head of the Delegation of the European Union.

We regret that the call for a ceasefire and an end to the violence has not been observed, even during this festive period. That is unacceptable, whether in Ukraine, the Middle East or anywhere in the world. As we have said throughout 2023, Ecuador insists on rejecting armed violence, and in this case, massive aerial missile and drone attacks in several Ukrainian locations, including Kyiv, Odesa, Kharkiv, Zaporizhzhya, Lviv and Dnipro. This reminds us of the attacks in the early hours of 29 December 2022, which continued into the new year. We call on the Russian Federation to cease these attacks and to avoid repeating the trend of December 2022. We recall the existing prohibition on attacking, destroying, removing or disabling objects that are indispensable to the survival of the civilian population. We therefore reiterate the need for an end to attacks against the population and civilian infrastructure. Nothing justifies, in this conflict or in any other, attacks on maternity wards and residential buildings. We insist, once again, on the responsibility of the parties to respect, without restriction, their obligations under international humanitarian law, including the principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution.

I take this opportunity to once again acknowledge the work of humanitarian actors and their efforts to alleviate the impact of the war on the civilian population, particularly during this cold winter.

We are concerned that a military mindset will be perpetuated, and we therefore call for moving towards a peaceful solution that makes possible a just and lasting peace within the framework of respect for the territorial integrity of Ukraine, within its internationally recognized borders and in full respect of the principles of the Charter of the United Nations. We also concur with the Secretary-General's concern of further escalation and a possible spillover of the conflict.

Finally, as we expect that this will be the last meeting of the year, during the Ecuadorian presidency of the Security Council, I express my sincere gratitude to each of the members of the Council for their support to my delegation and for Ecuador. I also thank the Secretary-General and all the speakers and participants in the meetings that were held this month, including the open debate.

It has been a very complex and difficult month, in which we have been able to promote dialogue for international peace and security, which is a paramount goal of our foreign policy.

I conclude by reiterating my appreciation to the outgoing members — Albania, Brazil, Gabon, Ghana and the United Arab Emirates — for their tireless work up until the last minute.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

The representative of the United Kingdom has asked for the floor to make a further statement.

Dame Barbara Woodward (United Kingdom): I want to say that the Russian Ambassador misquoted my remarks. I want to be clear: there is only one cause of the tragedy, and that is the actions of Russia. The rest is a torrent of lies and disinformation.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Ukraine.

Mr. Kyslytsya (Ukraine): I recognize the representative of Putin's terrorist regime here in the permanent seat of the Soviet Union. Two days ago, he convened members to bombard their minds with a barrage of fakes that his country has tirelessly fabricated since the beginning of its aggression — aggression that has been marked in particular by another type of bombardment, which results in human losses and large-scale destruction on the ground. And as long as Russia is able to kill the credibility and integrity of

the Security Council, it will feel free to kill innocent people in Ukraine and beyond.

I would like to thank the 32 United Nations States Member that supported our request for this urgent meeting of the Security Council following another wave of Russian air terror against my country. We are also grateful to the presidency of Ecuador for promptly responding to that request.

Overnight, the Russian Federation launched one of its most intense and massive missile and drone attacks, targeting residential areas, critical infrastructure and industrial and military facilities across the entirety of Ukraine. According to preliminary information, the Russian Federation launched at least 158 weapons of different types, including 122 missiles of various types and 36 unmanned aerial vehicles. Initially, the Russian forces attacked with Shahed drones from the north and south-east, advancing westward. Around 3 o'clock in the morning, Russia deployed strategic aviation — 18 Tu-95MS bombers took off. In three hours, they launched at least 90 Kh-101, Kh-555 and Kh-55 cruise missiles. Around 5 o'clock in the morning, Tu-22M3 long-range bombers launched eight Kh-22 and Kh-32 cruise missiles from the Kursk region of Russia towards the northern and central regions of Ukraine.

At the same time, Russia targeted Kharkiv with S-300 anti-aircraft guided missiles. Overall, the Russian forces launched at least 14 ballistic missiles, notably, S-300, S-400 and Iskander-M, from the occupied Crimea and the Kursk and Belgorod regions of the Russian Federation. At 6.30 in the morning, five Russian MiG-31K fighters took off from Russia's Astrakhan region, firing five Kh-47M2 Kinzhal air-ballistic missiles. The Russians also attacked from Su-35 aircraft with four Kh-31P anti-radar missiles and one Kh-59 missile.

The defence forces of Ukraine were able to intercept 87 cruise missiles and 27 Shahed drones. We are grateful to the responsible nations throughout the world that contribute to enhancing Ukraine's air defence. That saves the lives of innocent civilians much better than hollow reflections about the detrimental effects of sending weapons without specifying what those weapons are intended for — to help the defending side to protect its people and its sovereign territory, or to enhance the capabilities of the invader to kill and destroy.

Even a single missile or drone that is not intercepted can cause a lot of harm. Unfortunately, the overnight attack has increased the scale of pain among the

Ukrainian people. At least 30 Ukrainian civilians were killed and more than 160 were wounded by Russian missiles and drones — in Kyiv, Zaporizhzhya, Dnipro, Kharkiv, Odesa, Lviv, Smila and Konotop.

Just look at the list of targets that were so “bravely” destroyed by Russia last night: a maternity ward, educational facilities, a shopping mall, 45 multistorey residential buildings, private houses, two churches, commercial and storage facilities and a parking lot.

Given the reports of a Russian missile intruding into the air space of Poland during the Russian strike, we reiterate that Russian air terror poses a dangerous threat not only to Ukraine but to neighbouring countries as well. The only way to prevent its spillover effect is to continue supporting Ukraine by further strengthening our defence capacities.

According to data released by our air forces, Russia has fired 7,400 missiles and 3,700 attack drones at different targets throughout Ukraine since the beginning of its full-scale invasion. The figures now need to be updated. Unfortunately, it will not be the last update, as Russia will continue its air terror as long as it is able to do so.

There is full solidarity between the criminal Kremlin regime and the brain-washed Russian society in continuing their external aggression. They are full of hatred towards most of the world — and not only towards Ukraine, no matter how much those who are inclined towards policies of appeasement might persuade themselves otherwise. As long as they have resources, they will continue to attack Ukraine, the global security architecture and the international order based on the Charter of the United Nations. There is only one solution: Russia must be deprived of its ability to produce weapons, to finance its military aggression and to threaten the world.

I have nothing to say to the Russian representative here in the Chamber. Like his superiors in Moscow, he is a person with an amputated conscience and emasculated dignity.

In all times, all aggressors have only understood the language of force in response to their crimes. Everything else has been perceived only as weakness and encouragement to further aggression. History has provided us with many relevant lessons. As is known, those who cannot remember the past are condemned to

repeat it. I believe that will not be the case with the United Nations.

(spoke in Spanish)

I cannot conclude without expressing my deep appreciation to Ecuador for its successful presidency of the Council this month and for its steadfast and principled stance in defence of the Charter of the United Nations.

The President *(spoke in Spanish)*: I now give the floor to Mr. Skoog.

Mr. Skoog: I want first to thank you, Mr. President, for calling this meeting and for providing me the opportunity to address it on behalf of the European Union (EU). I also want to thank Assistant Secretary-General Khiari for his sobering report this afternoon and, through him, the Secretary-General for his very clear condemnation of this latest onslaught by Russia against Ukraine.

The EU reiterates our resolute condemnation of Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine, which constitutes a manifest violation of the Charter of the United Nations. We reaffirm our unwavering support for Ukraine’s independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders and its inherent right of self-defence against the Russian aggression.

Overnight, as we heard, Russia launched one of the largest attacks since its full-scale invasion of Ukraine against cities and the population. It was yet another cowardly and indiscriminate targeting of schools, metro stations and a hospital, resulting in the deaths of at least 30 people and, as we also heard, well over 100 wounded. Everywhere you look, Russia’s warfare leaves behind death, destruction and human suffering in its wake.

Russia’s ongoing systematic air strikes against civilian objects and critical infrastructure in Ukraine are unacceptable and must stop. Such intentional attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure add to the growing evidence of war crimes, as reported by the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine. Russia and its leadership must be held fully accountable for waging a war of aggression against Ukraine and for other most serious crimes under international law, as well as for the massive damage caused by its war.

In the face of continued Russian attacks against Ukraine's civil and critical infrastructure, the European Union and its member States will intensify the provision of further humanitarian and civil protection assistance to Ukraine, as well as assistance to ensure the resilience of its energy sector through the winter. Moreover, the EU remains committed to supporting Ukraine's repair, recovery and reconstruction, in coordination with international partners, including the demining process and psychosocial rehabilitation.

I want to send a message of solidarity to the people of Ukraine from here. I want to reiterate the EU's unwavering commitment to continue to provide strong political, financial, economic, humanitarian, military and diplomatic support to Ukraine and its people for as long as it takes.

As this could be the last meeting ahead of the New Year — we hope — I want to thank the outgoing members of the Council for a very serious and important effort and for their service on behalf of the broader membership of the United Nations. I wish the incoming members of the Security Council every success in promoting peace, diplomacy and accountability.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Poland.

Mr. Szczerski (Poland): We normally exchange messages of peace at this time of year. But today's developments — the fiercest Russian air strikes in several months — once again demonstrate just the opposite, that is, the evil nature of the Russian war of aggression that has been bringing tears and destruction to Ukraine for nearly two years.

It is against each and every norm of international humanitarian law that those air strikes escalated together with the onset of the harsh winter and that they are directed against civilians and civilian infrastructure and objects necessary for survival. It is even more deplorable that the targets of those deliberate Russian attacks are civilian infrastructure objects located hundreds of kilometres from the front lines, and that they are directed not against the military, but exactly against the civilian population of Ukraine. We cannot just let it happen.

Moscow clearly has not changed its goals. It wants to bomb Ukraine into subjugation and defeat. That evidently shows Russia's absolute lack of respect for the Charter of the United Nations and international law.

Poland continues to condemn Russian actions in the strongest terms possible. At the same time, we reaffirm our conviction that it is absolutely crucial to continue supporting Ukraine. Poland has done so since the very beginning of the war, and we will continue on that path.

Russian imperialism has a tendency to remind us regularly about what it is: a global threat with far-reaching consequences. That global threat needs to be reckoned with before it plunges the world further into chaos. The war against Ukraine needs to end with just peace, which means peace acceptable to Ukraine as the country aggressed. The aggressor cannot benefit from the aggression. Instead, we need accountability for the war atrocities and damages it has inflicted.

Against that backdrop, we once again call on all States that stand on the side of international law to take all the necessary steps to make Russia stop its aggression and withdraw from Ukrainian territory. That is the only way to prevent further deaths, injuries and devastation. That is the only way to stop an escalation of this large-scale humanitarian and human rights crisis that continues to take the lives of innocent civilians.

I would like to conclude with an important statement. I can confirm that, in the conjunction with today's brutal onslaught with Russian air strikes, Poland's military recorded a serious incident in the morning hours of a violation of Polish airspace by a Russian missile. The event is right now under investigation by the Polish military and other competent security services. Poland is also conducting consultations on the incident with its allies and key partners. I am informing the Security Council about this incident because we clearly see it as an element of the situation created by the latest wave of Russian attacks. We request from Russia an explanation of this incident of violating Poland's airspace and urge Russia to immediately cease this kind of activity provocation.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I should like to announce that the delegation of Lithuania has submitted a written statement, which will be distributed among the members of the Council and will be published as an official document of the Security Council.

As this is perhaps the last scheduled meeting of the Council for the month of December, I would like to express the sincere appreciation of the delegation of Ecuador to the members of the Council and to the Secretariat for the support they have given us. Indeed, it has been a busy month, and one in which we rallied

to consensus on several important issues within our purview. We could not have done it alone or without the hard work, support and positive contributions of every delegation and the representatives of the Secretariat, including the technical support team, conference service officers, interpreters, translators, verbatim reporters and security staff.

On behalf of the Council, I would also like to express the sincere appreciation of the Council to the five outgoing members, namely, Albania, Brazil, Gabon,

Ghana and the United Arab Emirates. I commend their hard work and contributions during their terms on the Security Council.

As we end our presidency, I know I speak on behalf of the Council in wishing the delegation of France good luck in the month of January.

I wish everyone a happy and prosperous 2024. I will miss this gavel.

The meeting rose at 5.30 p.m.