

KIEV/GENEVA (14 March 2014) - UN Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights Ivan Šimonovi? on Friday announced the immediate deployment of a UN human rights monitoring team throughout Ukraine to help establish the facts surrounding human rights violations, including in Crimea, and serve to de-escalate tensions in the country.

“What became clear very quickly during our discussions in Ukraine was the preponderance of competing narratives about what exactly has transpired in the country since November last year,” Šimonovi? told a press conference in Kiev on the ninth day of his mission to the country.

“Without an independent, objective establishment of the facts and circumstances surrounding alleged human rights violations, there is a serious risk that these competing narratives could be manipulated for political ends, leading to divisiveness and incitement to hatred. The UN team, as an impartial player, will serve to establish the facts, thus helping prevent such manipulation and de-escalate tensions.”

Šimonovi?, the UN’s most senior human rights official in New York, said that chronic human rights violations were clearly among the major reasons for the unrest in Ukraine in recent months.

“Warning signs about systemic human rights violations were neglected for many years, including the concerns and recommendations of international human rights bodies,” he said. “There are serious concerns about the weakness of rule of law institutions, lack of accountability and ensuing impunity for human rights violations. Reports of torture and ill-treatment are also numerous.”

In the context of the recent protests in Kiev and elsewhere, Šimonovi? expressed deep concern about allegations of gross violations, such as excessive use of force and extra-judicial killings, including by snipers, torture, disappearances and arbitrary detentions.

“I have personally met with one victim of a brutal beating whose scars, both physical and mental, were clearly visible,” he said. “The perpetrators of human rights violations against that individual and all other victims must be promptly brought to justice, whatever their background, status or affiliation, following independent, impartial and thorough investigations.”

Šimonovi? stressed that accountability was of utmost importance, not only for the victims of violations but also to restore the faith of the whole of Ukrainian society in its Government and institutions.

“I stress here that the call is for accountability and not retribution,” he said. “All reforms and new policy measures must be taken through a rule of law and human rights approach without any spirit of revenge. It is crucial to ensure that one does not respond to human rights violations with other human rights violations.”

Šimonovi? said he was encouraged by indications from high-level officials of a willingness to break with past injustices and elaborate a new vision based on the rule of law, democracy and human rights.

The team of human rights officers from the UN Human Rights Office, led by Šimonovi?, was unable to visit Crimea as the authorities stated that they would not receive the mission nor ensure its security. However, Šimonovi? said that denial of access did not prevent the team from assessing the human rights situation in Crimea. The team had access to several reliable sources and extensive one-on-one discussions with individuals who are in and from Crimea.

“I am gravely concerned about the situation in Crimea, where there appears to be no rule of law at present, and therefore a drastic deterioration in the protection of human rights, as well as rampant fear and insecurity due to misinformation, blocking of information and total uncertainty about what is coming next,” he said.

Šimonovi? highlighted the cases of several activists who are unaccounted for, including Andrey Shchekun, Anatoliy Koval’skiy and his son Sergey Koval’skiy, Mr. Taneev and Mikhail Vdovchenko.

“I have also met with activists and journalists who were stopped at paramilitary check points, detained between 9 and 11 March, interrogated, beaten, robbed of their equipment, harassed, humiliated and subject to mock executions, allegedly by a Berkut unit officer,” he said.

“I have been informed about cases of arbitrary arrest and detention, torture and ill-treatment, and other human rights violations committed by members of unidentified armed groups. Paramilitary forces must be disarmed and the rule of law must be re-established in Crimea by those who have the power to do so.”

Šimonovi? noted that the situation of minorities and indigenous peoples in Crimea, in particular the Crimean Tatars, was very vulnerable. He stressed that the human rights of all must be respected throughout Ukraine, including in Crimea, particularly the right of all to participate in public affairs and political life without discrimination.

At the request of the UN Secretary-General and the High Commissioner for Human Rights,

Šimonovi? has extended his mission and will remain in Ukraine until Tuesday, 18 March 2014.

To read the full statement delivered by Ivan Šimonovi? at the press conference in Kiev, please visit:

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=14371&LangID=E>

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