

**Statement in exercise of the right of reply during the  
14th meeting of the Working Group of the Protocol on Water and Health of the UNECE  
Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International  
Lakes on item 2 of the provisional agenda**

April 16, 2024

Thank you, Chair,

We are compelled to take the floor in order to exercise the right of reply. We observe with regret how the Ukrainian delegation once again seeks to politicize the work of the session.

We urge the parties to refrain from biased assessments of the situation in Ukraine. The so-called “war” that the delegate of Ukraine spoke of did not begin in February 2022, but ten years ago. And it wasn’t Russia that started it.

The reasons for the special operation in Ukraine are well known and have been repeatedly voiced by Russian representatives on specialized platforms. This is a barbaric civil war unleashed by Kiev against its own population, an economic and environmental blockade of the South-East of the country and Ukraine’s sabotage of the UN Security Council approved Minsk agreements. In this regard, we again note that talking about “aggression” in this context is inappropriate.

We remind the participants of this meeting that the special military operation of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation on the territory of Ukraine is carried out in accordance with the provisions of the UN Charter and in compliance with international law, including humanitarian law.

The actions of the Russian armed forces are not directed against the civilian population. Strikes with precision weapons are carried out on infrastructure facilities that are used for military supply purposes to Ukrainian forces.

Regarding issues related to the Protocol on Water and Health, we would like to draw the attention of participants to the fact that in 2020, according to UNICEF, more than 3 million people in the South-East of Ukraine, due to the blockade from Kiev, did not have proper access to clean water and sanitation services.

We urge the participants not to escalate the already extremely tense geopolitical situation and to return to substantive discussions within the framework of the mandate of our meeting.

Thank you,