



## Security Council briefing on TIPS: Situation around the Orthodox Christianity in Ukraine, 17 November 2023

Malta Statement delivered by Ms Francesca Gatt

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Thank you, President. We also thank ASG for Human Rights Brands Kehris for her informative briefing.

Regrettably, this meeting represents yet another attempt by the Russian Federation to divert attention from the real issue: Russia's aggression against Ukraine. Instead of focussing on this matter and other pressing issues, the Council's time is once again being taken up to spread disinformation and propaganda.

At the outset, let me reaffirm Malta's unwavering commitment to ensuring that everyone, everywhere, can enjoy their human rights. These include the right to freedom of religion or belief. We consider all allegations of violations of human rights with utmost seriousness.

Let us recall the facts. Russia's actions are violating human rights and international humanitarian law. Several UN reports have reported evidence demonstrating that Russian authorities have committed wilful killing, torture, sexual violence, shelling of civilian infrastructure and the deportation of children to the Russian Federation.

Furthermore, Russia's ongoing attacks against Ukraine have left a wide trail of destruction across the country. A clear example of this is the damage



inflicted on the largest Orthodox Church in Odesa by a Russian missile strike on 23 July. This adds UNESCO's verification list of damages of over 327 cultural, historical, or artistic sites in Ukraine, including 124 religious buildings.

Malta strongly condemns attacks against religious and cultural heritage. We urge the Russian Federation to comply with its obligations under international law, including international human rights law and international humanitarian law. We remain firm in our position that those who have committed crimes must be held accountable.

In closing, President, we once again urge the Russian Federation to immediately cease its aggression, and unconditionally, completely withdraw all its forces and military equipment from the entire territory of Ukraine within its internationally recognised borders.

I thank you.