U.S. condemns Russia's 'aggressive actions' in eastern Ukraine

UNITED NATIONS (AP) U.S. Ambassador Nikki Haley condemned Russia's "aggressive actions" in eastern Ukraine on Thursday and warned Moscow that U.S. sanctions imposed after its annexation of Crimea will remain until the peninsula is returned to Ukraine.

But the new American envoy tempered her criticism, saying it was "unfortunate" that she had to condemn Russia in her first appearance at the U.N. Security Council.

'We do want to better our relations with Russia,' Haley said, echoing President Donald Trump who has also said he wants a better relationship with President Vladimir Putin.

Moscow has applauded Trump's promises to rebuild U.S.-Russian relations, which have been pushed to their worst level since the Cold War, and Russia's U.N.



AP Photo/Richard Drew The new U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Nikki Haley, addresses a Security Council meeting of the United Nations, Thursday.

Ambassador Vitaly Churkin reacted calmly to Haley's criticism saying he "detected quite a bit of change of tone."

"It was friendly enough, given the circumstances and given the subject we were discussing," he said of Hayley's statement at the council meeting called by Ukraine after a major escalation of violence. "I wouldn't want to call it friendly.

Churkin said the Trump administration is just in its early days and both countries are dealing with very difficult problems.

"We are thinking, how are things going to develop?" he said. "Our position is very obvious. ... If there is an opportunity for us to work better with the United States to deal with various international problems which are extremely complicated and acute then we should take this opportunity."

One of those complex and urgent issues is Ukraine, where there are definitely major differences.

Anti-government protests in Ukraine culminated in President Viktor Yanukovych fleeing the country in February 2014 to Russia. Later that year, Russia seized and annexed the Crimean Peninsula from Ukraine, and Russian-speaking separatists in the country's east launched protests that escalated into a war that has killed more than 9,600 people.

Minsk agreement The

in February 2015 aimed at ending the conflict helped to reduce fighting, but skirmishes have continued and there was a major escalation of violence in recent days.

blamed Churkin Ukrainian security forces for starting it and Ukraine's U.N. Ambassador Volodymyr Yelchenko blamed the Russian army and the separatists.

Haley made clear the Trump administration's strong support for Ukraine, despite the president's overtures to Russia.

"The United States stands with the people of Ukraine who have suffered for nearly three years under Russian occupation and military interventions," she said. "Until Russia and the separatists it supports respect Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity this crisis will continue.

Haley said the recent sudden increase in fighting in the east has trapped thousands of civilians and destroyed the crisis is spreading, endangering many more.

"The dire situation in eastern Ukraine is one that demands clear and strong condemnation of Russian actions," she said.

Haley called for an immediate end to fighting and "full and immediate implementation" of the Minsk agreement.

Churkin also called for an immediate cease-fire and swift de-escalation of the situation "to prevent disaster and to return the situation to the political track."

He expressed hope that the Trump administration "will play a more active role in making sure that the violence stops" than the Obama administration did.

PARENTS TALK BACK One week later, a different kind of march

haron Ketchum went with her I daughter to the nation's capitol to spread the word of God, as she believes it, and to call for an end to abortion in

the country. While such a protest has clear political implications

for the law and how it affects others, she described it as more of an emotional journey for her. It was a chance for her to bond with her 16-year-old daughter, Katelyn, who was attending the March for Life for the second time.

"This was a pilgrimage for my daughter and I," Ketchum said. "Hearing the speakers, witnessing how many people feel the same way we do, it was a needed boost to our faith.'

The March for Life is an annual rally opposing women's legal right to abortion as decided by the

Ketchum said the ultimate goal is to end all abortions, including in the case of rape or incest, because she believes life begins at conception. This

what to do with all the embryos created

"I don't think it's man's decision that we can scientifically manufacture a baby," she said. "It's God's will.

The abortion rate in the level since the Supreme Court's landmark 1973 decision that legalized the procedure nationwide, according to a study released by the Guttmacher Institute. In 2014, 19

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Sultan Parents Talk Back

raises difficult questions, such as

and stored for IVF treatments, but Ketchum says the larger issue is about the consequences of

individual decisions.

U.S. has dipped to its lowest percent of pregnancies in the U.S., excluding miscarriages, ended in abortion. About 926,200 abortions were performed nationwide in 2014, the report found, compared with 1.06 million abortions in 2011. Better birth control access and use is a key to the declining number of abortions, said Megan Donovan, a senior policy manager at the Institute, in news reports about the study.

U.S. Supreme Court's Roe vs. Wade ruling in 1973. This year, the speakers included Vice President Mike Pence. The event came the weekend after nearly 500,000 women marched in Washington in protest of President Donald Trump and in support of women's rights — including access to abortion.

Ketchum and her daughter, who live in Wentzville, Missouri, left on Wednesday in a caravan of chartered buses taking thousands of St. Louis-area students to the march. The night they arrived in D.C., the group attended a program in which an energetic priest put on a show in the style of late-night talk show host Jimmy Fallon. He even did a lip-sync competition with a nun.

"The kids just loved it," Ketchum said. It got more serious when they heard from Melissa Ohden, a well-known speaker among anti-abortion activists. She speaks about her experiences as a survivor of her birth mother's attempted abortion.

The next day, they marched from the Washington Monument to the steps of the Supreme Court building. Ketchum's group found other students from Missouri, and they chanted: "We love babies, yes we do, we love babies, how about you?

Thousands of teenagers and college students attend the march each year, but the discussion about abortion starts much younger for some. Ketchum said her children probably learned about it in fifth or sixth grade, when their parochial school begins teaching about puberty. Children learn about the various ways a fetus can be aborted and the church's stance against it.

Ketchum said that with her own children, she wants to focus on the importance of chastity, making moral decisions and responsibility.

"Don't ask me what I believe on contraception,' she said. "That's not what I want to talk about. I didn't go on this trip for the politics. I went on it because I knew it would be an awesome experience with my daughter."

Her daughter agreed, saying that having her mother attend with her was the most meaningful part of the march. Katelyn also said seeing the large crowd of people standing up for the same issue as her was a favorite moment.

The day after the march, their group gathered in front of the White House to pray for the country and its leaders. Ketchum felt an overwhelming feeling of warmth. She said she voted for Trump because she feels it is what God wanted her to do based on Trump's stated anti-abortion position.

"I'm trusting Trump and his administration will do what they say," she said. "We'll just have to wait and see.'

Aisha Sultan is a St. Louis-based journalist who studies parenting in the digital age while trying to keep up with her tech-savvy children. Find her on Twitter: @AishaS.

NIGHT OWL

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