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UN Chief: East Ukraine Vote 'Unfortunate and Counterproductive'

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United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said Tuesday that the holding of separatist elections in eastern Ukraine over the weekend was "unfortunate and counterproductive."

Pro-Russian rebels elected their own leadership on Sunday in a vote denounced by Kiev and the West, further deepening a standoff with Russia over the future of the former Soviet state.

Ban, addressing the Vienna-based Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, said the situation in Ukraine remained a matter of deep concern. The 57-nation OSCE counts Russia, the United States and Ukraine among its members.

"The quote and unquote elections in the eastern part of the country this past Sunday are an unfortunate and counterproductive development," Ban said.

More than 4,000 people have been killed in the conflict, which began after the overthrow of Ukraine's Moscow-backed leader, Viktor Yanukovych, in February. Ukraine and the West

have accused Russia of sending weapons and soldiers to help the rebels, a charge Moscow denies.

A Sept. 5 cease-fire agreed in the Belarusian capital Minsk brought an end to full-scale clashes, but sporadic shelling continues. Kiev argues the separatists broke the agreement by conducting the elections without the central government's involvement.

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