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**STATEMENT BY
MR. ALEKSANDR VOLGAREV, DEPUTY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF
THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE 1447th MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

19 October 2023

On the International Day of the Girl Child

Mr. Chairperson,

In 2011, the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed 11 October as the International Day of the Girl Child. This is a suitable occasion to assess the state of affairs as regards their rights and opportunities and to draw attention to the many problems and deficits that exist. Take for example the deliberately inflated reporting by the Western alliance countries of Russia's alleged violations of the rights of Ukrainian children. What we have here is deliberate equivocation, attempts to distort reality and a demonstrative disregard for any arguments by Russia. We categorically reject these allegations.

A child protection system is currently being set up in the new constituent entities of Russia. The Russian Federation Presidential Commissioner for Children's Rights, Maria Lvova-Belova, has been working unstintingly to protect girls and boys arriving from the territory of Ukraine. Her work includes the reunification of families who have become separated. So far, 35 minors have been returned to 24 families. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is providing substantial assistance to Russia in this process. Its representatives accompany families on the territory of Russia. It is strange that the Kyiv regime and the ICRC representatives in Kyiv are extremely reluctant to work in this area. On 16 October, the Commissioner gave a detailed briefing at the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. We urge all those who are genuinely interested in these issues to read carefully the contents of Ms. Lvova-Belova's comprehensive report. We will distribute the text and related materials in the Organization.

It is known that the Latvian authorities have used the pretext of the Russian special military operation to step up their efforts to foment Russophobic sentiments and to cultivate public resentment towards speakers of the Russian language. The Latvian Government is taking it out on the weakest – children and elderly people. Girls and boys are being denied the right to preserve their own cultural identity and use their mother tongue, and old people will simply be deported. The picture is unsavoury, to put it mildly. The story in the local press about how a certain "educator" in one of the preschool institutions forced a little girl to perform squats for every word spoken in her native language is a vivid confirmation of this. This is not an isolated incident; to date at least five cases of bullying of Russian-speaking children in preschool institutions have been reported. This ugly phenomenon could well become widespread.

Unfortunately, these are not historical chronicles of the Second World War telling about the atrocities of the Nazi regime, but the reality of modern-day Latvia. The “educational measures” practised in preschool institutions are a direct consequence of Latvia’s policy of forced de-Russification. It is well known that pupils in general education institutions are also subjected to ethnolinguistic harassment. Because of these abuses, parents of victims are forced to homeschool them to protect them from unfair attacks and bullying.

Mr. Chairperson,

The Kyiv regime’s Western handlers, who for years have supported the killing of civilians, including women and children, are flagrantly violating children’s rights both at home and in other countries. In its concluding observations on France in June this year, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child identified many gaps in this area.

A whole cluster of claims related to the crimes of the French military in the Central African Republic. We would remind you that the matter concerns the rape, mostly of girls, by soldiers of the French contingent in 2013 and 2014. The Committee’s experts recommend that “the ongoing investigation which opened in 2016 is concluded without further delay”. They also express concern about the “slow pace and lack of follow-up to allegations of sexual abuse and exploitation”.

In addition, France is urged to “continue its efforts to ensure that all cases of sexual abuse of all children under 18 years of age are reported, investigated and prosecuted, including abuses perpetrated by those in the circle of trust, such as personnel of the Catholic Church”. Along the same lines is the need to “strengthen measures of protection for children above the age of 15 years who are or at risk of becoming victims of sexual exploitation”.

The Committee’s list of claims against the United Kingdom is also extensive. These include racism, failure to consider the best interests of the child and violence against minors. In particular, there is an explicit reference to the need to “develop measures aimed at preventing violence against children in alternative care, children with disabilities, asylum-seeking, refugee and migrant children”.

The United Kingdom is also encouraged to “promptly and effectively investigate ... all cases of violence ... , including domestic violence and the sexual exploitation and abuse of children in and outside the home, in the digital environment, in religious and educational institutions”.

The prevalence of the problem is borne out by the disappointing findings of a report by the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse. It states that this crime is widespread and occurs in virtually all spheres of social life. According to the Inquiry, one in six girls in the United Kingdom is a victim of a sexual offence before the age of 16. It notes that the real number is likely to be much higher.

The Committee also draws particular attention to “the overrepresentation of children of Asian and African descent and Muslim, Roma, gypsy and traveller children in the criminal justice system”.

Inhumane conditions of juvenile detention have been documented in a number of OSCE participating States. The European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment recently called attention to this problem in Luxembourg. In particular, the “deplorable living conditions” for girls and boys in Dreibern were noted. The situation is no better in Schrassig prison, where juveniles are allowed to interact with adult inmates. Since 1993, the country’s authorities have ignored urgent appeals by international agencies not to place minors there. In that regard, the fact that, as of 1 July

this year, the number of proceedings against children instituted by the Prosecutor's Office in the Grand Duchy was 40 per cent higher than in 2022 is particularly worrying.

The situation in the United States of America, which remains the only outlier in the world not to have ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child, is very sad in that respect. Moreover, it is one of the few States where juvenile girls and boys continue to be sentenced to life imprisonment without the possibility of parole. Domestic legislation and law enforcement practice show that the system for the protection of children's rights there is inadequate to meet the challenges of the times. Dramatic stories of gross violations of the rights of children, including adopted Russian children, confirm the existence of systemic problems and insufficient protection of the rights of girls and boys in general.

For many years, international human rights organizations have had serious reservations about Norway, primarily in the context of the infamous Barnevernet foster care system. Its many shortcomings have been repeatedly highlighted by the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. These include discrimination against persons of non-Norwegian origin, poor professional qualifications of staff, lack of proper supervision of institutions by the relevant Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs, insufficient monitoring of the living conditions of girls and boys in foster families, and disregard for their opinions when making decisions on guardianship. A study by the University of Tromsø was published at the beginning of January this year. It notes that most Roma children end up in non-Roma foster care. Their whereabouts are withheld from their biological parents.

There are hundreds of stories in the country's media of serious incidents in care institutions, including attempted suicides, juvenile deaths and abductions of girls and boys. According to a joint investigation by State broadcaster NRK and the Centre for Investigative Journalism, more than 400 minors have been listed as having escaped from foreigner reception centres and Barnevernet foster homes since 2015. The police are not actively searching for them and it is possible that they are victims of trafficking in human beings.

Mr. Chairperson,

In conclusion, we should like to emphasize that Russia has consistently advocated the development of international co-operation in the promotion and protection of the rights of girls and boys. The Convention on the Rights of the Child and its principles are the main reference point and unquestionable authority for the entire international community on this issue. There are also relevant commitments in our Organization. We call upon the OSCE participating States to comply strictly with them.

Thank you for your attention.