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FSC.DEL/299/22/Rev.1
22 September 2022

ENGLISH
Original: RUSSIAN

Delegation of the Russian Federation

**STATEMENT BY
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RUSSIAN FEDERATION TO THE VIENNA NEGOTIATIONS ON MILITARY
SECURITY AND ARMS CONTROL, AT THE 1021st PLENARY MEETING
OF THE OSCE FORUM FOR SECURITY CO OPERATION**

14 September 2022

**Agenda item: Security Dialogue
Subject: Impact of armed conflict on children**

Mr. Chairperson,

We are grateful for the organization of this discussion under the agenda item Security Dialogue. We welcome the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Virginia Gamba de Potgieter, the Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office on Children and Security, Ms. Rita Izsák-Ndiaye, and the representative of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Mr. Geert Cappelaere.

There has long been an urgent need for comprehensive and depoliticized consideration of the impact of armed conflict on children in the OSCE area. Although this issue relates primarily to the human dimension of our Organization, an analysis of the politico-military aspects of the problem at the Forum for Security Co-operation could be useful from the point of view of ensuring that the facts of armed violence against children are taken into account by international authorities. We are convinced that it is important to maintain a high level of reliability and trustworthiness of the information included in the reports of human rights organizations and, in particular, of the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General. Any exertion of pressure by donors to force the unit she heads to disseminate knowingly false information contravenes Article 100 of the Charter of the United Nations and is absolutely unacceptable.

The Russian Federation condemns all violations against children: killing and maiming, the use of children as combatants or human shields, sexual violence, abduction, attacks on schools and hospitals, and denial of humanitarian access. All perpetrators of such crimes must be brought to justice.

Humanity towards the civilian population, even during combat, is a hallmark of civilized behaviour by countries. Unfortunately, by no means all OSCE participating States have embraced this message.

During the military operation of NATO allied forces against Yugoslavia from 24 March to 10 June 1999, the air forces of the North Atlantic allies flew over 38,000 sorties. As a result, up to

2,500 people lost their lives, including 89 children. One of the symbols of that tragedy was three-year-old Milica Rakić, who was killed on 17 April 1999 by shrapnel from a NATO munition.

Purely civilian objects and social facilities (48 hospitals, 70 schools, 18 kindergartens and 13 university buildings, including halls of residence) were subjected to missile and bomb strikes.

The use of depleted uranium munitions and the targeted destruction of chemical plants by NATO air forces resulted in extensive and long-term contamination of soil, air and water sources. This is undermining the health of the nation as a whole and of the younger generation in particular.

The impact of the NATO bombing on the health of children, both those alive during the campaign and those born after it, is the subject of a monograph by the renowned Serbian oncologist, Dr. Danica Grujičić, entitled *The Truth About the Consequences of the NATO Bombing of Serbia in 1999* and published in 2021. The author notes that since 1999 there has been a steady increase in childhood cancer rates, abnormal pregnancies, anomalies in newborns and infertility among young families in the countries of the region. Dr. Grujičić has documented a dramatic reduction in the age of cancer patients and atypical pathogenesis of certain types of tumours. Specialists in the field link these consequences directly to the results of the military aggression unleashed by NATO member States against Yugoslavia in 1999. There can be no justification for this aggression.

Mr. Chairperson,

Today, Ukraine's representatives and their Western allies, as has been the case many times before, voiced accusations against the Russian Federation. In doing so, they did not back their statements up with real facts. Unfortunately, there has also been a retelling of the ravings of the former Ukrainian Commissioner for Human Rights, Liudmyla Denisova, who, incidentally, was dismissed for her blatant anti-Russian lies about the "rape of children". I would remind you that Ms. Denisova, together with her daughter who is also a Ukrainian civil servant, misled the international community by spreading disinformation about "the gang rape of adolescent girls in front of their mothers" and "the raping of babies and toddlers with teaspoons or candles". Ms. Denisova later stated that she "told these terrible stories because she wants victory for Ukraine". Unfortunately, some delegations here are repeating these disgusting slanders.

Now let me tell you about the real, documented suffering of children inflicted by the Ukrainian armed forces with the support of a Western alliance of States. You wanted facts? Here they are.

The war against the population of Donbas unleashed by the authorities in Kyiv in 2014 has taken the cruellest toll on children there. The punitive policy pursued by the Kyiv authorities for many years has pushed these children to the brink of survival. The Ukrainian Government has no qualms about directly hounding children, especially those who are trying to draw the international community's attention to the war crimes committed against their peers. Among them is a schoolgirl from Luhansk, Faina Savenkova, who wrote an open letter to the United Nations asking the organization not to forget about the children of Donbas. Her personal data, like that of other minors, has been published on the notorious Ukrainian website Myrotvoret, where a tick with the word "executed" lights up next to their names in the event of their death or murder. This is a gross violation by the Ukrainian Government of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, under which States Parties must ensure the protection of every child.

We note with regret that for eight years the irreparable loss of life among the children of Donbas has been seen as "acceptable" by the Ukrainian Government's Western handlers. These children were born and have grown up under constant shelling by the Ukrainian armed forces. Ukrainian military personnel have

carried out cynical attacks on kindergartens, schools and medical facilities. All of this has been documented in reports by the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine, but it has gone unnoticed by the Western participating States. Today, children in Donbas are being killed and maimed as a result of shelling using Western weapons, including those provided by the United States of America, the United Kingdom, Germany, France, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, the Netherlands and other countries that are complicit in the Ukrainian armed forces' war crimes against children.

By the start of the special military operation, 5,074 people, including 91 children, had lost their lives on the territory of the Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) since 2014, and around 8,000 civilians, including 277 children, had been injured. Between 24 February and 26 August this year, 345 civilians were killed, including 18 children. A total of 3,199 people were injured, including 203 children. Ninety-nine kindergartens and 149 schools were destroyed as a result of shelling by the Ukrainian armed forces.

By the start of the special military operation, 1,761 people, including 35 children, had lost their lives in the Luhansk People's Republic (LPR) since 2014, and around 3,000 had been injured, including 90 children. Since 24 February this year, 81 civilians have been killed, including four children, and 265 people have been injured, including 25 children.

These are not mere figures. We are talking about the blighted lives of real people.

I recommend to all our Western colleagues present here that they visit the Alley of Angels, the memorial in a park in the city of Donetsk dedicated to the children killed by Ukraine. Although it is a foregone conclusion how you will react to this: you will not go there. It is terrifying for the accomplices in the Ukrainian armed forces' crimes, who are supporting these in word and in deed, to realize how much suffering and bloodshed – the shedding of children's blood – they have brought to Donbas. The youngest fatality of the Ukrainian aggression was just 27 days old.

Over the past few months, thousands of Lepestok PFM-1 miniature mines [also known as butterfly mines] have been raining down on the territory of the independent republics of Donbas and the liberated territories of Ukraine. This is a most dreadful weapon: one such mine contains 37 grams of explosives, enough to tear off an adult victim's leg. A child would be killed by such a "butterfly". There are regular reports of unfortunate children in Donbas who have been blown up by anti-personnel mines "lovingly" scattered by the Ukrainian armed forces. Let me remind you that the use and stockpiling of Lepestok mines was prohibited under the Ottawa Convention of 1997. The Ukrainian Government has signed that document. However, according to open sources, around 3.5 million such mines remain in the possession of the Ukrainian armed forces. As we can see, the Ukrainian military personnel have found a "worthy" use for them.

We cannot fail to note the use of social infrastructure for military purposes, including the seizure of schools and kindergartens by the Ukrainian armed forces. Ukrainian armed formation units are stationed there, the approach roads are mined, but no danger signs are erected to warn the local residents. Artillery positions, strongholds and ammunition depots are being set up. Multiple-launch rocket systems are deployed on school premises; retaliatory fire is provoked against neighbouring houses, from which the civilian population has not been evacuated. All of this is blatant evidence of the Ukrainian Government's criminal actions against civilians, a demonstration of its indifference to the fate of children and its disregard for all the norms and principles of international humanitarian law and for the provisions of the OSCE Code of Conduct on Politico-Military Aspects of Security.

We know that the facts we have cited will elicit no response, and the reaction of those present here will be a flurry of calls not to listen to “lies, disinformation and propaganda”. However, the truth always remains the truth, even if for some people the truth is very inconvenient.

Mr. Chairperson,

Our country has always sought to help civilian populations caught up in hostilities. We are providing humanitarian assistance, restoring infrastructure and co-operating with local authorities, not least in the repatriation of children, drawing on the Russian Federation’s extensive experience in dealing with corresponding tasks in Iraq and Syria.

One of the objectives of the special military operation being conducted by Russia is to protect the population and children of Donbas from the criminal actions of the Ukrainian regime. According to the inter-agency co-ordination headquarters, 3.6 million people, including over half a million children, have been evacuated from dangerous areas in Ukraine, the DPR and the LPR to Russian territory. All these people left for our country voluntarily, saving their lives and the lives of their children.

More than 9,500 temporary accommodation facilities are operating in the constituent entities of the Russian Federation. Crisis centres, including regional offices of children’s ombudspersons, are working with evacuees. All refugees are dealt with individually and receive comprehensive assistance promptly.

Through the Presidential Commissioner for Children’s Rights, Maria Lvova-Belova, special attention is paid to families with minors, to orphaned children and to children left without parental care. Many are provided with targeted humanitarian and medical assistance, including psychological rehabilitation. Its aim is to help children to forget all the horrors they have suffered during the previous eight years, when the Ukrainian Government was exterminating the civilian population of Donbas systematically and with impunity before the eyes of the whole world.

In summing up, we should like to confirm the readiness of the Russian Federation to continue international co-operation on the issue of children and armed conflict and also on international humanitarian law in general.

Thank you for your attention.