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Delegation of Canada
to the OSCE

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auprès de l'OSCE

**STATEMENT BY COUNSELLOR ESTHER VAN NES
ON THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION'S ONGOING AGGRESSION AGAINST UKRAINE
1478th MEETING OF THE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

13 June 2024

Madam Chair,

Last year, Canada joined Ukraine and 43 other participating States to invoke a Moscow Mechanism examination on the forcible transfer and deportation of Ukrainian children.

The Moscow Mechanism experts confirmed that a large number of Ukrainian children have been displaced to the temporarily occupied territories and to the Russian Federation.

Though Russia claims that it intended to keep these children safe from war, the report documents practices of non-consensual evacuations, transfers for the purposes of adoption or foster care, and prolonged displacement.

Whatever the form of placement, Ukrainian children find themselves in an entirely Russian environment and are exposed to pro-Russian information campaigns often amounting to targeted re-education and military education - in violation of their human rights.

The Russian Federation creates various obstacles for families seeking to get their children back. This includes forced citizenship, challenges in locating children, and barriers created around their physical return.

The International Criminal Court has issued arrest warrants for the leader of the Russian Federation and his Children's Right Commissioner; both are wanted for war crimes in connection with the unlawful deportation and unlawful transfer of children from occupied areas of Ukraine to the Russian Federation.

More recently, in their concluding remarks of their periodic review of the Russian Federation's implementation of the Convention of the Rights of the Child, the Committee on the Rights of the Child expressed deep concern about the alleged responsibility of the Presidential Commissioner for Children's Rights in the war crime of the unlawful deportation and transfer of children.

Belarus' involvement in this large-scale and systematic campaign of forcible transfer and deportation of children - documented by the Yale Humanitarian Research Lab among others - is also deplorable.

Madam Chair,

The Russian Federation claims to want to protect children from war. How ironic! If it truly wishes to do so, it should end its war now.

The Russian Federation claims to act on a humanitarian basis towards children. Yet, if we look to independent reports, it is more likely violating international law by transferring children, adopting them out and changing their names.

This is not a case of a few rotten apples, or a handful of children.

The numbers of children affected is in the thousands. Exact numbers are being painstakingly and slowly ascertained, given the challenges of tracking the whereabouts of many disappeared citizens due to the ongoing war.

The Committee on the Rights of the Child urged the Russian Federation to put an end to the forcible transfer and deportation of children, provide information on the number and whereabouts of children so they can be tracked, and ensure that no child is deprived of their Ukrainian nationality, among many other recommendations.

Madam Chair,

During a recent visit to Ottawa, Oleksandra Matvichuk, whose Centre for Civil Liberties won the Nobel Peace Prize, said, in relation to children, that her organization is not only documenting violations of Geneva and Hague Conventions, but also human pain and suffering.

Wilfully inflicting the trauma of separation to children from their families, caregivers, community, and culture is an act that stands out in its cruelty and disregard for humanity.

Canada and a growing number of States are combining their efforts through the International Coalition for the Return of Ukrainian Children to reunite children with their families and ensure their safe reintegration.

We will raise the continued deportation and forced transfer of children at the upcoming Summit on Peace in Ukraine, and work across our networks to raise awareness and join our efforts in support of Ukraine's activities to bring back their children where they belong.

We invite all those who have not yet joined the Coalition to offer their countries' support. Our goal in advancing this issue speaks to the concern of many States that this war rolls back children's rights globally.

In this regard, we also welcome the OSCE's efforts to work with Ukraine to find solutions as it seeks to re-establish the strongest bonds of family and community between these deported and forcibly transferred children and their families in Ukraine.

Thank you, Madam Chair.