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FSC.DEL/162/24
14 May 2024

ENGLISH
Original: RUSSIAN

Delegation of the Russian Federation

**STATEMENT BY MS. IULIA ZHDANOVA,
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TO THE VIENNA NEGOTIATIONS ON MILITARY SECURITY AND ARMS
CONTROL, AT THE 1076th PLENARY MEETING OF THE
OSCE FORUM FOR SECURITY CO-OPERATION**

8 May 2024

**Agenda item: Security Dialogue
Subject: Humanitarian demining in the OSCE area – scope, challenges
and the way forward**

Mr. Chairperson,

We commend the idea of holding a plenary meeting of the OSCE Forum for Security Co-operation (FSC) on humanitarian demining in accordance with the politico-military mandate of this autonomous decision-making body of the Organization. At the same time, we cannot agree with the pro-Western take you are imposing on the agenda, whereby the discussion of any matters within the FSC framework is reduced to the events concerning Ukraine and Russia's "blame" for what is happening. We consider such an approach, which involves playing fast and loose with the causes and effects of the Ukrainian crisis, to be counterproductive, at odds with the real state of affairs and also liable to divert the discussions from attainment of the objectives set forth in the concept note for today's meeting. In connection with this, we categorically reject the groundless accusations made by the panellists and by the delegations of Western OSCE participating States that have taken the floor.

Mr. Chairperson,

One of the goals of the Russian Federation's foreign policy is to create a world free of mines and other explosive hazards. In that regard, we are helping to improve the technical proficiency and operational capacity of our partners in the field of demining. It is, after all, States that bear the primary responsibility for ensuring the safety and security of their people.

When it comes to countering the mine threat, we are implementing our national approaches to this task within the framework of the Inhumane Weapons Convention and its Amended Protocol II on mines. We regard the Protocol as an important element of the Convention, one that establishes an effective mechanism for restricting the improper use of landmines. The key conditions for harnessing the potential of such an international mechanism are, in our view, its universalization and ensuring that its provisions are complied with at the national level strictly, fully and, most importantly, in good faith.

We are paying considerable attention to international co-operation in this area. The exchange of experience with military sappers is being actively pursued. Since 2014, the International Mine Action Centre of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation (IMAC) has been training specialists in landmine clearance and in detecting and defusing various types of mines and improvised explosive devices, operators of mobile robotic units, and mine-detection service staff. For example, in 2022 alone, 135 foreign military personnel underwent training at IMAC. They were drawn from such countries as the Republic of Armenia, the Republic of Belarus, the Republic of Djibouti, the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, the Republic of the Union of Myanmar and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

A significant contribution to the implementation of international obligations in this field is being made by the peacekeeping activities of the Russian army and pyrotechnic units of the Russian Ministry of Emergency Situations, which involve demining operations both on our country's territory and in other States.

Following NATO's unprecedented attack on Yugoslavia in 1999, which was carried out in violation of the Charter of the United Nations, the Republic of Serbia ended up as the country most contaminated by unexploded ordnance. In 2008, Serbia, which did not have sufficient resources of its own, requested our country's assistance. As a result of the joint work performed by a Russian-Serbian humanitarian demining squad between 2008 and 2019, more than 672 hectares of Serbian territory were cleared and 13,276 items of unexploded ordnance were detected and destroyed, including NATO-standard aerial bombs, shells and cluster munitions.

In 2015, the leadership of South Ossetia turned to the leadership of the Russian Federation with a request for assistance in the demining of its territory. In accordance with a decision by the President of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin, around 135 hectares of South Ossetian territory were surveyed between 2016 and 2019, in the course of which 1,049 explosive hazards were detected, including anti-personnel and anti-tank mines, tripwires, and caches of firearms and ammunition.

In November 2020, on instructions from the leadership of the Russian Federation, specialists deployed by the Russian Ministry of Emergency Situations began undertaking humanitarian demining work in Nagorno-Karabakh and in adjacent areas of the Republic of Azerbaijan, resulting in more than 769 hectares of land being surveyed and in over 21,000 explosive hazards being detected and disposed of. Moreover, during March–April 2021 and July–August 2021, the Russian Ministry of Emergency Situations held two training courses for pyrotechnical experts from Azerbaijan (with 68 and 46 trainees respectively), who are now able to work independently.

Mr. Chairperson,

In the context of the special military operation we attach great importance to the humanitarian demining of our national territory. Faced with the collective West's aggressive support for the Kyiv regime, which has no qualms about employing patently terrorist methods and is using various types of mines and cluster munitions, Russia is at the present stage doing everything possible to ensure the civilian population's safety and security. High priority is being given in these circumstances to the demining of social infrastructure (hospitals, kindergartens, schools and energy, water and gas supply systems), agricultural lands and areas earmarked for the construction of new facilities.

To date, as part of their implementation of clearance tasks, demining units from the armed forces of the Russian Federation, the Russian Ministry of Emergency Situations and the Ministries of Emergency Situations of the People's Republics of Donetsk and Lugansk have already checked more than 53,000 hectares of land, around 10,500 buildings, four bridges and over 1,300 km of roads. In the course of

this work, more than 1,300,000 explosive hazards have been detected and destroyed, including upwards of 700,000 in the Donetsk People's Republic, over 500,000 in the Lugansk People's Republic, over 50,000 in the Kherson and Zaporozhye regions and more than 500 in the Belgorod region.

On a separate note, we should like to point out that since 1 May an exhibition has been open to the public on Poklonnaya Hill in Moscow, featuring Western weaponry and military equipment captured on the battlefield or found on Russian territory in the zone of the special military operation. Among the exhibits are a large number of mines manufactured in the United States of America, the United Kingdom, France, Germany and other NATO countries. This exhibition is very popular with the inhabitants of Moscow and visitors to the capital. Moreover, members of Western diplomatic missions enjoy fast-track admission to the site. Now anyone can see for themselves the veracity of the Russian claims about the West being involved knee-deep in the conflict relating to Ukraine, all the more so since prohibited types of NATO-standard weapons continue to be pumped into that country.

Mr. Chairperson,

On 24 April, the US President approved a new package of military aid for the Kyiv regime worth 61 billion dollars, which is to comprise, *inter alia*, 155 mm cluster shells, missiles for HIMARS multiple-launch rocket systems, ATACMS tactical missiles and various types of mines. This has, of course, been done solely out of loving care for Ukraine's civilian population and, to quote Joe Biden, "it's going to make America safer. It's going to make the world safer." However, the provision of this aid is reportedly conditional on ramping up the mobilization of Ukraine's population. A corresponding law was signed by Volodymyr Zelenskyy already on 16 April. Given the sorry state of the Ukrainian armed forces on the front line, the Kyiv regime plans to raise reinforcements among men aged between 18 and 60 years, inclusive. The idea of calling up Ukrainian women to serve in the army is being actively floated – they will doubtless also have to take part in "human wave attacks". In view of all this, there is no longer any reason to be surprised at the words of Ukrainian Economy Minister Yuliia Svyrydenko when she said that just 30 per cent of women were involved in demining, but that the authorities in Kyiv would do all they could to achieve "gender equality". So there you have the warped logic that is espoused both by the Western countries supporting the Kyiv regime's terrorist methods and by their protégés.

In that regard, as far as the conflict relating to Ukraine is concerned, the United States is exclusively pursuing its own selfish objectives: it is getting rid of old US Army materiel and opening up an opportunity for its military-industrial complex to replace such "non-moving stock" with new models. A glaring example is how the latest aid package includes Claymore anti-personnel mines, which were developed back in the first half of the 1950s. This foreign policy line serves as further confirmation of the aggressive goals of the United States, which stand out for their extreme cynicism.

With the connivance and direct involvement of the United States and the North Atlantic Alliance, the Zelenskyy regime is actively using NATO cluster munitions to shell the city of Belgorod and other population centres in the Belgorod region. These shelling attacks have claimed 152 casualties, including 11 children, since the start of the year; 24 civilians have been killed, among them two children. As for the shelling of population centres in the Donetsk People's Republic, that has been going on uninterruptedly since 2014. Over the past month, unfortunately, there have also been civilian casualties there. On 13 April, during a shelling attack on Gorlovka using cluster munitions, eight people were injured, including one child. On 26 April, in the Kuibyshevsky district of the city of Donetsk, a man struck a cluster bomb, which exploded. He died of his injuries in the ambulance that picked him up. Also on 26 April, in the village of Olginka, a man was injured by the blast of a PFM-1 Lepetok landmine, a type of mine prohibited by the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention (Ottawa Convention). During missile strikes against the Crimean peninsula in April and May of this year, the Ukrainian formations have repeatedly made use of

US-manufactured ATACMS tactical missiles with cluster warheads, which pose a particular hazard to the civilian population.

Against this backdrop it takes one's breath away to see the cynicism of Western delegations, which accuse Russia of all manner of sins and demand that we adhere strictly to the norms of international humanitarian law. The NATO and EU member States that today championed compliance with international humanitarian law and fervently sought to convince us of their commitment to the Ottawa Convention and the Convention on Cluster Munitions (Oslo Convention), and also to the OSCE Document on Stockpiles of Conventional Ammunition, have in reality been supplying mines to Ukraine since 2014 and now they are supplying cluster munitions as well. International efforts in the field of humanitarian demining – which, incidentally, are being financed by Western countries themselves – are thus being undermined. This hypocritical logic is fully in keeping with the cant of the “rules-based world order” promoted by them.

We do not tire of reiterating that, in contrast to the authorities in Kyiv, our country is fully committed to the norms and principles of international humanitarian law, including the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and the Protocols thereto and the Inhumane Weapons Convention and its Protocols. Long before the start of the special military operation, guidelines on international humanitarian law for our armed forces were adopted. These were developed taking into account the international treaties to which our country is a party. The armed forces of the Russian Federation act in strict compliance with that document. During routine combat readiness exercises, work is undertaken to inform Russian military personnel about the norms and principles of international humanitarian law, including the provisions and technical requirements of the aforementioned Protocol [Amended Protocol II to the Inhumane Weapons Convention].

Measures to ensure compliance with the technical requirements of Amended Protocol II on mines are also systematically implemented in the Russian army when mines are developed and new technical assets are adopted for the detection and disposal of explosives, with a view to minimizing the potential threat to both military personnel and civilians. We are focusing, in particular, on improving ways and methods of informing the population about combat zones and about the behaviour to adopt when an explosive hazard is detected.

Mr. Chairperson,

In closing, we once again warn Ukraine and its patrons against engaging in violation of the principles of international humanitarian law, the provisions of Amended Protocol II to the Inhumane Weapons Convention and the provisions of the Ottawa Convention. Such actions call for an immediate response from the international community and the perpetrators must be held accountable. We call upon the OSCE, the United Nations, the International Committee of the Red Cross and other specialized international bodies to bring their influence to bear on the authorities in Kyiv and to take effective measures to prevent the grave humanitarian consequences that the Ukrainian armed formations' war crimes are having for the civilian population.

Thank you for your attention.