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Délégation du Canada
auprès de l'OSCE

**STATEMENT BY AMBASSADOR JOCELYN KINNEAR
ON THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION'S ONGOING AGGRESSION AGAINST UKRAINE
1448th MEETING OF THE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

2 November 2023

Mister Chair,

In the last two weeks since we met, the Russian Federation has continued its aggression against Ukraine, illegally occupying its land and inflicting suffering on the Ukrainian people.

Among Russia's attempts to subjugate Ukraine are continuous attacks against civilians and civilian objects, forcible deportation of Ukrainians, especially children, illegal arrest and torture of dissidents, pollution of Ukrainian land, air, and water, and dangerous threats to nuclear safety and security because of military actions in the vicinity of nuclear power plants.

We believe that supporting Ukraine against Russia's aggression is imperative, and we are happy to see that the assistance we, and others in this room, are providing, is helping Ukraine successfully defend its territory, its people, and its freedom.

No aspect of life in Ukraine remains untouched by Russia's aggression. This is why we support Ukraine in other areas too, in line with President Zelenskyy's 10-Point Peace Formula, for example, on food security, accountability, ecological safety, and nuclear safety.

While our support touches on many important issues, the return of Ukraine's children to their homes is particularly important to us.

The illegal forcible deportation of children away from their parents and caretakers in illegally occupied parts of Ukraine to locations in Russia, to be adopted by Russian families or to attend re-education camps is not only exceptionally cruel, but is one of the six grave violations of children in armed conflict, and is illegal. It demonstrates Russia's callousness in conducting warfare, and complete disregard for the laws that govern it.

Even more insidious is Russia's attempt to whitewash these crimes by presenting them as a humanitarian effort aimed at protecting children from war. The irony is not lost on us.

Maria Lvova-Belova, the person in the Office of the President of the Russian Federation overseeing and orchestrating this forced deportation is under an arrest warrant from the International Criminal Court for war crimes. According to the ICC, there are reasonable grounds to believe that Maria Lvova-Belova bears individual criminal responsibility for the crimes of unlawful deportation and transfer of children from occupied areas of Ukraine to the Russian Federation.

The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs gave this individual a platform to spin alleged war crimes as child protection efforts, as part of Russia's so-called international cooperation activities, including in Ukraine and Syria.

We cringed at the sight of Maria Lvova-Belova's "reunification" videos, in which she films herself reuniting children with their families they should have never been separated from. The practice of drawing propaganda value from this already cruel practice is not only despicable, but exploitative – exactly the opposite of what child protection should be.

In its October report, the UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine found evidence of unlawful transfers and deportations.

Moreover, the Commission's accounts of how the children were treated while in camps in Crimea were heartbreaking. Some recount being bullied, others placed in conditions akin to solitary confinement. One boy was in the "isolator" for four days for listening to the Ukrainian anthem. Some were threatened to be sent to children's homes or foster families. One girl said her 10-year-old brother was sent to a psychiatric hospital in Crimea, as a punishment following a quarrel with another child and after he "was crying because he missed his mother", separating him from his two other siblings who were in the camp.

We furthermore deplore the facilitation by Belarusian authorities in the forced deportation of Ukrainian children to Belarus.

Mr. Chair,

The third meeting of national security advisors took place in Malta last week. Canada and Qatar are co-leads on the fourth point of President Zelenskyy's 10-Point Peace Formula on the release of prisoners and deported persons. During this meeting, Canada announced it would create an international coalition of countries aimed at facilitating the return of Ukrainian children who were deported or forcibly displaced by Russia from the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine.

We look forward to working with our OSCE partners on this important issue and will spare no effort to bring these innocent children home to their families and caretakers in Ukraine, where they belong.

Thank you, Mr Chair.