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PC.DEL/1322/24
7 November 2024

ENGLISH
Original: RUSSIAN

Delegation of the Russian Federation

**STATEMENT BY
MR. ALEKSANDR VOLGAREV, DEPUTY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF
THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE 1495th MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

7 November 2024

**In response to the report by the OSCE Special Representative and Co-ordinator for
Combating Trafficking in Human Beings**

Madam Chairperson,

We welcome the OSCE Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, Ms. Kari Johnstone, to the Permanent Council. We thank her for her comprehensive report.

Russia regards countering trafficking as a priority task for the international community. The primary responsibility for protecting their citizens from this threat lies with States and the relevant national entities. Inter-State co-operation, on both a bilateral and a multilateral basis, is important. Our country supports international efforts to combat trafficking, with the United Nations playing the leading role.

We believe in the need for a comprehensive approach to this problem. It should cover combating the demand, protecting victims and prosecuting perpetrators, but also eradicating the underlying causes of this phenomenon. States should make every effort to prevent situations that could lead victims into the hands of lawbreakers, and should place emphasis on the protection of persons from socially disadvantaged groups.

The comprehensive approach of your Office, Ms. Johnstone, is demonstrated by the report presented today, which is geographically and thematically wide-ranging. At the same time, we reaffirm the importance of giving due attention to the branch of trafficking in human beings for the purpose of removing human organs, cells and tissues. We have repeatedly spoken about the urgency of this problem in the OSCE area and cited examples of the activities of “black-market transplant surgeons” in the territories of Ukraine under the control of the Kyiv regime. Likewise, evidence has been gathered in the Donetsk and Lugansk People’s Republics of Ukrainian neo-Nazis removing anatomical material from Donetsk and Lugansk captives and even from members of the Ukrainian armed forces. We have taken note that, during today’s presentation, you made specific mention of the fact that this area of work by the Co-ordinator’s Office is under threat because of funding difficulties. This state of affairs is a cause for alarm and concern to us.

Representatives of Volodymyr Zelenskyy’s illegitimate regime are also fond of other forms of exploitation of people. The media periodically publish the results of journalistic investigations that reveal

networks of traffickers of “live goods” operating under the patronage of high-ranking Ukrainian officials, with hundreds of women victims being exposed to sexual exploitation.

Ukrainian refugee women in European Union Member States face similar risks. For example, according to Germany’s Federal Statistical Office, and also local media and non-governmental organizations, 70 per cent of refugees from Ukraine are women. At the same time, only 14 per cent of them have jobs. This factor, combined with their lack of housing, significantly increases the likelihood of their falling into the hands of criminals, who also recruit their victims via the Internet or through the use of artificial intelligence.

Madam Co-ordinator,

We share your opinion that migrants, children and members of national minorities are particularly vulnerable to trafficking and exploitation. We note the joint publication by your Office and the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the thematic handbook “Out of the Shadows: Addressing the Dynamics of Trafficking in Persons Belonging to Minorities, including National Minorities”. We share the view contained in the report that the root causes of trafficking in human beings include racism, xenophobia and discrimination against ethnic minorities and Indigenous peoples. In that regard, we urge you not to slacken in your attention to the issues of First Nations and Indigenous girls and women in some OSCE participating States. The concluding observations on Canada by the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, released in late October this year, found “insufficient preventive measures to protect Indigenous women and girls from further violence and [a] lack of concrete actions aimed at addressing the root, systemic causes of all forms of violence against Indigenous women and girls, including sexual violence”. The Canadian Government is called upon, among other things, to “strengthen efforts to combat trafficking of women and girls, ... paying particular attention to Indigenous women, underage girls, migrant women” and others.

Madam Co-ordinator,

Other forms of exploitation are also widespread in the OSCE area. According to various institutions of the European Union, the number of victims of labour exploitation has increased by more than 20 per cent in some of its Member States. This refers to men forced into agricultural labour. Traffickers exploit loopholes in the laws concerning work permits, visas, and the like. Special Rapporteurs of the United Nations Human Rights Council drew attention to similar problems in the United Kingdom in June of this year. Among other things, they expressed alarm at the many risks faced by migrant workers. In that regard, the experts urged the UK Government to “govern labour migration more effectively by adopting adequate policies and safeguards, preventing deception, stepping up efforts to identify, protect, and assist victims of exploitation and prevent trafficking for purposes of labour exploitation, and upholding the country’s international human rights obligations”.

Madam Co-ordinator,

The OSCE’s solid set of anti-trafficking commitments requires implementation in good faith by participating States. Only then can they be an effective tool in countering the trade in “live goods”. The imposition of non-consensus themes or concepts alien to the legal systems of countries is not conducive to this, but rather distracts from efforts to solve really important problems. We regret that the concept of “survivors”, which is being assertively advanced by certain entities and countries, has gained such large-scale momentum. In that regard, we call upon you, Ms. Johnstone, to comply strictly with the mandate entrusted to you by all OSCE participating States and to bear in mind that this concept, as it has evolved since the 2018 Milan Ministerial Council meeting, does not enjoy consensus support in our Organization.

In conclusion, allow me to wish you, Ms. Johnstone, and the staff at your Office success in your work.

Thank you for your attention.