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**STATEMENT BY MR. ANDREY RUDENKO,  
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RUSSIAN FEDERATION TO THE OSCE, AT THE 923rd MEETING  
OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

6 September 2012

**Regarding the court ruling in the case of “Pussy Riot”**

Mr. Chairperson,

We cannot but react to the statements by the delegations of Cyprus (on behalf of the European Union), the United States of America, Norway, Switzerland and Liechtenstein regarding the court ruling handed down in the widely discussed case of the members of the punk group “Pussy Riot”.

We call on all those concerned to give serious thought to what essentially is involved in the outrageous spectacle staged within the walls of the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour in Moscow. We are dealing here not with a harmless prank on the part of overgrown schoolgirls or with a stupid joke but with a sacrilegious act offensive to millions of believers. This act gave rise to justified indignation in Russian society among millions of orthodox faithful and followers of other confessions. What is involved here is a pre-planned act of mockery against the feelings of believing men and women and the desecration of the principal cathedral in Russia, with which important events in the history of our country are linked. Imagine if you will a similar sacrilegious “artistic performance” in a mosque, synagogue or Catholic church. What would have been the reaction in that case?

By their outrageous and immoral behaviour these so-called “artists” in effect copied those persons who in the thirties of the last century, acting under the slogan of militant atheism, fought against religion and callously destroyed churches and places of worship in our country – including the very same Cathedral of Christ the Saviour. For that reason, it is natural that the majority of citizens in our country consider the sentence handed down against the members of this punk group to be a just one.

Unfortunately, this episode clearly disclosed an alarming trend that is characteristic of many OSCE countries, namely an increasing intolerance towards the feelings of believers and, generally, the moral and ethical foundations and values on which modern European civilization is based. We can still clearly recall the reaction in the Islamic world to the “caricature scandal” in Denmark or to the burning in the United States of the Koran, which is regarded as a holy book by Muslims. There were also those who sought to justify these

blasphemous actions through references to freedom of expression. We are well aware of the consequences, including the human victims.

The recent tragic events in the United States provide grounds for these fears. For example, on 5 August in the state of Wisconsin an ex-serviceman opened random fire in a Sikh temple, resulting in the death of seven persons. It is regrettable that literally two days later a mosque was set afire by unidentified persons in another state, this time Missouri.

At the same time, we cannot agree with the assertions regarding the “disproportionality of the sentence” or with the “concerns” raised regarding the objectivity and transparency of the judicial process under which the case of the “Pussy Riot” members was heard. In any country the severity of the punishment is determined by an independent court, and any interference in its work is inadmissible. I would recall that what is involved are illegal actions as defined under law whose effect was to offend the feelings of believing men and women and to desecrate a religious site. On the basis of Article 213 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation these persons were accused of hooliganism for reasons of religious hatred and were sentenced to two years of imprisonment at a penal colony with standard conditions of confinement. The verdict was handed down after a careful examination of all the facts of the case within the framework of existing procedural norms.

I should like to note that on the eve of the reading of the verdict the President of the Russian Federation spoke out in favour of leniency for the members of the “Pussy Riot” group, while the head of the Russian Orthodox Church asked that they be given milder sentences if they were to repent. Nevertheless, the court made its own decision. The convicted women can lodge an appeal, something they have in fact already done. On 27 August their lawyers submitted an appeal against the sentence, which will be examined in the Moscow Municipal Court in the usual manner.

Russian legislation as regards crimes of this kind is not exceptional. As you may be aware, the laws of a number of countries provide for no less severe penalties for offences against the moral sensitivities of religious believers. In the Criminal Code of Germany, for example, offences committed against religion and views, including acts of hooliganism within places of worship, are punishable by imprisonment for a term of up to three years or by a fine. The Austrian Criminal Code, in the case of acts of hooliganism committed within a church that offend moral feelings, provides for penalties in the form of imprisonment for a period of up to six months or a fine. Accordingly, assertions regarding the disproportionality of the punishment automatically call to mind efforts made in bad faith to use the court’s verdict as a pretext for a blanket and politically inspired criticism of the Russian authorities.

We also categorically reject the efforts to tie in the sentence delivered with Russia’s obligations as regards respect for freedom of speech. The fundamental documents under international law on human rights establish a number of limitations on freedom of expression. Considerations of this kind are laid down in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and in the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.

In conclusion, we call on all our partners to refrain from hasty and superficial statements and to give careful thought to the causes and consequences of this immoral action. After all, there is surely no one in the OSCE who is interested in inflaming anti-religious, xenophobic or extremist attitudes. Over the many centuries of its history – beginning with the

Crusades and religious persecutions and ending with the tragedy of the Second World War – Europe has experienced the consequences of such ideologies. And unless manifestations of hatred are rejected early enough – whether against religion, migrants or ethnic minorities – a favourable breeding ground will continue to be created for dangerous divisions in society and for the emergence of new Anders Breiviks.

Thank you for your attention.