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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
1383rd MEETING OF THE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

21 July 2022

Mr. Chair,

Since the start of the war, nearly 13 million Ukrainians – predominantly women and children – have had to flee their homes to escape Russia's relentless attacks on civilian populations. Unfortunately, the road to safety is filled with dangers, including the risk of exploitation by criminal networks, who prey on the most vulnerable, as we heard earlier this week at the Special Human Dimension Meeting. I will focus my statement today on the exploitation risks faced by these vulnerable groups.

For human traffickers, Russia's war is an opportunity. In April, the OSCE Special Coordinator on Countering Trafficking in Human Beings, Mr. Val Richey, underscored that: "Risks of trafficking in this humanitarian crisis are huge. No country can handle them alone. There needs to be a comprehensive, OSCE-wide effort to prevent this crisis from becoming a human trafficking crisis." In early June, the UN Special Representative for Sexual Violence in Armed Conflicts also emphasized that "from the outset of the conflict, heightened risks of trafficking in persons, including for purposes of sexual exploitation and prostitution, have been alarmingly evident."

Women and children on the move arrive in countries they don't know, trying to get by in languages they don't understand, and with cultures they are not familiar with. In addition, numerous families have been separated, resulting in a large number of unaccompanied minors. This puts them at a particularly high risk of exploitation, including trafficking in persons, abuse and sexual exploitation.

The longer Russia's war against Ukraine continues, the more refugees become prey to exploitation and abuse.

Mr. Chair,

Without support networks and timely assistance to find safe accommodations and work, refugees can fall prey to criminal networks as they seek to provide for their children and themselves. These networks lure vulnerable refugees with false promises of work, affordable transportation, or accommodations, using social media and online advertisements. Many of those who respond to the false prospects end up in forced labour, sexual exploitation, prostitution, and sometimes even worse.

Luckily, due to the dedicated efforts of law enforcement, sometimes these criminal networks are detected and dismantled. Earlier this month, Ukrainian law enforcement uncovered a human trafficking network and arrested the alleged ringleader; and Europol led a multi-country hackathon to monitor and detect suspicious human trafficking networks online.

We commend these efforts and encourage all participating States to continue protecting and assisting Ukrainian refugees, and to redouble efforts to fight human trafficking.

Mr. Chair,

Gender-responsive, victim-centered, trauma-informed and age-appropriate identification techniques, protection and referral services must continue to be central to our collective efforts, in collaboration with civil society and the private sector. To this end, the Government of Canada is funding initiatives aimed at preventing human trafficking at Ukraine's borders. This includes work with the Government of Ukraine and local NGOs to widely disseminate information to increase awareness of the traps of human-trafficking schemes. We are also supporting the Ukrainian Government develop a database to track and protect children crossing the border, including institutionalized children and orphans.

Domestically, we also recognize that refugees entering Canada may be at risk of trafficking after their arrival, in particular women and youth. This is why we established the Human Trafficking Hotline operating 24 / 7, offering referrals to support and to services for victims and survivors of human trafficking.

We will continue to coordinate with our international and domestic partners to reduce this enhanced risk of trafficking resulting from Russia's unjustified war against Ukraine and to mitigate the impacts of this horrific crime.

Mr. Chair,

As we all know, the human toll of this catastrophe is unprecedented in Europe since WWII. Hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians have found themselves deported to Russia on trains in the middle of the night or sent to filtration camps, both eerily reminiscent of the methods used in this earlier European conflict. In less than five months, thousands of Ukrainian civilians have died, millions have been displaced, and millions are at risk of trafficking. Russian forces demonstrate time and again inhumane and barbaric behaviour against their neighbours. Behaviours that, as reported by the recent Moscow Mechanism mission, likely amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity. The world will not forget, and we will not let these crimes go unpunished.

Mr. Chair,

Before I conclude, let me address the impact of Russia's war on those who want to help Ukraine and its people. This week we heard the devastating news of the death of Paul Urey – a volunteer aid worker – while in custody of the so-called "Donetsk People's Republic". He was reportedly attempting to rescue a woman and her family trapped by the fighting in a village south of the city of Zaporizhzhia, when he was stopped at a checkpoint and detained. He later died in detention, with no explanation forthcoming. Our deepest condolences go to the family of Mr. Urey and to the UK delegation.

Russia has specific obligations under the Geneva Conventions as an occupying power, which must be respected. Those responsible for this tragedy must be held to account, and we call on Russia to immediately and unconditionally release all civilian aid workers as well as the three national Mission members of the OSCE's Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.