

Delegation of the Russian Federation

**STATEMENT BY
MR. ANDREY KELIN, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE
RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE 1045th MEETING OF
THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

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On the protection of children in the OSCE area

Mr. Chairperson,

We should like once again to draw the Permanent Council's attention to the problem of the protection of children in the OSCE area.

The alarming information about the large number of violations in this area in many OSCE countries, and the threats to the life, security, health and moral development of children demand the closest attention.

In spite of the disquieting information from international and non-governmental organizations and human rights workers about the existence of serious breaches in the protection of children and threats to their life, security, health and moral development, this issue continues to be assiduously glossed over in the OSCE or shoved into the background on some pretext or other.

And yet there is a lot to be concerned about. For example, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child has presented information about the significant increase in Sweden of cases of violence, aggression, bullying and hate crimes in connection with children. It highlights the inadequate work on the part of the State to protect children as well from the harmful influence of modern information technology, in particular the activities of online paedophiles and extremists.

An Associated Press investigation reveals serious shortcomings in the United States of America in the social protection of minors from domestic violence. Journalists counted no fewer than 786 deaths of children between 2008 and 2013 after the social services had followed up reports of cruel treatment of them. There are horrifying cases of abuse (beating, deprivation of food, locking in the cellar, etc.) resulting in the death of small children with practically nothing being done by the social services. According to the Associated Press analysis, Florida is the "leader" in terms of child deaths as a result of negligence by social workers (117 in six years), followed by Georgia (83), New York (78) and Texas (76).

I won't talk again about Internet trafficking in the United States of America of adopted children, including Russian orphans, or of the murder of Russian children after adoption by their new American parents.

The attempts to exert pressure on Russian-speaking children in Lithuania are a cause for concern. How else is it possible to explain the sudden search of schools in Vilnius whose pupils were attending the Soyuz International Youth Educational Camps in Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Ukraine? The school principal was charged with "assistance to another State in carrying out activities hostile to the Republic of Lithuania", punishable under Article 118 of the Lithuanian Criminal Code by up to seven years' imprisonment – in other words, legal action instead of the development of contacts between young people.

The situation of the Chechen children removed from Russia to Lithuania in 2006 still remains unresolved. The Lithuanian authorities refuse to allow their mothers, Russian guardians or the consul access to the children in spite of numerous official appeals by Russia and by representatives of the local Chechen diaspora as well. The actions of the Lithuanian authorities are at odds with bilateral and international agreements, including the provisions of the United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the relevant Protocol to it.

The situation with regard to the protection of children is also far from untroubled in the United Kingdom. According to British human rights workers, one in 20 children in that country has been sexually abused. There are even entire gangs of child abusers and also secret paedophile societies. One of the most glaring examples is the case of abusers of Pakistani origin who abducted and raped 11-year-old girls in the county of Oxfordshire. According to Home Secretary Theresa May, similar horrifying stories in Rotherham, Manchester, Rochdale and South Yorkshire are, unfortunately, just the tip of the iceberg.

Another critical problem in the United Kingdom is the hundreds of children removed every year from their families, against the will not only of their parents but also of the children themselves. There are also so-called "secret family courts" and the removal of children without the proper paperwork. There are violations of the principle of presumed innocence: removal decisions are taken at times on the basis of unverified facts. Cases of this sort have also been recorded with the children of citizens of other countries (the Netherlands, Lithuania, Germany). Diplomatic and consular representations have not been informed in the proper manner. Further communication by parents with the removed children is unfortunately subject to strict censorship and can be discontinued at any time for "exceeding the permitted limits". We have observed similar cases in other European countries, notably in Norway. Moreover parents are forbidden to talk publicly about the state of affairs on pain of arrest or denial of parental rights.

According to Finnish human rights workers, children continue to be removed from their Russian mothers in Finland under far-fetched pretexts. Three such cases have occurred in the last three months.

Russia is also faced with the task of improving the situation of children. It has not yet managed to deal with the problem of begging and the exploitation of children from underprivileged families by criminal gangs. The living conditions of children in orphanages also need to be further improved. The protection of children is a matter of priority in Russia. A number of measures have been introduced, including the use of international human rights

instruments. There are multipurpose federal and regional programmes to which considerable resources are allocated. There still remains much to be done, however.

No matter how much progress the OSCE participating States make in protecting the rights of children, there are problems in every country that need to be resolved. It is inadmissible and even criminal to ignore the myriad examples of child labour, sexual abuse of minors, child pornography, begging, vagrancy, domestic violence, not only in foster homes, and trafficking in children, including the use of social media and the Internet.

We urge the Serbian Chairmanship and our partners to give serious attention to the protection of children and to start substantive discussion of this issue at last this year.

Thank you for your attention.