



Delegation of Canada  
to the OSCE

Délégation du Canada  
auprès de l'OSCE

**STATEMENT BY AMBASSADOR JOCELYN KINNEAR  
ON FURTHER DETERIORATION OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN RUSSIA  
1409<sup>th</sup> MEETING OF THE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

**2 February 2023**

Mr. Chair,

It has only been four months since Professor Angelika Nußberger, the rapporteur appointed under the Moscow Mechanism, delivered her report on the human rights situation in the Russian Federation to this Council. At that time, she raised serious concerns that Russia's harsh legislation on "foreign agents" and "undesirable organizations" was closing off civil society space, restricting NGO activities, interfering with media freedom and negatively impacting the political and social activities of individuals.

Her concerns about the human rights situation in Russia have been echoed and repeated by numerous international human rights NGOs and by independent bodies, including the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, the European Court of Human Rights, the OHCHR, and the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders, to name but a few.

In the intervening months we have only seen further proof of the utter disregard by the Putin regime for the human rights and fundamental freedoms of the people living within the Russian Federation.

Last week's forced dissolution of the Moscow Helsinki Group testifies not only to the ongoing repression, but also the Kremlin's rejection of fundamental OSCE principles.

(As others have noted), the Moscow Helsinki Group is Russia's oldest human rights organisation. In 1975, when the Soviet Union signed the Helsinki Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, the government published the text – in its entirety, including the agreement's provisions on respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms – in "Pravda." It is said that a small group of citizens – including Professor Yuri Orlov and Dr. Andrei Sakharov – read the Helsinki Accords and decided to take their government at its word.

On May 12, 1976, the creation of the Moscow Helsinki Group was announced, with a mandate to monitor compliance of Third Dimension commitments. It inspired the creation of other Helsinki Groups throughout Europe – East and West – as well as in Canada and the USA.

In the Soviet period, the members of this group were surveilled, harassed, arrested and detained. Yuri Orlov was imprisoned and then exiled. Andrei Sakharov was exiled internally to the closed city of Gorky. Dozens of others were imprisoned. The Helsinki Groups persevered by continuing to shine a light on human rights violations and political persecution. They exerted pressure on all participating States to push one another into respecting their commitments.

The Moscow Helsinki Group – and the other organizations that it inspired – were catalysts for the development of civil society holding governments to account. This is what the Russian Federation is rejecting by suppressing civil society within its borders – accountability to its own citizens.

We also heard this week that Moscow’s municipal authorities are evicting the Sakharov Center from its premises and from the Andrey Sakharov memorial apartment. The non-profit, whose mission is to educate the public about human rights, received a termination notice on January 24. The grounds cited in the notice were the amendments to the Russian “foreign agent” law that took effect on December 1, 2022.

The Putin regime has combined this, of course, with further actions to limit media freedom, declaring the news outlet Meduza an “undesirable organisation”, a measure that has been condemned by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media. The repression of the independent media and the continued attack on civil society space serves only to isolate the citizens of Russia.

The shuttering of the Moscow Helsinki Group and the eviction of the Sakharov Center are tragically symbolic of Russia’s turning away from the founding principles of this organization, as well as from the human rights obligations that the Soviet Union, and then Russia in succession, undertook in the post-war period such as the ICERD, the ICCPR and the ICESCR.

And as this Council has noted repeatedly, Russia’s internal repression – its denial and rejection of its human rights commitments – only fuels its external aggression. This has been made only too clear in Russia’s brutal war against the people and territory of Ukraine.

Mr. Chair,

In this Council, the Russian delegation has cynically criticized the human rights records of Canada, the U.S., Poland and the Baltic states, and others. They have accused participating States “West of Vienna” of interference in the internal affairs of states.

Canada remains open to serious discussions and exchanges on our own human rights record; we have a vibrant civil society that holds us to account on it every day. As Russia should.

But in trying to twist the narrative, Russia has argued that the “West” is seeking to impose its “values” on others, and that some members of this Council apply a double standard to human rights.

The facts say differently.

Russia is violating its international obligations and the commitments that all of us, including Russia, made 47 years ago in Helsinki – in its war against Ukraine, and in its repression of its own people.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.