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**STATEMENT BY
MR. ALEKSANDR VOLGAREV, DEPUTY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF
THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE 1438th MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

8 September 2023

In connection with the International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances

Mr. Chairperson,

On 30 August, the International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances was observed. That date was established through United Nations General Assembly resolution 65/209 of 21 December 2010 as a reminder of the need to combat the scourge in question. Today – 13 years later – this grave problem has lost none of its relevance, including in the OSCE area.

The externally steered Kyiv regime actively engages in enforced disappearances for various purposes. That there are secret prisons in Ukraine managed by its Security Service is no secret to anyone – in 2016, press photographers were shown round one such detention facility in Kyiv by the then Prosecutor General of Ukraine, Yuriy Lutsenko. Their existence was similarly confirmed in 2019 by the Head of the United Nations Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine, Fiona Frazer. The Mission was able to establish the names of 184 persons who were being unlawfully detained in a secret prison of the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) in Kharkiv.

From 2014 to 2022 several illegal detention facilities were up and running in the population centres of Donbas. An end was put to their activities following the liberation of these towns and cities by the Russian army. Documentary evidence and eyewitness testimonies are now in the public domain regarding a secret prison in Mariupol called the “Library” that was run by members of the neo-Nazi Azov formation. Civilians who did not share the neo-Nazis’ views were taken there, as were people suspected of sympathizing with the People’s Republics of Donetsk and Lugansk and with Russia. They were illegally deprived of their liberty and subjected to torture and abuse. Some people were even killed on the spot in particularly brutal fashion.

Since the start of the Russian special military operation, the Kyiv regime has intensified its attempts to purge the public and political space of divergent opinions. As part of their efforts to combat dissent, the Ukrainian intelligence services do not balk at abducting journalists, civil society activists and public figures. Overall, international bodies have recorded at least 91 enforced disappearances and arbitrary detentions carried out by the Ukrainian security apparatus between February 2022 and 23 May 2023. A large proportion of the victims were subjected to torture or ill-treatment. Several of them were taken to an

undisclosed destination and continue to be detained by the SBU. The Chilean journalist Gonzalo Lira López, the activist Elena Berezhnaya and the historian Aleksandr Karevin, in particular, have suffered such attacks.

Members of the clergy, too, have endured repression, notably the Vicegerent of the Kyiv Monastery of the Caves, the Metropolitan Pavel, and Archimandrite Laurus (Berezovsky) of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and many others. The corresponding facts are described in greater detail in a recent report by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs entitled “Illegal actions by the Kiev regime targeting the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC), its clergy and parishioners”. We have already drawn the Permanent Council’s attention to that document. We would remind you that we continue to expect the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights and the Personal Representative responsible for combating discrimination against Christians to provide an appropriate and substantive response in accordance with their respective mandates.

Mr. Chairperson,

In their disdainful attitude towards human beings and human dignity the Kyiv authorities have plenty of “role models”. For the Western handlers of the Zelenskyy regime have likewise repeatedly tainted themselves through inhumane treatment, enforced disappearances, torture and so on. One of the most glaring examples continues to be the notorious US prison at Guantánamo Bay, though in the same league are the CIA “secret prisons”, including “flying prisons”, on the territory of some Member States of the European Union.

In 2023, these facilities once again attracted international attention. The United Nations Human Rights Council’s Working Group on Arbitrary Detention issued an opinion in April on the situation concerning Abu Zubaydah, the “Forever Prisoner” of Guantánamo. It is pointed out there that his detention under the so-called extraordinary rendition programme may constitute an enforced disappearance. Also involved in this breach of the law, in addition to the United States of America, were Poland, Lithuania, the United Kingdom and a number of OSCE Partners for Co-operation, through whose “good offices” Mr. Zubaydah eventually ended up in Guantánamo. The same fate befell dozens of other detainees who have been unlawfully held there for many years. Meanwhile, those responsible for the acts of torture and enforced disappearances during transfers and secret detentions have not been brought before a court to account for their actions.

No less tragic is the situation in the US-controlled Al-Hawl refugee camp in Syria. International human rights organizations have repeatedly drawn attention to the fact that people have been held there in incommunicado detention for many years, which is tantamount to enforced disappearance.

Mr. Chairperson,

The situation in European OSCE participating States also continues to be cause for concern. Apart from the assistance rendered by a number of those countries to the US Government in its criminal actions, enforced disappearances in the context of migration flows are becoming increasingly relevant there. This is confirmed, in particular, by the conclusions of a report entitled “EU Member States’ use of new technologies in enforced disappearances” that was published by the Border Violence Monitoring Network (BVMN), a non-governmental organization (NGO), in February of this year. It is asserted there that incidents of arbitrary detention and “pushbacks” of migrants in the Western Balkans, Greece and Türkiye testify to enforced disappearances being a “widespread and systematic” phenomenon at the external borders of the European Union. Since 2017, the BVMN has documented over 1,500 testimonies reporting the arrest, detention and forcible removal of almost 25,000 migrants by persons or groups acting with the

authorization, support or acquiescence of EU Member States. Moreover, this is frequently done in such a way as to conceal the whereabouts of asylum seekers.

The real figures may be much higher – many cases are not made public, not least owing to the obstacles put in the way of relevant NGOs by EU Member States. In particular, the European Commission’s country reports mention restrictions on the work of such entities in Greece, Poland and Italy, along with instances of their staff being subjected to surveillance or pressure.

Also at risk are the relatives of disappeared migrants: they may suffer intimidation and encounter hurdles when attempting to determine the whereabouts of their loved ones or to draw attention to such cases. In April 2023, the United Nations Committee on Enforced Disappearances expressed concerns in the context of migration to Germany, in particular concerns about disappearances being under-reported or going unreported. The Committee recommended that the German authorities ensure that witnesses or relatives are able to report disappearances of migrants without fear of deportation or deprivation of liberty.

In 2022, experts from that same Committee noted that the family members of missing persons in Greece had faced bureaucratic obstacles when attempting to locate their loved ones. This refers to hundreds of people who have disappeared in the Mediterranean Sea or the Evros River. Most alarming is the fact that a large number of unaccompanied migrant children have gone missing upon their arrival in Greece or have disappeared from migrant reception centres. What is more, as pointed out by the Committee, “migrants, including children, have routinely been held in secret detention, incommunicado and without being registered”.

The situation on the European Union’s eastern borders is no better. Take Latvia, for example. Even human rights NGOs famed for their loyalty to the collective West have been obliged to acknowledge that. Their experts have concluded that refugees and migrants are being brutally pushed back by the Latvian law enforcement authorities at the border with Belarus, with many of them enduring serious human rights violations, such as secret detention. Sometimes such arbitrary detention may be equated with enforced disappearance.

We have cited a by no means exhaustive list of cases related to the involvement of so-called progressive democracies in the practice of enforced disappearances in the OSCE area. The Brussels bloc is engaged in such “efforts”, including financial ones, beyond its area of responsibility as well – for example, in some North African countries.

On 21 July 2023, several experts and special rapporteurs appointed by the United Nations Human Rights Council expressed their concern over the plight of 120 migrants and refugees in Libya. They are believed to have been released by the Libyan Directorate for Combating Illegal Migration (DCIM) from a warehouse in Tazirbu in February 2023, whereupon they were reportedly taken to an undisclosed location, and, what is more, in circumstances that might be tantamount to enforced disappearance. We recall that the DCIM was granted financial and technical assistance by the European Union. It is legitimate to ask whether EU structures are potentially complicit in this incident, which is so dubious from a human rights perspective. There are questions for Italy, too, whose Government continues to provide significant support to the Libyan authorities on a bilateral basis, despite numerous reports by international human rights organizations and repeated recommendations to suspend that support – recommendations voiced by, among others, the United Nations Secretary-General, the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights and Italian civil society.

Mr. Chairperson,

One could go on and on with such examples. We call upon all the aforementioned OSCE participating States to stop violating human rights and to fulfil their obligations in good faith, including their OSCE commitments. Meanwhile, the relevant executive structures of our Organization must finally, within their existing mandates, adequately assess these actions.

Thank you for your attention.