



PERMANENT MISSION OF THE REPUBLIC OF LATVIA TO THE UN, ENGLISH only
OSCE AND OTHER INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS IN VIENNA

Statement by the Permanent Representative of Latvia, Ambassador Bahtijors Hasans in response to the delegation of the Russian Federation

Permanent Council No.1135,
Vienna, 2 March 2017

Mr. Chairman,

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to exercise Latvia's right of reply, since the name of my country was mentioned in the statement by the Russian delegation.

In its statement, the Russian Federation mentioned Latvia in the context of statelessness. However, they have repeatedly mixed different terminologies.

Latvia's national legislation is in conformity with two international instruments - 1954 and 1961 Conventions on Statelessness - protecting rights of those persons who are registered as stateless in Latvia. As already explained in this forum on 26 January this year, Latvia currently is home to 176 stateless persons which represent 0.01 percent of the total population. Obviously this hardly could be characterized as a mass statelessness.

We would like to emphasize that, even though Latvia is not a successor state of the USSR, it granted a privileged status and preferential access to citizenship to former Soviet citizens transferred to Latvia by the Soviet regime. Apparently this is the group of people misleadingly referred to by the Russian Federation.

However, they are in no way stateless persons. The protection provided to them by the Latvian legislation extends significantly beyond the requirements of the *1954 Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons*. These persons enjoy the same social guarantees and most of the rights guaranteed to Latvian citizens. They enjoy full protection under the law both in Latvia and abroad.

I would like to take this opportunity to repeatedly assure that Latvia has on several occasions eased the naturalization legislation. Current framework provides every opportunity for non-citizens to acquire citizenship. Whether to use this opportunity is an act of individual will. No one can be forced into citizenship.

Let me conclude by reaffirming our continued support to the UNHCR's efforts to terminate statelessness globally.

Thank you, Mr Chairman.