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**STATEMENT BY MR. ANDREY KELIN,  
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,  
AT THE 1025th MEETING OF THE  
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

13 November 2014

**On the protection of the rights of children in the OSCE area**

Mr. Chairperson,

We are extremely concerned about the safeguarding of the rights of children in the OSCE area.

As I recall, we have heard appeals from our partners not to concentrate on details but to focus on “systemic failures”. Unfortunately, it is quite clear today that the problems regarding the safeguarding of the rights of children in the OSCE have indeed taken on systemic proportions.

At the Permanent Council meeting on 30 October we already raised the question of the removal by the Norwegian child protection authorities of a five-year-old boy from the custody of a Russian family living in that country. As far as I am aware, the child was put in the care of another family and there is no intention of returning him to his birth parents.

The Office of the Ombudsperson for Children’s Rights in the Russian Federation recently received new information about further removals of this type.

One case concerns two children aged 11 and 13 years who were taken away from their mother, Elena Kuznetsova, who has Russian citizenship. They were entrusted to the sister of Mrs. Kuznetsova’s husband, and the mother is permitted to visit her children eight times a year.

The second removal concerns the family of the Russian citizen Andrey Prikazchikov, who is married to a Norwegian woman. The pretext was the fact that during a game of football one of the Norwegian boys collided with Mr. Prikazchikov’s son and suffered a slight injury. The Norwegian child protection authorities removed two sons from the Russian man’s custody and placed each of them with a different foster family, something that is quite unacceptable. They are also threatening to remove the third child from this family.

We should like to point out that according to information from the Ombudsperson for Children's Rights, Mr. Pavel Astakhov, representatives of the child protection agency in Norway have already removed 19 children from Russian families.

Recently, the Russian woman Alexandra Fomina, who lives in Finland, also appealed to the Russian authorities for assistance after her ten-year-old daughter Diana failed to return home from school. It transpired that the Finnish child protection agency took the girl away on 7 November. According to information from human rights activists, it is possible that they removed the child because she told friends that one day her parents had smacked her and refused to get a dog. The child was placed with a foster family on 9 November.

We do not deny that in such cases the child protection authorities in these countries are acting within the law – at least one would like to hope so. At the same time, it is impossible to close our eyes to some important aspects. First, they are citizens of another country. Second, measures like this can have irreparable consequences. Many eminent human rights organizations share this view. In particular, a report by the Nordic Committee for Human Rights stated that only in a small number of cases in which children were removed from their birth families was there actually a need.

Children removed from a family environment that the authorities believe to be unfavourable often find themselves in even worse conditions, in which they are maltreated, bullied, insulted and exposed to psychological, physical and even sexual violence. The authors of the report cite research data showing that children separated from their parents are two or three times as likely, frequently as adults, to develop serious depression, psychosis or other psychiatric and somatic disorders as those who are not subject to this kind of stress in childhood.

No less worrying is the situation of Russian children who have gone to the United States of America on educational or rehabilitation programmes and who have not been returned to Russia. It is often impossible to obtain information from the United States authorities about their fate.

For example, a girl from a regional boarding school in Tula went to the United States of America in July 2004 to be treated for facial burns as part of a charity project by Dream Vision Animation, a non-governmental organization. She has not returned since then to Russia. No procedures have been undertaken to establish child custody in the United States. Another boy from a residential home for physically disabled children in Penza region went to the United States of America for examination and treatment in South Carolina. He also failed to return to his native country, and nothing is known about him either. Another Russian high school student left in 2013 as part of the FLEX student exchange programme and failed to return to Russia on its completion. The United States authorities are refusing to co-operate in the return of the teenager to his native country. Co-operation under this programme has been suspended.

We find this situation unacceptable and call on our colleagues to take our concerns seriously. There are a large number of commitments and obligations in international law and within the OSCE regarding the rights and interests of children. For a long time, however, discussion in the OSCE regarding the safeguarding of the rights of the child has unjustifiably

and also possibly deliberately been given low priority. We feel that there is a need for objective consideration of this serious problem.

Thank you for your attention.