



PERMANENT MISSION OF THE REPUBLIC OF LATVIA TO THE UN,
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.1152,
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Thank you Mr. Chair!

We have duly noted the statement of the Russian delegation.

Let me start my response with a clear message - it is premature and not appropriate to comment at this particular forum on proposals of amendments to laws or regulations before their approval. Those particular ones, the Russian Federation was referring to, are aimed to the reconciliation of society and continue to be discussed at different levels, in accordance with the constitution of the Republic of Latvia.

On a more general note, let me remind our colleagues that during and after the Second World War Latvia greatly suffered under the occupation of two totalitarian regimes – the Soviet Union and the Nazi Germany. Using repressions and terror the occupying Nazi and Soviet powers forcibly drafted many people in Latvia to join military units on one or the other side of the battle-front.

During the Second World War more than 100,000 Latvian citizens were mobilized into various formations of German armed forces and about the same number in Soviet armed forces.

Latvian authorities have consistently condemned all crimes against humanity committed by both totalitarian regimes. Latvia categorically denounces the Holocaust, mourns its victims and is strongly committed to education, remembrance and research of it.

The former President of Latvia, who was mentioned in statement by the Russian Federation, has publicly stated that it is important to find concord between those war veterans, who fought for the Red Army, and those, who fought on the opposite side. The President has noted that for a secure and tolerant society there is no other way but to find a common denominator with a view to the future. He promised to facilitate the rapprochement among all World War II veterans, also expressing support for an equal attitude, including social guarantees, towards all of those, who were drafted into armed forces during the war.

I would like to strongly argue that this is a time for Russia to look at itself in the mirror.

Today, when the international community is greatly concerned about the serious violations of human rights of Tatars in illegally occupied Crimea, the allegation by representatives of the Russian Federation against Latvia are just another attempt to distract attention from the sad human rights situation in Russia itself.

On May 18, 1944, the Soviet government ordered the mass deportation of over 230, 000 Crimean Tatars from their homeland. Thousands of families were forcibly separated: some citizens were given warning of just few minutes and afterwards were deposited on the freezing steppes of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. Nearly half of those deported, mostly women and children, perished between 1944-1947.

Scope of this tragedy bears remembrance, all the more so because the persecution of the Crimean Tatars is not merely a historical fact, it is a present day reality in Russia's illegally occupied and annexed Crimea. The Russian government has carried out a campaign of violence, including killings, disappearances, imprisonment and tortures against those who oppose the occupation. Russia has banned the Crimean Tatar Mejlis - the sole independent, legally-recognized voice of the Tatar people. It has shut down Tatar language media outlets and cut off Tatar-language schools.

Russia with its statement today just confirmed once again, how wrong it would be to follow a suggestion to single out one form of intolerance, or to follow a selective approach of condemning only one totalitarian regime. It is our true belief that only a comprehensive address will make the right difference.

Thank you, Mr Chair!