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**STATEMENT BY
MR. ALEKSANDR VOLGAREV, DEPUTY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF
THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE 1480th MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

4 July 2024

On World Refugee Day

Madam Chairperson,

The Russian Federation is pleased to be able to speak on a subject as important as the protection of refugees. Our country has consistently taken measures in accordance with its international obligations to assist asylum seekers. We stress once again that an important element of these efforts is co-operation with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) as the main international framework for addressing the challenges of forced migration.

Since 2014, following the coup d'état in Ukraine, hundreds of thousands of Russians and Russian-speaking residents of that country have fled to Russia. The mass exodus to Russia of civilians fleeing war crimes by the Ukrainian armed forces and the incessant shelling of peaceful towns and cities in Donbas continued in the following years. Our country has received more than 2.8 million refugees according to the UNHCR, although the number in reality is much higher. Since the start of the special military operation, around 5.5 million people have arrived in Russia. Every effort is being made by Russia to receive and accommodate these persons and to provide them with all-round assistance. As we have said many times before, the staff of the UNHCR office in Moscow can see for themselves the effectiveness of the work being done. The mass exodus was also fuelled by the Russophobia and hatred of everything Russian cultivated by the Kyiv regime. These and other human rights violations by Volodymyr Zelenskyy's regime are listed in the recent report on the human rights situation in Ukraine by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which can be found on its website. We urge everyone to study it carefully.

Madam Chairperson,

We are forced to point out once again the absolutely baseless arrogance of the Western alliance countries towards other States. The facts, figures and trends recorded by numerous human rights bodies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and experts bear witness to systemic problems. Many of these are due to deep-rooted racial, ethnic or religious prejudices in these societies. Moreover, the United States of America and the European Union, which are avidly circulating accusations against Russia with the help of human rights bodies that report to them, including the OSCE, in connection with the "deportation" of Ukrainian children, are glaring examples of violations of the rights of underage migrants and refugees.

In the wake of the recently adopted EU Pact on Migration and Asylum, a number of United Nations Human Rights Council Special Rapporteurs have called upon EU Member States to finally ban the detention of children in immigration centres. The experts point out the inadmissibility of detaining “migrant and asylum-seeking children because of their or their parents’ migration status”. This is “never in the best interest of a child and always a violation of children’s rights”.

Another problem is the separation of migrant and refugee families. Every year, the American Civil Liberties Union, an NGO, reports such cases at US State border crossings. The sad figures represent tens of thousands of broken lives and human rights violations. It is worth noting that naturally no one is taking the responsibility that the United States is so fond of calling for.

The international human rights community is concerned about the situation in the United Kingdom. We are not going to list all the comments. There are too many of them, and they would make a separate “current issue”. Let us recall just a few. Since 2022, this State has passed laws tightening migration policy. The most prominent are the Illegal Migration Act, approved in July 2023, and the new legislation in April this year regarding the deportation of illegal migrants to Rwanda. The latter not only violates the provisions of the 1951 United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, including the principle of non-refoulement, but also helps trafficking in human beings and various forms of exploitation to flourish.

Moreover, according to the NGO Care4Calais, the conditions for migrants and refugees in the holding camps have given rise to numerous complaints. Detention at the former Wethersfield airbase in Essex is tantamount to imprisonment, and the accommodation conditions inhuman. There is no access to healthcare there, including psychological counselling. In February this year, the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture published a report following the experts’ visit to the United Kingdom in spring 2023. It noted abuse by staff at Colnbrook and Brook House, with excessive measures, including handcuffing women to the bed while visiting external hospitals.

Madam Chairperson,

The latest report by the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights on the situation in the EU countries was published at the beginning of June this year. Its conclusions are very disappointing. According to the International Organization for Migration, in 2023, more than 4,000 people perished or went missing at sea while trying to reach Europe. This is a 37 per cent increase from 2022 and is the highest in five years. And this figure does not include those who attempted to reach Europe by crossing the English Channel. More than two dozen people perished or went missing there in 2023. Over three dozen people died in the attempt to reach the French territory of Mayotte.

The report states that issues of mistreatment of migrants, discrimination against people of African descent and Roma – in addition to violent manifestations of anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim hatred – are among the “dominant issues in the political landscape of Europe”. The introduction of tougher border controls, as well as arbitrary, violent and inhuman treatment by border and law enforcement officials, contribute to gross violations of asylum seekers’ rights. Against this background, it is not surprising that some countries are seeking to restrict the activities of NGOs defending the rights of migrants and refugees. Relevant cases were recorded by the European Commission in 2023 in Greece, Italy, Latvia, Poland and elsewhere. The purpose of such actions is obvious – to suppress unpleasant facts that would form a picture that is very different from the one that the EU representative has tried to paint for us here.

These cases clearly demonstrate the urgency of the problem of protecting the rights of refugees and migrants in the OSCE area. We call upon the Western alliance countries to stop violating their international

obligations to protect the rights of migrants and refugees, to cease lecturing others and to finally start taking responsibility for their actions.

Thank you for your attention.