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**STATEMENT BY
MR. ALEKSANDR VOLGAREV, DEPUTY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF
THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE 1464th MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

7 March 2024

**In response to the address by the Special Representative of the
OSCE Chairperson-in-Office on Gender on the occasion of International Women's Day**

Madam Chairperson,

Tomorrow, International Women's Day will be solemnly celebrated across the whole world. This spring holiday has come a long way, from a kind of grassroots mass protest to international recognition in 1975 under its present name through United Nations General Assembly resolution 32/142. We pay tribute to generations of outstanding female exponents of the movement clamouring for women to be given equal rights in society.

A definitive solution to the problematic issues on the women's agenda is nevertheless still very far off. This process is being hampered by high-handed attempts to politicize gender matters, to endow these with a neoliberal and pro-Western ring. We categorically object to an expansive construction of the concept of gender equality, which has been unequivocally defined in the commitments of our Organization as equality between women and men. We insist on the imperative of compliance by OSCE officials with their mandate and on the inadmissibility of inserting non-consensus elements.

Madam Chairperson,

The permanent representatives of Western alliance countries are very fond of harping on about the fictitious violence by Russian soldiers against the civilian population in Ukraine. The way in which they savour, down to the smallest detail, certain stories the credibility of which raises legitimate doubts stands in stark contrast to their deafening silence over the brutality of the Kyiv regime. Even media outlets known for their pro-Ukrainian stance, such as *The Guardian*, point out that members of that regime are ruthless in their treatment of women and children. In early February of this year, it became known that, as part of criminal proceedings against Ukrainian citizens accused of allegedly collaborating with Russia, torture is used to get the "right" testimony out of people. Without consideration for the sex and age of those being interrogated.

Detailed information on these atrocities was shared during the round table organized on 26 February of this year by the Permanent Mission of Russia in connection with the tenth anniversary of the events on the Maidan in Kyiv. Those attending the round table had the opportunity to hear first-hand about numerous

facts related to the persecution of civil society activists – many of them women – on account of their professional work. We regard the demonstrative boycotting of that important event by the collective West and the OSCE executive structures reporting to it as indicative of fear of an honest discussion, of an unwillingness to hear the inconvenient truth about their protégés, but also of support for the crimes by the Kyiv neo-Nazis.

In the context of the spy scare that has taken hold of Ukraine and the constant searching for “domestic enemies” there, thousands of public and cultural figures and human rights defenders are subjected to persecution. Among those being persecuted are the activist Elena Berezhnaya, who was taken into custody back in 2022, and the recently arrested lawyer Svetlana Novitskaya. Incidentally, they have both taken part a number of times in the work of human dimension events within our Organization. However, their fate for some reason does not interest OSCE representatives whose direct duties include the protection of human rights.

Madam Chairperson,

In 2023, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights noted that women were under-represented in public and political life in Cyprus, Slovakia, Switzerland, Bulgaria, Denmark and Czechia. Women in Georgia also encounter hate speech, harassment, threats and intimidation. Things are not too bright in Luxembourg either. There are major deficiencies there with regard to employment policy and in the fields of education and healthcare.

Systemic racism and racial discrimination have an impact on access to healthcare for women from ethnic groups and Indigenous women. In particular, this problem is being flagged in the United States of America by non-governmental organizations (NGOs), such as the Southern Rural Black Women’s Initiative for Economic and Social Justice. Moreover, as we have already mentioned before, very serious criticism of the US authorities is to be found in the concluding observations of the United Nations Human Rights Committee following its consideration of the latest periodic report by the United States on its implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. These observations note the particular vulnerability of people of African descent, persons of Hispanic/Latino origin and Indigenous women to various forms of violence.

No less vulnerable are women refugees, asylum seekers and migrants. They are at risk of becoming victims of trafficking in human beings for the purposes of sexual or labour exploitation. In November 2023, the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women recommended that the authorities in Albania “promptly investigate, prosecute and adequately sentence those responsible for trafficking [in women and girls]”. The Albanian authorities were also urged to “address the exploitation of women and girls in prostitution and domestic servitude”.

The Committee’s experts had plenty of concerns regarding Italy, too, including concerns over “the prevalence of trafficking in women and girls ... and the low prosecution and conviction rates in trafficking cases”. In particular, the Italian authorities were admonished to “enforce specific measures to target the continued operation of organized ... trafficking networks that subject Nigerian women and unaccompanied Nigerian minors to sex trafficking”.

We are obliged to draw attention once more to the situation in Greece. At the start of the year, the aforementioned United Nations Committee emphasized that in that country “the risk of trafficking for purposes of sexual or labour exploitation is higher among refugee, asylum-seeking and migrant women and girls.”

Furthermore, in a resolution adopted in February of this year on the rule of law and media freedom in Greece, the European Parliament expressed “severe concern about the treatment of migrants at the external borders and domestically, following systematic pushbacks and violence against non-EU nationals, their arbitrary detention and the theft of their belongings”. Similarly, it was “severely concerned about the conditions in reception centres, especially in terms of protecting individuals against crimes being committed and access to basic sanitation”.

According to data from international NGOs, the practice of forcible pushback has been widely employed by the Polish authorities over the past two years. Volunteers rendering assistance to the newly arrived continue to be faced with criminal charges, persecution and intimidation on the part of the official authorities. It would not be amiss to point out that these also include quite a few women.

Madam Chairperson,

A key prerequisite for the independence of women is for them to be able to unfold their economic potential, achieve personal development and build their professional skills. An enabling environment for their empowerment must be created. The promotion of women and men should be based on their professional competence, knowledge and experience, and not on the infamous imposition of quotas. In that regard, it is important to pay due attention to issues related to social and economic rights; traditional spiritual and moral values; protection of the family, mothers and children; the occupational retraining of unemployed women and men; and protection of, and support for, large or low-income families, along with single parents.

In closing, we should like to congratulate you, Madam Chairperson, Madam Secretary General, our guests and all our colleagues on the upcoming holiday. We wish you good health, joy, prosperity, creativity and further professional success.

Thank you for your attention.