



United States Mission to the OSCE

Reply to Russian Federation on Rights of Children

As delivered by Ambassador Daniel Baer
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
December 18, 2014

Since I was not prepared for today's statement from the Russian Federation, I'll reserve the right to return as well, but allow me to make a few comments.

Three general points.

First, on the specific case raised by our distinguished Russian colleague -- It might be the story covered by Reuters in an investigative journalism piece about a year-and-a-half ago, I believe, and I would first make the point that this is an example of investigative journalism and the kind of free and independent media that often surfaces specific cases that point out opportunities to improve rights' protections-- and underscores the importance of having a free and independent press.

The U.S., of course, takes very seriously any case where the welfare of a child is threatened. And children who are adopted from overseas have no different rights than children from domestic adoptions in the United States.

Whenever any case comes to our common public attention, one of the important things is to identify the lessons learned, what can be done to prevent cases like this? I have read the article, and one of the things that comes out is that, it doesn't appear that the primary motivation of this handful of specific cases was to sell children, it actually spoke to the challenges that sometimes accompany adoption. In the vast majority of cases, adoptive families adjust well, and in a few cases they need support. And perhaps one of the lessons we should take from a story like this one is that we should enhance the support available to adoptive families.

I come from an adoptive family: my youngest sibling is adopted. And I saw some of the challenges that come with adoption, even in a family that is not especially challenged by economic circumstance. And I would assess that even in the time since my youngest brother was adopted -- in 1998 -- I've seen development in the social services, and support mechanisms, both formal and informal, that are available to adoptive families in the United States.

Until Russia cut off adoptions, U.S. families had provided loving homes to more than 60,000 Russian orphans -- children who could not find homes in Russia. The overwhelming majority of those are adoptions that have provided children with a loving home in which they can grow and flourish.

The second point I'd like to make is about the area of children's rights more generally. There are so many real, deep, wide-spread challenges affecting children around the world, including in the U.S. The heartbreaking events in Peshawar earlier this week reminded us of the very deep and real challenges that children's rights face. And for that reason I find it sad that the Russian Federation so often raises specific cases that, while serious in their own right, aren't reflective of massive systemic problems or of government neglect. Raising selective cases in Norway or in the U.S. or other countries doesn't substantiate the Russian pretension to care about the rights of children.

And so I would urge our Russian colleagues to call Moscow and tell them: don't have us raise these kinds of cases. This makes us look brutish and cynical. It makes us look hypocritical, because we are the ones who are always telling people not to use human rights as a political tool. It makes us look like we don't care about the rights of children at all.

The third point I'd like to make is a constructive offer, which is: let's focus on common challenges that affect large numbers of children in both of our countries. I would be happy, in 2015, to work with the delegation of the Russian Federation here in this Council, as well as with any others, on the challenges surrounding bullying of children in schools. In my own country there have been a number of stories in the past years about children who have taken their own lives as a result of bullying. I think one of the challenges that is common to our country and to many others is: how do we help parents and teachers create supportive, loving environments where no child feels the need to end his or her own life because of bullying, and where other kids are encouraged to be friendly and supportive of each child?

Thank you, Mr. Chair.