

Dear Madam Chairwoman, Thank you for the opportunity to speak at this forum. I completed an internship at the OHCHR where I acquired a lot of important knowledge and practical skills.

My name is Inna Dyeri, I am here representing the non-profit The Russian Society of Latvia. 37% of the population of Latvia speak Russian as their native language. At the start of the war in Ukraine, the Russian-speaking population in Latvia was subjected to all manner of oppression.

Right-wing parties in Latvia used the war to justify stripping Russian-speaking residents of their right to the preservation and use of their native language. Bans and restrictions following the outbreak of the war have started to become totalitarian in nature.

A ban was introduced on teaching the Russian language in schools and on Russian schools themselves. Latvia has removed the Russian language in its entirety from the education system, starting from nursery. Now, it may only be taught as part of special interest education. We have brought more than 300 actions before the ECHR and... lost. The ECHR has decided that, considering the historical experience of Latvia, it is not possible to regard this as discrimination. This decision is unprecedented in the history of the court and we are contesting it.

The Russian national and linguistic minority in Latvia is being subjected to collective punishment for the actions of the government of a neighbouring country which we have never been citizens of. These actions on the part of the Latvian authorities, and also their approval by the Council of Europe, undermine the entire international system of human rights and demonstrate openly to the entire world that an EU Member State may freely violate recognised international standards regarding the protection of the rights of national minorities and embolden xenophobia.

Together, we must halt any further dismantling of the international system of human rights. We must halt the Latvian authorities in their madness and Russophobia! If this step is not taken now, it will represent a step back for the entire world – to a time when the subjugation and repression of individual peoples was accepted as the norm.

Madam Chairwoman. I am here to convey to you our pain. Please, help us find a sensible resolution!