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PROTECTION OF MINORITIES

Note verbale dated 5 August 1994 from the Permanent Mission of
the Republic of Latvia to the United Nations Office at Geneva
addressed to the Centre for Human Rights

The Permanent Mission of the Republic of Latvia to the United Nations Office in Geneva presents its compliments to your good offices and has the honour and the task to request the secretariat of the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities to circulate under item 18 as an official document of the forty-sixth session of the Sub-Commission, the statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia of 4 August 1994.

Statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia

The Republic of Latvia Ministry of Foreign Affairs expresses its bafflement concerning the 4 August statement by the President of the Russian Federation, Boris Yeltsin, regarding Latvia's Citizenship Law.

In his statement, Boris Yeltsin accuses Latvia's Parliament as if it had ignored the objections and recommendations of Western Governments and international organizations. In the statement, Mr. Yeltsin characterizes Latvia as a "centre of national intolerance", as though Latvia officially practised discrimination against its inhabitants on the bases of ethnicity. The Citizenship Law of the Republic of Latvia is characterized in this statement as a "glaring example of the ignorance of international human rights standards".

With regret, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs must state that the assertions expressed in the Russian Federation President's statement do not reflect the truth. Many authoritative international organizations, especially the CSCE and the Council of Europe, have been in consultation with Latvia's Parliament during the process leading up to the adoption of this law. The recommendations of these and other organizations were included in the adopted law, thereby insuring that the said law meets international standards. In its 29 July 1994 declaration, the European Union welcomed the adoption of a citizenship law in Latvia and rates it as "a good basis for progress in the integration of ethnic minorities and the development of inter-community relations ...". The Union welcomed the fact that "the law takes account of the recommendations of CSCE and the Council of Europe and of appeals from the Union".

Also incomprehensible is the assertion that Latvia has "negated the positive result that was achieved thanks to the monumental efforts of both sides, to regulate all facets of the Russian troop withdrawal issue". Exactly the opposite is true - to date Latvia's side has done everything it could to reinforce this positive result.

The aforementioned statement shows an inadequate understanding by Russia of the positions of the CSCE and the Council of Europe, as well as of the work of Latvia's Parliament. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs expresses its regret that the Russian Federation has not based its rating of this law on the internationally accepted principles, by which the CSCE, the Council of Europe and the European Union operate.
