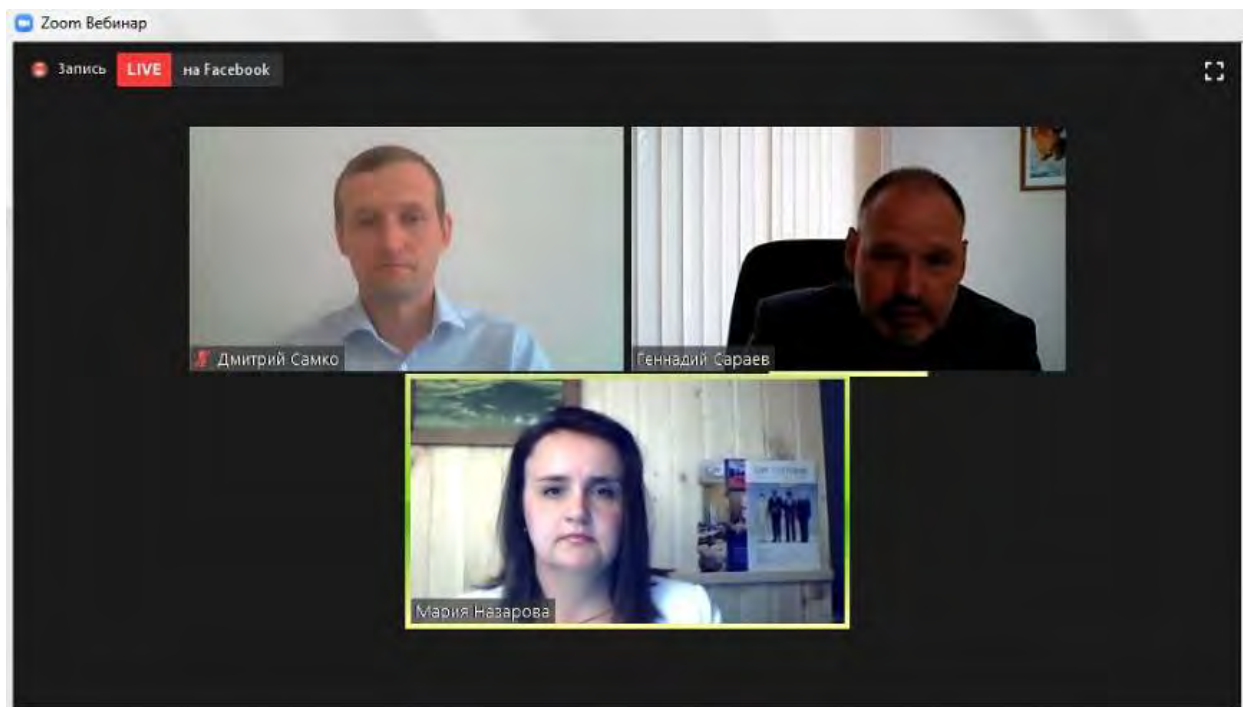


UPF Moscow, Russia commemorates the UN Global Day of Parents 2020

Dmitry Samko
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Moscow, Russia -- UPF commemorated the UN Global Day of Parents 2020 with an online interview of a prominent children's rights official.

The United Nations commemoration takes place every year on June 1, which is also the day on which Russians celebrate International Children's Day.

The current situation in the world, especially with the COVID-19 pandemic, has translated many of the processes of our lives into virtual mode. The question of children's information security is of concern to all parents.

These issues were discussed at a meeting of the UPF staff with Gennady A. Saraev, commissioner for the Rights of the Child in the Russian Republic of Karelia.

The following is a transcript of the conversation. Dmitry Samko, the chair of UPF-Moscow, conducted the interview. Questions from the audience were presented by Maria Nazarova, secretary general of UPF-Russia.

Dmitry Samko: Today we are celebrating a big date: International Children's Day. This day is being discussed by the media as well as social networks. This day radiates a good aura. For you [however], this is primarily a very difficult job. How does the holiday in 2020 differ from previous years? We are in a pandemic situation, which we could not have imagined a year ago. What are the features of your work today, compared to previous years?

Gennady A. Saraev: Good afternoon, dear participants. I am glad for the opportunity to communicate, thanks to the Universal Peace Federation, and I hope that today we will talk about protecting the rights of childhood from the professional point of view.

How is the holiday different this year? First, we are holding it without mass events. There are no large street rallies or meetings in concert halls. Work is being done exclusively through communication technology, thanks to the Internet. This also influenced the content of the meetings that were held. This morning, we held an online forum with participants from the government, in which we exchanged opinions and suggestions on solving childhood problems in the presence of modern challenges.

The pandemic situation has revealed many new problems that previously were not very noticeable: in the fields of education and medicine, parent training, and domestic violence. We received answers to these challenges and urgently need to prepare some solutions.

Unfortunately, it was not possible to go to children's groups, especially to closed groups where there are children without parental care. If in the self-isolation mode the climate in the family is more or less tranquil, then in child-care facilities, of course, children are in a tougher situation. Here we do not have the possibility of such close communication. Therefore, a lot of video messages were recorded, and many video meetings were held with people who usually go to places where children without parental care live.

This year, the date has two aspects. On the one hand, this is a festive event using Internet technologies; on

the other hand, it is an opportunity to plunge more seriously into the problematic issues that the pandemic has posed.

Dmitry Samko: Here you have touched on the topic of institutions: orphanages, orphan homes. In general, you probably have a lot of such institutions in the region. In a pandemic, is the situation more complicated? My children surf the Internet, watch cartoons, and I can control them. How is the process going on there now? Do complaints come from there? Are additional checks being carried out? It is very difficult to imagine how the children feel within four walls.

Gennady A. Saraev: You know, we have a very interesting experience: One children's home is completely closed, since the children were taken into families. That is, we found an opportunity to prepare families so that employees working in this institution would take the children to their families and provide the children with comfortable conditions. Where there was no such opportunity for children, specialists got help through consultations and new technologies. After all, it's hard to stay indoors for 24 hours, especially for children who have lived a difficult life. The child who lives in a children's institution has a heavy heredity; he suffered a difficult life situation. It is extremely difficult to expect special obedience and gratitude from him; his attitude to the world is very hostile. Therefore, of course, it's quite difficult to work with them. Fortunately, our specialists are succeeding, and their professional level allows us to organize in self-isolation training, leisure, and involve children in some new activities. It's good that today the Internet provides opportunities. On a number of sites there are master classes, life hacks, that allow an adult to organize communication with a child. This is not always possible in our families, especially in children's homes.

Dmitry Samko: I am sure that in many regions your colleagues also are working on this. Could you tell in a nutshell about the specifics of the work of the regional commissioners for children's rights? Because the media in general touch on the federal level. For example, there is the Presidential Commissioner for Children's Rights. But at the regional level, what is your direct work, what is entrusted to you?

Gennady A. Saraev: The general educational program: We have a federal law that defines the activities of the ombudsman under the president as the main coordinator and main engine of the system for protecting children's rights, and there are regional ombudsmen who act locally and work primarily with people. We learn about violations of children's rights from citizens' appeals, their statements, and from the audit results. Ninety percent of the situations we work with are appeals from interested people: parents, caregivers, or the children themselves. The second option is that we ourselves identify situations during monitoring or through public assistants. That is, we work "in the field": We communicate with children, families and local authorities that are responsible for protecting the rights of the child. These are requests either to protect the rights or not to allow violation: I mean violation of the legitimate rights of the child.

Maria [Nazarova, the secretary general of UPF-Russia] very correctly mentioned at the beginning that parents are the main defenders of the rights of the child, since they are fully entrusted with the care of the child. Protecting the rights of the child is the responsibility of parents. Parents are the ones who decide to provide medical care; they enroll a child in kindergarten, in school. It is parents who realize the rights of the child, being his legal representatives. Of course, there are situations in which parents are to blame, in which they themselves violate the rights of the child, but this is another story. Regional ombudsmen work with such cases. There is one regional ombudsman per region. There are two components to his work: He is not accountable to anyone and is not dependent on anyone. In such conditions of independence and non-accountability, there are very few levers of influence. Because as soon as such a person has leverage, there needs to be someone who will look after the authorized person, again completely independent and unaccountable. At the same time, we work very closely with a number of oversight bodies and with the prosecutor's office in the entrusted territory.

My territory is the Republic of Karelia [in northwestern Russia]. I am responsible for families and children living in the region. If the child moves to another region, I will move the documents to the ombudsman, for example, in St. Petersburg, or Murmansk, or Moscow, depending on where my ward has moved. Next, we interact with a specialist who works in the new place of residence of the child.

Dmitry Samko: It's too early to take stock of the period of self-isolation, but nevertheless, you said that 90 percent of your work is complaints. Has the number of complaints and appeals increased in the last 2.5 months? Is it harder to work now? Or did self-isolation, on the contrary, narrow the funnel of appeals in your region directly?

Gennady A. Saraev: The amount of appeals remains the same. The subject has changed. We separately track the letters to ombudsmen and calls to the children's helpline, which make it possible to assess childhood problems in the region and to monitor the situation. We noted a decrease in the number of complaints from children about violence. We began to sort out what had happened: [Either] there was less violence or [else] the children lost the opportunity to seek help in isolation, when the child cannot complain about the aggressor in a threatened situation. This must be analyzed.

Dmitry Samko: I also want to touch on the subject related to family issues. In her report to President Putin, the [national-level] commissioner for the Rights of the Child, Anna Kuznetsova, said that in 2019, priority measures were taken to preserve traditional family values. Has your region participated in this

work?

Gennady A. Saraev: Traditional family values. Here it is important for us to preserve traditional values in general and the family as the keeper of these values. I think this is more of a question for society, not for the state. The issue of continuity of traditions is determined by the possibility of transferring traditions from the older generation to the younger. Here we have a very well-established education. In Karelia there is a developed regional course on the history of Karelia and a lot of projects that are aimed at preserving culture, both Orthodox and pagan. Today, I think, this work is being carried out in all regions. It's just that we are focusing on places in Karelia.

Dmitry Samko: I would like to move on to the issue of information security of the younger generation. The same report by Anna Kuznetsova talked about creating positive content for teens. How far have we progressed in this sphere? How much safer is the Internet?

Gennady A. Saraev: I think that we have a very difficult security situation, including information. Unfortunately, we still do not have terms that would define relations on the Internet between people. We are still confused in terms. We are talking about such a thing as information space. There is no such space. All that is on the Internet is information. And we are talking about information security, which can harm a child or an adult. Now so many people use the Internet for criminal purposes. The sooner a child begins to use information technology, the greater the chance that he will fall into the hands of scammers. Unfortunately, this spring we opened a criminal case for a crime against the sexual integrity of a child who is 7 years old. He found himself in a situation where, under the conditions of distance learning, parents created an account for the child, and an unknown user came into contact with the child and asked the child to take nude photos. We are confident that our security forces will be able to figure out [the identity of] this person.

Unfortunately, this is not the only case. Our children immediately entered into the use of information from the Internet, and a culture of attitude toward this information has not yet formed. We overly trust what we see on the Internet. We do not double-check information; we take it for truth. The child is even more vulnerable in this regard. Here adolescents were the most advanced; they learned to recognize threats, bots, fakes. But, unfortunately, they were the first to form pseudo-positive content. As a result, our entire generation lives on camera, lives on selfies, lives on the need to make some small feat, take it off and put it on the Internet to show some positive content. We also need to work with this. Indeed, positive content is not the only one that causes positive emotions, it can be useful as informative. Unfortunately, today we have a total mess on the Internet, and this allows some people to use the Internet for the wrong purposes.

Dmitry Samko: I agree with you and also see this mess on the Internet. Is there any state or regional resource to get verified positive content out of this mess? Maybe there is some prospect of creating such a resource?

Gennady A. Saraev: I think today there are trustworthy sites that you can use. For example, "I Am a Parent." In fact, I would refer everyone to the films that were released in the Soviet Union. There was very clear censorship and obviously a number of values. Action films do not give an idea of universal values. To separate good content from bad, you need to pay attention to age marking, which means that people who released the content understood who they were doing it for. Therefore, I insist that when using the content, you focus on age marking. This is the main criterion for selecting information.

Dmitry Samko: Thank you! Now, within two months of self-isolation, we have become partly Internet-dependent. Some, for objective reasons (distance learning, work). Now we are starting to smoothly get out of this. Are additional measures necessary, or are specialists needed in working with children, who would recommend taking a month off from TVs and telephones, or smoothly getting out of it so that there is no breakage? Does the ombudsman give such a recommendation? How could we get out of the situation smoothly?

Gennady A. Saraev: Today we use gadgets more. A computer, a smartphone are nothing more than tools that help us do our job. Today, moving from an online situation to direct communication, the first thing to do is to evaluate the screen time. When we worked through gadgets, screen time was prohibitively unacceptable, especially the burden on the eyes. For two months we pretty seriously ruined the eyes of our children. When children were at school, the screen time that they spent on the phone was two to 2.5 hours. Now screen time has increased by about three times. The child is forced to spend six to seven hours before the screen, or even more.

The recommendation for parents is, first, to track how much time your child spends on the phone. Secondly, a parental control function is available on every smartphone. It can be turned on to limit the screen time of the child.

One of the tasks today is to organize the child's leisure without the smartphone with which we lured him while we were cleaning, cooking, working. Many parents in the period of self-isolation showed low ratings of their psychological and pedagogical competence. They did not know what to do with the child. They forgot how to play with children. Therefore, a lot of resources were aimed at educating parents to

spend time with their child.

Dmitry Samko: You touched on the moment when we found ourselves at home with children. I want to believe that parents saw the positive side of interaction with their child. It turns out that there are applications for parental control. Are there any such techniques?

Gennady A. Saraev: The Kaspersky Lab has the most intelligent application. Also, in iPhones the "parental control" is built in.

Dmitry Samko: Of course, it is important to control. It is a sad picture when you go out into nature and everyone is sitting on smartphones. Speaking of our summer, is it possible that offline camps are already preparing for opening in July and August? What can be the security difficulties this summer, because everyone is tired of sitting at home? Is it possible that there will be an increased demand for these camps or trips? What is the approach to these possible problems?

Gennady A. Saraev: First of all, this summer will, of course, be short in terms of organizing summer vacations at camp. Camps will open only on July 1, both school and stationary. During the first month of summer, children will be at home. Now many are trying to organize online camps, in which specialists somehow organize leisure through Internet technologies, that is, we continue to actively spoil the eyes of children. The child is forced to stay in front of the screen, and this is a passive lifestyle, this is a strain on the eyes. In the best case, they provide tasks involving motion. Before, it used to be inside the apartment, but now it can be practiced in the yard.

Only two stationary camps remained in Karelia. Most of the camps were bought by businessmen, and now they are campsites for metropolitan residents, as a rule. Unfortunately, they do not accept children. Accordingly, we send children to the Krasnodar Territory [in the south of Russia] [or] to the Crimea. But taking into account that the vacation periods will be reduced from 20 to 14 days, most likely it will not be recreational activities, but just relaxation, since the child needs three days to adapt to the southern climate, and then another three days to adapt to the northern climate. Therefore, it is assumed that this campaign will not be recreational, but leisure and, perhaps, educational. In any case, we are forced to sacrifice something. The parents who cannot organize a trip to the camp will have to organize leisure activities by themselves.

It will be good if a teenager finds an opportunity to earn extra money. We plan to open 1,500 jobs. This does not cover the need; however, now there is state support for subsidizing enterprises if a teenager is hired.

There is a negative assumption about the level of criminality increasing. This is the destructive behavior of adolescents in a state of homelessness. Now they are organized into groups, but these groups do not yet display any criminal inclinations. If we do not intervene now, by the fall we can get negative results.

Dmitry Samko: Our country lagged behind European countries in the spread of the epidemic by two to three weeks, in some places by a month. Now our coming out of the epidemic probably will also be belated. Maybe there is some foreign experience of working with children and adolescents that can be helpful to us.

I know that in February you were at the World Summit 2020 in Seoul. Perhaps you met your colleagues there; did you have professional communication? As an ombudsman, have you exchanged experiences with colleagues from other countries and regions? Can you talk about interaction with colleagues from other countries and your experience of international communication?

Gennady A. Saraev: Since Karelia borders with Finland, we are in constant contact with our Finnish colleagues. In particular, at the summit in Seoul, we managed to communicate with our Finnish colleagues, who were represented by a large delegation. And we once again talked about the possibility of interaction, since the specialists who attended the summit were extremely interested in interacting with partners from Russia. We certainly share practices, information and experience.

Unfortunately, our plans with our Finnish partners regarding joint camps most likely will not be realized, as the border is closed, and nobody knows when it will be opened. We had to cancel a number of Russian-Finnish events. It is likely that we will find the opportunity to hold some events in summer, but international activities have been suspended today. The exchange of information continues, but, unfortunately, not all the experiences of our neighbors are applicable here: different systems, different approaches, infrastructure, and the number of children.

Dmitry Samko: You have an active position. I know that you participate in federal programs and that you support community projects. It was nice to meet you at one of these family values conferences. The law "On Commissioners for the Rights of the Child in the Russian Federation" says that only a person with an impeccable reputation can be appointed to this position. For you, what is an ideal reputation; what qualities should the ombudsman, who is engaged in such specific work, have?

Gennady A. Saraev: I think that here we are talking about the oath taken by the ombudsman. When the

commissioner is appointed to the post, he is guided by his conscience. That is why the question arose about reputation. A person who is not accountable to the authorities, who is independent of the authorities, and who can begin to solve the situation on the basis of his idea of justice, should have some experience and a high public assessment. Reputation means public assessment of his professional activities, or that part of life that was in sight.

Given the fact that since my student years I was engaged in social activities, starting with the student union and ending with my last position when I headed the executive committee of the United Russia party. From this position, I resigned to become ombudsman. There was a definite opinion about me. If one has inner conviction, is conscience-oriented, then any of his actions can be explained. That is, reputation is one's position. Having a position is very important for any authorized person.

Dmitry Samko: Now my last question is practical and straightforward. How can we help you? What kind of support do you expect? As ombudsman, you have the right to appoint public representatives and create expert administrative councils. Can the Ambassadors for Peace, our participants, and the Universal Peace Federation help in any way? How could any particular person help you or your colleagues in your area?

Gennady A. Saraev: I think that you can help, first of all, by informing. This is the main weapon of the ombudsman. One of the methods of any ombudsman is legal education and legal information. Quite often, people get confused in the very concept of law. That is, people very often throw around the words "I have the right" meaninglessly. And "I have the right" is a very serious component of our life.

If there is a law in which this right is written down, you can appeal to it, but often we have only myths about the law. We have priority of law, which we need to know and understand -- for example, why we give health priority over education and why we give education priority over something else. A simple example of the priority of law: We have the right to education and the right to own and use a mobile device.

A child, using a smartphone during a lesson at school, exercises the right to own a smartphone but violates the right to education. Accordingly, the teacher can prohibit him from using a smartphone while retaining the student's right to own a smartphone and realizing the right to education. The priority is the right to education and the right to own a smartphone, while limiting the right to use a smartphone is similar to the situation in which the driver does not have the right to use a smartphone while driving, as in this case he may get into an accident, that is, violate the right of others for safety. Therefore, today the main thing is to explain what the priority of law is; let's say there is such a law that we can temporarily limit in order to realize another law, a public one. Unfortunately, I have to admit that our population has a very low level of legal literacy. People do not understand what justice is. Justice is not always equality.

An expert council has been created in Karelia and there are a number of movements, including the Fathers of Karelia movement, which, incidentally, includes representatives of the Universal Peace Federation. I am very grateful to those people who participate in many events, promoting family values and legal education issues.

Dmitry Samko: We greet them all and smoothly move on to questions that have come from the audience. We give the floor to Maria Nazarova.

Maria Nazarova: Thank you, Mr. Saraev. Thank you, Mr. Samko! It was a very interesting interview. We have some questions.

The first question is: "How are children protected from emotional violence coming from the TV screen, from reality shows in prime time? Maybe it is worth marking them 18+?"

Gennady A. Saraev: You know, I have a lot of serious questions related to our television. Of course, the emotional violence that we see today on the screens is unacceptable, in my opinion. Frankly, I would have banned all reality shows before 23 hours [11 p.m.]. After all, violence is committed against children who not only watch but hear all these cries and the verbal aggression that people show in relation to each other, and for children it becomes the norm. In fact, we form a certain norm of behavior through verbal aggression demonstrated on screens. Here you need to put a limit of 21+ and show these programs at night for those who can stand it. Such as House-2 and a number of competitions with participation of children.

But what to do? We agree with this; nevertheless, everything remains as it is. Where is the progress?

The fact is that television today is a commercial structure. And each time we appeal to television, we are told that these shows are popular, they are gaining a large audience. It seems to me that if society as a whole expresses its position, if there will be not one, not two, but a million requests to cancel, then it will be somewhat effective. ... Or do not watch it. If we launch a "Do Not Watch These Shows" flash mob. ... As soon as the number of views falls, demand falls. In fact, today these shows respond to the request of the audience. There is a question for us too. Why are we watching this, or what do people who watch find in this for themselves??

Maria Nazarova: This is probably one of those moments when NGOs can support the commissioners for Children's Rights. Here is the next question: "How to teach a child to be critical of information on the Internet?" Can you speak about your parental experience?

Gennady A. Saraev: I sit next to the child, and we look together. I show the child how I conduct my VKontakte [a Russian social networking service] page: why I like this post and why I ignore the other. Personal example and explanation. Only joint activities. The child himself will not understand what is good and what is bad. It takes time to teach and show.

I had a situation in which a child asked me to download a network game in which "Smeshariki" [Russian cartoon characters] go to visit, buy something on their way. For a while, the child was playing, and then I noticed that other Smeshariki got in contact with him, and I had a question, what these Smeshariki offered. When the child and I noticed that they started asking completely non-childish questions, we deleted this game, and I informed the creators of the game that there were unsafe users. The intervention probably prevented some possible consequences, but the fact of personal presence is unquestionably important.

Maria Nazarova: Here is another question: "What is the danger to children in the Internet activity of their parents?"

Gennady A. Saraev: First of all, parents are stealing this time from the child. The child needs live communication, not the parent's face buried in a monitor. The child perceives this as the norm and correct behavior and will continue to behave the same. A child from birth requires personal, live communication, and for parents to communicate with him up to the age of three. Unfortunately, today very often parents find a replacement for themselves, involving grandparents in upbringing, and they themselves stick to the monitors. But I think that parents who delve into the Internet themselves lose the happiness of communicating with their children. They won't be able to make up for this time in the future.

Maria Nazarova: Thank you! I have a few more short questions.

Question: What is the most difficult thing for you in raising children?

Answer: To recognize the correct opinion of the child. It is extremely difficult to accept that the child is right. You think your opinion is final. Of course, his opinion may be erroneous. It is necessary to give the child the right to make a mistake. We ourselves made such mistakes, and these mistakes were not fatal. Through your own experience, you can learn something.

Question: At what age did you give your children a phone and allow access to the Internet?

Answer: My youngest daughter turned 11 in March, and at the end of elementary school we gave her a smartphone.

Question: What quality of character do you value most?

Answer: Personal moral standing. Unfortunately, today many lack moral standing, and people are guided by any opinion that they have heard from any verified or unverified source.

Question: What is your favorite pastime?

Answer: I spend time at my dacha, just in the nature. There are many different activities: fishing ... or just enjoying nature.

Question: If you had the opportunity to communicate with any person of the past, who would it be?

Answer: Carl Jung. I greatly respect his theory of analytical psychology. And as a psychologist, I would be extremely interested in talking to him.

Question: What human quality do you consider most valuable in yourself?

Answer: I have learned to hear others.

(Translated from Russian by Liudmila L. Sokolova.)