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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1093rd MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

17 March 2016

On the violation of the rights of indigenous women and children in Canada

Mr. Chairperson,

Not so long ago, we celebrated International Women's Day. Much was said about protecting women's rights. Against this backdrop, the situation of indigenous women and children in Canada looks particularly dismal.

Recently, international human rights experts – the United Nations Human Rights Council special rapporteurs on violence against women, on the rights of indigenous peoples and on adequate housing, members of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and the President of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights – strongly criticized the situation regarding discrimination and violence against aboriginal women in Canada.

The experts condemned the long-standing inertia of the country's authorities in the investigation of cases of the disappearance and murder of women and young girls, as well as of their discrimination and of the violation of their rights. In the experts' view, Canadian aboriginal women remain extremely vulnerable and it is routine practice to seriously trample on their rights, in comparison to those of the rest of the population. This inertia was characterized as a gross violation of the Canadian Government's obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The situation was labelled as an "unacceptable cycle of violence". As is emphasized in an open letter on 26 February 2016 to ministers of the Canadian Government by the organization Human Rights Watch, crimes against indigenous women perpetrated by the police, including brutality and sexual assault, are particularly alarming. Human rights advocates state that a significant hurdle to curbing impunity is women's fear of police reprisals for the complaints lodged.

Nevertheless, we note that in December 2015, the administration of Justin Trudeau announced the start of long-awaited national investigations into the matter. We call on Canada to conduct this process in line with international standards and to involve the indigenous peoples themselves.

Indigenous children also continue to have a hard time.

On 26 January 2016, the completion of an inquiry by the Canadian Human Rights Commission and Human Rights Tribunal into a complaint, dating back almost ten years and lodged by non-governmental organizations for indigenous peoples, including the Assembly of First Nations and the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada, against the Federal Government's policy regarding welfare support for aboriginal children in Canadian reserves. Accusations centre on the recognized inadequacy of funding for corresponding programmes in comparison with those usually granted to population centres in Canada. As a result, those children are more prone to fall under the category of vulnerable and to be sent to children's homes. According to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, the Canadian system of residential schools for children from aboriginal peoples amounted to racism enshrined in law and "cultural genocide".

The inquiry has dragged on since 2007, stymied in every way imaginable by the previous conservative Government, human rights advocates claim. What is more, the Department of Justice and the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development had applied surveillance measures to a few of the indigenous persons involved in the inquiry, for which they had been obliged to issue an apology when the news broke out.

The Human Rights Tribunal concluded that the model for funding and managing the welfare provision system for indigenous families and children in reserves had given rise to refusals to provide services and had obstructed the enjoyment of them. We support the Tribunal's request to the Government to desist from similar discriminatory practices, to review the funding system and to bring in independent experts when carrying out reform.

This attitude by the Canadian authorities to indigenous children is, to put it mildly, irresponsible and a bitter throwback to the past. Data from Canada's federal department responsible for health care shows that the suicide rate among young indigenous persons is six times higher than that of the rest of the population, and 11 times higher among Inuits, who have one of the highest rates in the world. As the non-governmental organization Raising the Roof reports, this is related to the fact that 40 per cent of indigenous children live in poverty.

We call on the Canadian authorities to put an end to the discrimination of indigenous peoples, especially of women and children, who are especially vulnerable, and to comply with their international obligations in this area, including the CSCE Helsinki Document 1992.

Thank you for your attention.