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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE
1300th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL
VIA VIDEO TELECONFERENCE**

28 January 2021

On freedom of assembly in the OSCE area

Madam Chairperson,

Peaceful demonstrations are a natural means of civic engagement in democratic societies. In the Russian Federation, this right is enshrined in Article 31 of the Constitution. However, there are statutory rules for having such actions approved by the authorities. Their aim is to ensure the safety of citizens and public order. Similar norms are in place in virtually all OSCE participating States. Violations are prosecuted everywhere. In Russia, they are subject to administrative penalties. Article 20.2 of the Code of Administrative Offences provides for either a fine, community service or administrative detention.

Protests took place in a number of Russian cities on 23 January. With the exception of a few incidents, they were generally calm, although they were not agreed with the authorities and were organized with COVID-19 restrictions in place. Law enforcement authorities detained demonstrators strictly in accordance with the procedures established by law, used force only as a last resort and did not obstruct the work of journalists. They even handed out medical masks to participants. Most of the detainees were released the same day. The Russian Federation is a country governed by the rule of law. All complaints about violations of demonstrators' rights will be investigated and those responsible will be punished in accordance with the law.

The same rule applies to attacks on law enforcement officers. Often it was the protesters who attacked the police, throwing smoke bombs, and chunks of ice and snow at the security forces, chanting insults and calling for violence. In Moscow alone, 13 law enforcement officers were reportedly injured. Of these, six sought medical attention, while no demonstrators were seen in hospitals in the capital. I would remind you that in Russia encroachment on the life of a law enforcement officer, the use of violence against a representative of authority and also insulting him or her are criminal offences (Articles 317 to 319 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation).

I would emphasize once again that the police used force only if they were directly attacked – no water cannons, no firearms and no tear gas. Meanwhile, in the United States of America and parts of Europe, the use of such riot control equipment and police brutality in general, bordering on torture, have become common practice.

We have raised the issue of serious police violence in the United States on many occasions. Further worrying examples were added at the start of this year. For example, the US police used smoke grenades to disperse protests outside the Capitol on 6 January. Firearms were also used. The tragic video of the Capitol security officer who shot a woman, US Air Force veteran Ashli Babbitt, almost at point-blank range, was shown all over the world media. She later died in hospital. We note that the woman was unarmed and posed no danger.

The reaction of many US politicians, especially Donald Trump's opponents, to such police violence has been not merely uncritical but even approving. A witch-hunt has been launched against protesters at the Capitol. Some face up to 20 years in prison. At the time, US President-elect Joe Biden explicitly stated at a press conference: "Don't dare to call them protesters. They were a riotous mob, insurrectionists, domestic terrorists." Compare this with the unrestrained wave of accusations against Russia, where brief protests have been far more peaceful, with far more humane accompaniment by law enforcement bodies. This raises a logical question for our US colleagues: how is it that the demonstrators at the Capitol are terrorists, while the aggressive supporters of Alexei Navalny are peaceful protesters?

Does the Government in Washington naively believe that people in the United States are blind and cannot see the hypocrisy of their authorities? It is perhaps no coincidence that a statement full of sarcasm by our fellow diplomat Mohamad Safa, Permanent Representative of Lebanon to the United Nations, appeared on the day of the "storming of the Capitol": "If the United States saw what the United States is doing in the United States, the United States would invade the United States to liberate the United States from the tyranny of the United States."

For those who talk about the "brutality" of the Russian security forces, we would like to give a different example. On the evening of 23 January in Tacoma, Washington state, a police officer in an off-road vehicle found himself surrounded by a crowd of street racers. His response was simply to run them over with his vehicle. By comparison, in Moscow on Saturday, protesters surrounded a vehicle of the Federal Security Service of Russia, jumped on it and tried to smash the windscreen and side windows. The driver simply waited for the crowd to disperse without making any attempt to move. He sacrificed his own health, suffering a serious eye injury as a result of the attack.

In Canada riot control equipment is used without good reason against demonstrators. For example, on 7 June last year, law enforcement officers fired tear gas to disperse participants in a demonstration in Montreal against racism and police violence. Police later confirmed the use of "chemical irritants" against the demonstrators.

There are also plenty of examples in Europe. In the Netherlands, police used water cannons, tear gas and batons to disperse demonstrations against the pandemic restrictions on 24 January in Amsterdam and Eindhoven and on 25 January in Rotterdam. A girl was seriously injured when she was literally shot at close range with a water cannon. Nearly 500 people were detained during the riots. The reaction of Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte is telling. He described the demonstrations as "criminal violence [that] has nothing to do with protest". This was in response to the question of where the politicized dividing line between peaceful protests and acts of violence lies.

In Brussels on 24 January, law enforcement officers fired tear gas into a crowd of protesters against police violence who had not had their demonstration authorized by the authorities and refused to disperse. Several dozen people have been detained. Each of them will be fined up to 250 euros.

In the German city of Braunschweig, police unleashed dogs on people during a rally against racism in September 2020. The video footage has gone around the world. In Berlin and Frankfurt am Main in November, law enforcement officers fired tear gas and water cannons at protesters against government measures to combat the coronavirus. Interestingly, the police did not disperse demonstrators in several German cities who had rallied in support of Alexei Navalny on 23 January despite the total lockdown.

The reaction of German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas to the action in Leipzig on 8 November 2020 is typical. He wrote on Twitter: “The Basic Law guarantees the right to demonstrate. Those who endanger their fellow citizens, attack police officers or journalists, spread extreme right-wing agitation or set fire to barricades in counterdemonstrations are no longer protected by this basic right.” Given that Russia is repeatedly accused of allegedly mistreating demonstrators who are far from peaceful, such a stance looks like another example of double standards.

There has also been unrest in Poland. From October to December 2020, Polish police sprayed tear gas and forcibly dispersed demonstrations against the abortion ban and COVID-19 restrictions.

In France, baton charges, rubber bullets and tear gas were regularly used to disperse the months-long mass demonstrations of the “gilets jaunes”. Blood was shed. Journalists, including Russian ones, who were caught in the middle of things, were beaten. Eleven people were killed and more than 50 injured.

It is also difficult to describe law enforcement officers in the United Kingdom as “tolerant”. There were protests in London in late November 2020 against the restrictive measures imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic. The media were full of reports of police brutality against the protesters. Over 150 people were arrested.

In Zurich, Switzerland, in June, security forces used tear gas to disperse those protesting against racism in the United States and the killing of African American George Floyd by police there. In the same city in January 2020, police officers used water cannons and tear gas to deal with protesters against the World Economic Forum in Davos.

In conclusion, our State is not perfect, and we are not against sincere dialogue on human rights. But it has to be sincere. The examples we have given clearly demonstrate that Western critics who have spoken here have no moral or other right to lecture. Why don't you first discuss the situation in the countries just listed? Or does the hypocritical NATO and European Union solidarity get in the way? And where is the lauded Swiss neutrality? It seems to have been long forgotten.

We call for an end to the discrediting of the very concept of human rights, using them only to interfere in the internal affairs of others. Take care of your internal problems first, put your own house in order in accordance with your international obligations. And then share the positive practice with everyone. That would be a constructive approach.

We should like to show you a short video which clearly shows the difference in the attitude of law enforcement officers towards protesters in Russia and in some Western countries:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FW-rhhLwsok&bpctr=1611856495>.

Thank you for your attention.