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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,  
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,  
AT THE 1217th MEETING OF THE  
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

14 February 2019

**On the situation with Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia**

Mr. Chairperson,

On 20 April 2017, the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation recognized the Jehovah's Witnesses as an extremist religious organization and ordered the closure of its administrative centre, regional branches and the prohibition of its activities throughout Russia. According to the results of inspections and expert examinations, it has been established that the organization's activities contravene Russian legislation in the area of countering extremism, and the information in its brochures poses a threat to public health and safety.

Now I will turn to the sentencing of Dennis Christensen, a Danish citizen. It has been established that he was fully aware of the type of activities conducted by the local religious organization "Jehovah's Witnesses Oryol" and that the court had ordered in June 2016 the closure of that organization on the grounds of engaging in extremist activities. Nevertheless, Mr. Christensen, who was in the city of Oryol from 18 January to 25 May 2017, that is, after the court order had been issued, deliberately committed acts aimed at continuing the illegal activities of that religious organization.

On 6 February 2019, the Zheleznodorozhny District Court of the city of Oryol found the defendant guilty of the criminal offence provided for in Article 282.2(1) of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation for organizing the activities of a religious association, in respect of which the court has issued an enforceable decision on closure on the grounds of engaging in extremist activities. An appeal may be lodged against this decision.

As far as we know, representatives of the association have lodged a complaint with the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR). In that regard, the Chairman of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation, Vyacheslav Lebedev, recently allowed the possibility of consideration by the Supreme Court of the accused's appeal if the ECHR accepts their complaint. At the same time, he confirmed that the decision to recognize the organization as extremist and ban it on the territory of Russia remains in force.

We should also like to note that the activities of Jehovah's Witnesses raise questions not only in our country, but also in the governments of a number of other States, including Member States of the European Union. For example, according to media reports, nine cases of sexual violence by former and current Jehovah's Witnesses against underage members of the organization are being investigated in the Netherlands. At the end of 2018, the police conducted a series of searches at the headquarters and private homes of Jehovah's Witnesses. At the same time, the Reclaimed Voices Foundation, established in 2017, which deals with the protection of victims of the illegal activities of Jehovah's Witnesses, received around 276 complaints concerning sexual abuse committed by Jehovah's Witnesses against children and adolescents.

Moreover, we regard speculation on this subject as bordering on attempts to exert pressure on the work of the independent judicial authorities of a sovereign State. Once again, we recall paragraph 19 of the Document of the Moscow Meeting of the Conference on the Human Dimension of the CSCE of 1991, which states: "The participating States will respect the internationally recognized standards that relate to the independence of judges ...", and which also provides for "prohibiting improper influence on judges".

We again stress that nothing prevents Jehovah's Witnesses from freely practising their religion in Russia, since no formal permission is required to pray. Our country, where more than 60 denominations officially operate and around 25,000 religious organizations are registered, has always defended freedom of religion. Against this background, the position of those who stubbornly block compliance with the instructions of the OSCE Ministerial Council in Basel in 2014 to elaborate declarations in defence of Christians, Muslims and members of other religions appears particularly hypocritical.

Thank you for your attention.