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Delegation of the Russian Federation

**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1247th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

14 November 2019

**In response to the address by the President of the International Committee
of the Red Cross, Mr. Peter Maurer**

Mr. Maurer,

We are pleased to welcome you to the Permanent Council and thank you for your interesting and balanced address.

Russia shares the ideals of humanity, neutrality and compassion that are the basis for the Committee's work. Having gone through two world wars with an unprecedented scale of civilian suffering in the first half of the last century and having lost some 30 million people in the second of these wars, my country knows their price, not on paper but in real life.

A regional delegation of the Committee has operated in Moscow since 1992. Our co-operation reached a new level in 2018, when a memorandum of understanding was signed between the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) on Russia's voluntary contribution to the organization's budget.

As a participant in the International Red Cross Movement, the Russian Red Cross also focuses all its efforts to help those in need. These include refugees, victims of epidemics, wars and conflicts, people with disabilities, migrants and other vulnerable groups.

The leaders of the ICRC are regular guests in Moscow, which reflects the intensive and trust-based nature of our co-operation. You, Mr. Maurer, participated in the annual Senior Workshop on International Rules governing Military Operations (SWIRMO-2019), which took place for the first time in Moscow from 7 to 12 October. The event was held by the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation in conjunction with the ICRC. The workshop was attended by 140 delegates from 70 States as well as representatives of the United Nations, the Collective Security Treaty Organization and the African Union.

A wide range of issues on the international humanitarian agenda were raised during your meeting with the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Russia, Mr. Sergey Lavrov, in September on the margins of the 74th session of the UN General Assembly in New York.

Despite the countless challenges facing humanitarian organizations, the ICRC continues to operate successfully in strict accordance with its mandate. In many hotspots, the Committee is the only body that is granted humanitarian access. The confidence in the ICRC is due to its adherence to the principles of neutrality and impartiality and also to the high level of professionalism on the part of its staff. This approach has earned the Committee widespread respect around the world and in some cases helps it to operate in areas that others cannot access. This is especially valuable in view of the trend towards politicization of humanitarian action.

We note the consistent efforts of the ICRC to provide aid to millions of inhabitants of Donbas in distress because of the blockade imposed by the Ukrainian Government. Together with Russian humanitarian convoys, the Committee's aid remains one of the few sources of essential supplies and medicines for the population of the region.

The repair of the bridge in Stanytsia Luhanska, which began after the disengagement of forces and hardware, is giving rise to cautious optimism. It is important to complete this repair work before the really cold weather starts. We regret that, despite the efforts made in the Trilateral Contact Group, the Ukrainian side has actually kept the ICRC from being involved in the implementation of the project to repair the bridge.

Priority attention needs to be given to the problems of the unified water distribution network in Donbas, which is divided by military operations. With the assistance of the ICRC, it has proved possible to establish a functioning, albeit intermittent, mechanism of cash payment for water supplies to Luhansk. It is up to the Ukrainian Government to organize cashless payment for the water. We trust that the progress made in the audit of the Voda Donbas water company will deliver the desired result.

The Ukrainian Government must honour its commitments under Point 8 of the Minsk Package of Measures and resume payment of pensions and social benefits to the inhabitants of Donbas. According to the Ukrainian Parliament's Commissioner for Human Rights, Lyudmyla Denisova, the Ukrainian Government owed pensioners in Donbas more than 1.3 billion US dollars for the period from June 2016 to April 2018 alone. By now this figure is even higher. In general, it is necessary to completely lift the ongoing blockade by the Ukrainian Government of the region's economy and restore the severed socio-economic ties.

We applaud the ICRC's desire to establish an effective mechanism to search for people who went missing during the conflict in Donbas. We are ready to consider the question of providing consultative assistance. At the same time, since the conflict is an internal Ukrainian one, the key role here should be played by the parties to the conflict themselves – the Ukrainian Government and Donetsk and Luhansk.

Mr. Maurer,

Russia, like the ICRC, is interested in further strengthening international humanitarian law. The use of traditional methods that facilitate its observance, such as broad dissemination of knowledge, training of personnel and the holding of training sessions, has priority. It is important to employ existing mechanisms, first and foremost to exploit the potential of the International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent. We welcome the varied programme for the 33rd International Conference (to be held in Geneva from 9 to 12 December) and intend to play an active part in it.

In conclusion, I should like to assure you once again that the ICRC can always count on Russia's assistance in carrying out its difficult but noble mission.

Thank you for your attention.