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MC.DEL/16/23
1 December 2023

Original: as delivered

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The Honourable Robert Oliphant
Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs

**Intervention at the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
Ministerial Council**

November 30, 2023

Monsieur le Président,

Alors que nous sommes réunis ici aujourd'hui, la Russie poursuit sa guerre brutale contre l'Ukraine. Avant tout, nos pensées sont avec les Ukrainiennes et les Ukrainiens qui subissent, et continuent de subir, des attaques incessantes contre leur pays, leurs maisons, leur culture et même leurs enfants. La Russie tente de détruire l'Ukraine, son identité et son avenir.

Malgré cet assaut, la population ukrainienne continue de se mobiliser et de se défendre, et de défendre son pays. Et le Canada demeure solidaire de l'Ukraine aujourd'hui et demain.

[EN: Mr. Chair: As we meet here today, Russia continues its brutal war against Ukraine. First and foremost, our thoughts are with the people of Ukraine. They have suffered and continue to suffer relentless attacks on their country, their homes, their culture and even their children. Russia is trying to destroy Ukraine, its identity and its future.]

Despite this assault, Ukrainians continue to stand up and defend themselves and their country. And Canada continues to stand with Ukraine.]

Russia's interference is not limited only to Ukraine. Russia has also repeatedly undermined the sovereignty and territoriality of Georgia and Moldova—most recently by interfering in democratic elections in Moldova.

Russia's aggressions threaten not only its neighbours and the rest of Europe but threatens the entire world. Russia's actions have negatively impacted global food security and energy security with a huge impact on some of the most vulnerable people in the world in the global South, and they have renewed fears today of a nuclear threat. Not to mention the devastating damage its war in Ukraine is inflicting on the environment which also has global impact.

With these actions, Russia has turned its back on the structures and systems we collectively have all agreed to live by, that have been put in place to prevent conflict and violence and to safeguard human rights. They include international law, the UN Charter and other foundational documents, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as well as our own principles and commitments at the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, which are reflected in the Helsinki Final Act and other decisions of this organization.

While these decisions are made by our governments acting on behalf of our people, they are primarily about people. And I want to echo your theme *It's about people*, because we are here about their security, their health, their well-being and their prosperity. It is about the people.

We are also deeply concerned about other areas in the region. Canada is deeply concerned by the refugee crisis in Armenia. More than a hundred thousand people have fled from Nagorno-Karabakh following Azerbaijan's military operation, most recently in September. It's about people.

We are also deeply concerned by the situation in Belarus. There, the flawed elections of 2020 have been followed by draconian restrictions across society and the detention of more than 1,500 political prisoners. The people of Belarus deserve better. It's about people.

Monsieur le Président,

L'OSCE a un travail important à accomplir. Chaque jour, à Varsovie, à Vienne, à La Haye et dans ses bureaux régionaux, l'OSCE contribue à la surveillance des élections, au renforcement des institutions démocratiques et à l'amélioration de la sécurité des frontières. L'OSCE s'efforce de lutter contre l'extrémisme violent et la traite de personnes, de renforcer la gouvernance et de développer les capacités économiques et

environnementales des États participants. Je voudrais remercier les membres du personnel de l'OSCE pour leur travail professionnel, dévoué et assidu. Sans vous, nous ne pourrions pas remplir nos engagements qui sont au cœur de notre mandat. Et vous le faites en dépit de la Russie, qui abuse de notre principe de consensus pour entraver notre travail à maintes reprises et pour paralyser l'organisation.

[EN Mr. Chair, this organization has important work to do. Every day, in Warsaw, Vienna, the Hague and all its field offices across the region, the OSCE helps to monitor elections, strengthen democratic institutions and improve border security. The OSCE works to counter violent extremism and trafficking, to strengthen governance and to build economic and environmental capacity. I would like to thank OSCE staff members for their professional, dedicated and tireless work. Without you we could not fulfill our commitments or implement the comprehensive approach to security that is at the heart of this organization. And you do it in spite of Russia, which abuses our consensus principle, time and again, to hamper our work and paralyze the organization.]

Mr. Chair, Canada would like to thank you personally and North Macedonia for its principled leadership this year. As chair of the Forum on Security Cooperation, Canada has underlined the importance of frank, constructive dialogue and of the intrinsic linkages that all three dimensions of comprehensive security have with the military sphere.

As chair in office, you have raised the issue of gender and gender equality and that is extremely important. I would like to note the Secretary General and her comments with respect to elevating the role of women in all aspects of our work at the OSCE. We need a functional and strong OSCE, now more than ever. We need conversation and dialogue, and we need to safeguard the OSCE's principles and its comprehensive approach to security.

In this respect, we welcome Malta for stepping forward to take on the role of Chair-in-Office for 2024, extending thanks as well to Estonia. We hope that we can see similar progress on the renewal of the mandates of the Top 4, as has been suggested by almost everyone in this room, as well as on the Budget so that the organization can continue to fulfill its important mandate.

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Mr. Chair, as you said last year “the Helsinki commitments must be our lighthouse”. They must be our guiding principles; they must guide us in the darkest and deepest nights of terror. We are deeply grateful for how you have steered the ship, despite the terrible storm the world has found itself in and we have found ourselves in. You have kept us on course—thank you for that - we must continue to follow. Canada remains committed to the success and the importance of the OSCE.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.