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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1109th (SPECIAL) MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

20 July 2016

**In response to the report by the
Chairperson of the Informal Working Group Focusing on the Issue of
Migration and Refugee Flows**

Mr. Chairperson,

First of all, we are grateful to the distinguished Ambassador Claude Wild for his steady and, I emphasize, professional work as Chairperson of the Informal Working Group Focusing on the Issue of Migration and Refugee Flows.

The topic of migration is becoming increasingly relevant in the world, including the OSCE. The crisis-response mechanisms created over the decades have shown themselves to be unprepared for the new migration challenges. This is clearly manifested by the situation in the countries of the European Union and in a number of other countries, which are faced with a massive influx of migrants from the Middle East and North Africa.

In order to respond to such challenges, it is crucial to analyse their root causes, particularly from the point of view of the recommended concept of shared responsibility. The so-called Arab Spring should obviously be at the top of the list, having been provoked to a large extent by outside interference in the domestic affairs of a number of sovereign States in the region with a view to destabilizing them and bringing about a change of government. The outcome has been an erosion of the economy and the destruction of the social infrastructure and normal life of millions of people. The power vacuum has been quite quickly filled by radical groups, leading to a sharp upsurge in terrorism, which threatens the life of entire population groups.

As a result, there have been the massive flows of refugees heading for Europe, where the initial welcome has quickly given way to the erection of new walls at the borders. This has been accompanied by attempts at populist anti-immigration rhetoric, frequently turning into xenophobia.

The new migration challenges have also given rise to new threats of terrorism and extremism, resulting in a whole series of terrorist acts in a number of countries in the OSCE area, including the recent tragic events.

At the same time, other basic causes of the mass movement of populations – poverty, unemployment, unequal distribution of wealth among countries and regions – have not disappeared.

Mr. Chairperson,

The main international platform for co-operation on the problem of migration is the United Nations. A high-level meeting of the UN General Assembly on this issue is scheduled for September this year. But the OSCE can also make a contribution to the common goal as part of an appropriate division of labour. In that context, we should like to make a number of preliminary comments on the report by the distinguished Ambassador Wild.

There has been serious and painstaking work, which deserves the greatest appreciation. At its core is a high-quality structured comparative analysis of the activities of the OSCE in the area of migration, confirming that the Organization has already elaborated a solid set of commitments in connection with migration, supplementing existing universal standards. We should also rely on this set of norms in the search for optimum solutions to the migration problem.

At the same time, it is not advisable to interpret broadly and in that way erode the regime of international protection of refugees, which is based on the 1951 United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol to it. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has warned against this on a number of occasions.

We believe that the migration problem should be a permanent focus of attention in the OSCE. We assume that international protection, fighting crime, strengthening borders, integration of migrants and refugees, protection of their human rights and increasing co-operation on migration will be included in the specialist OSCE agenda on this topic.

Discrimination and the expulsion of Christians from the Middle East and North Africa should be singled out for attention. We believe that this problem should be examined at a special OSCE conference and at the Ministerial Council meeting in Hamburg.

There is a need for appropriate control of migration flows. The main considerations here are to create additional channels for legal migration and to combat illegal migration, develop readmission mechanisms and establish a solid barrier in the path of foreign terrorist fighters.

The receiving countries, including those in the EU, need to be helped in safeguarding the human rights of refugees and migrants on their territory. As the report says, the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights could provide assistance in this regard by assessing the situation and elaborating suitable recommendations at the invitation of interested governments.

For our part, we are willing to share Russia's rich experience of the effective acceptance and accommodation of refugees and forced migrants and to work constructively in this area in the OSCE.

Thank you for your attention.