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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1139th MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

30 March 2017

**In connection with the issue raised by the
European Union and the United States of America about the activities of
Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia**

Mr. Chairperson,

On 23 March 2017, the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation decided to suspend the activities of the Administrative Centre of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia. The verdict of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation on this issue is expected on 5 April.

Speculations about this subject before the emergence of an official court decision are inadmissible, bordering on attempts to exert pressure on the judiciary.

I should like to quote the words of the representative of the Administrative Centre of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia, Ivan Belenko: "The liquidation and prohibition of a registered organization does not mean in accordance with Russian law a ban on professing the religion of Jehovah's Witnesses. This is a constitutional right, it concerns everyone, and anyone can individually or jointly with others profess any religion and have religious convictions".

I regret that the statements did not refer to the reasons for the decision of the Ministry of Justice of Russia, the basis for which were the results of the audit of the Administrative Centre of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia, held from 8 to 27 February this year. The results showed that the activities of the organization not only violate its own statutory goals and tasks, but also contravene Russian legislation in the field of countering extremism.

It is worth recalling that, for example, the branch of Jehovah's Witnesses in Oryol received nine official warnings about the inadmissibility of carrying out extremist activities. They were ignored and the case was brought to court. The situation with the printed materials distributed by the organization is also noteworthy. So, back in 2015, the Prosecutor's Office of the town of Serov in the Sverdlovsk region sent one of these brochures to be examined by experts, who found that the publication contains statements aimed at inciting hatred and enmity towards other religions. The comprehensive religious examinations and the conclusions of the experts (philologists, religious scholars, philosophers, psychologists)

appointed by the court also confirmed the presence of statements justifying the use of violence against representatives of another faith.

Incidentally, we have on more than one occasion called on the esteemed United States representatives to study history more closely. We recall that the religious movement of Jehovah's Witnesses has existed under this name only since 1931, and not since the beginning of the nineteenth century, as it was indicated in her statement.

In general, our Western colleagues continue to seek out flaws from the countries they dislike, while failing to do their own "homework". For example, according to a study by the US Institute for Social Policy and Understanding, in 2016, 60 per cent of Muslims living in the United States of America faced religious discrimination. There are many interesting figures in the document, which I will not take the time to read out. I recommend that you read it.

According to the European Union, the discriminatory decision of the European Court of Justice of 14 March this year, which confirms the right of employers to prohibit workers from displaying in any way religious symbols in the workplace, is indicative.

The state of religious freedom in these countries thus leaves much to be desired, and we should be ready to hear their self-critical assessment.

Thank you for your attention.