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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE
1307th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL
VIA VIDEO TELECONFERENCE**

25 March 2021

**On the 22nd anniversary of NATO's aggression against a sovereign State,
the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia**

Madam Chairperson,

On 24 March 1999, the United States of America and its NATO allies began their armed aggression against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, which lasted for 78 days and nights. In the course of the hostilities, around 1,200 aircraft were deployed, including 850 combat aircraft. The Alliance's forces flew more than 35,000 combat sorties, fired around 3,000 cruise missiles and released over 10,000 tonnes of explosives. Just think about this figure. Converted to a TNT equivalent, it is five times higher than the blast energy of the atom bomb dropped by the US military over Hiroshima in 1945.

The US-led onslaught by NATO, which was unprovoked but had been planned and prepared in advance, is a horrifying case of violation of international law – namely, of the fundamental objectives and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, the CSCE Helsinki Final Act and the United Nations Security Council resolutions on the situation in Yugoslavia.

The NATO attacks grossly breached the norms and principles of international humanitarian law as enshrined in the Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907, the Geneva Conventions of 1949 relating to the protection of war victims and the 1977 Protocols Additional to these, and also the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict.

The use of so-called precision weapons, which are intended to minimize or preclude casualties, was likewise contrary to the norms and principles of international humanitarian law. As is known, the air strikes claimed the lives of more than 2,000 Serbs, including children, women and people of advanced age. They would later on be cynically referred to as “collateral damage”. It was one such “high-precision” bomb that destroyed the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade. Did the bombardier make a mistake or was it in fact an idiosyncratic “political signal” addressed to the Chinese Government?

And how can one reconcile with international humanitarian law the NATO forces' use of missiles carrying graphite bombs that disable the electricity supply of critical systems such as hospitals and maternity clinics throughout the area where they explode? Or their use of cluster bombs and munitions containing

depleted uranium that result in highly toxic and radioactive contamination? Fifteen tonnes of this carcinogen, whose effects are indiscriminate, were dropped on Yugoslav territory during the aggression. We know that the National Assembly of Serbia has established a commission to investigate the consequences of the aerial bombardment, and that lawsuits against NATO filed by some of the victims are already being examined at the Higher Court in Belgrade. We expect the perpetrators to be duly punished.

Major Yugoslav cities were subjected to brutal missile and bomb strikes; oil refineries, storage tanks and pipelines were deliberately destroyed, as a result of which the country found itself on the verge of an environmental catastrophe. The NATO forces bombarded industrial facilities, power stations, railway stations, bridges, radio and television headquarters, and historical and cultural monuments. The country's economy was devastated, with the damage reckoned to be in the order of tens of billions of dollars.

Seeking to escape the bombing, tens of thousands of people were forced to leave their places of residence and make their way to neighbouring countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia and Croatia). According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, in two weeks alone, from 24 March to 5 April 1999, more than 350,000 people effectively fled from Kosovo. In all, up to 50 per cent of the Serbian population abandoned their homes during the aggression. Even Henry Kissinger admitted in one of his books: "The legions of refugees that filled television screens after the NATO bombing started were to a much greater degree the result of NATO's actions than the precipitating cause of them."

Let us recall once again what served as the pretext for launching this aggression. That it was a deliberate distortion of the facts has long been known. This has been talked and written about numerous times; evidence has been presented. The alleged civilians who were killed in the village of Račak were in fact members of an armed formation, namely of the so-called Kosovo Liberation Army; their bodies were dressed up in civilian clothes. By the way, in Western countries that formation was referred to as a terrorist group when it was convenient to do so, but later on those very same terrorists suddenly became a "Liberation Army".

Upon arriving at the scene, the head of the OSCE Kosovo Verification Mission at the time, William Walker from the United States, categorically asserted that an act of genocide had taken place there: this was at once taken up and propagated by the Western media. Similar manipulations of the facts would subsequently be churned out as if from a production line: Colin Powell's "Iraqi test tube", the White Helmets' staged chemical weapons attacks, and many more, giving Western countries a pretext for military interventions.

The US Government's intentions vis-à-vis Yugoslavia are eloquently described in his memoirs by Strobe Talbott, who was then Deputy Secretary of State. During a telephone conversation that took place on the day before the start of the air strikes, Richard Holbrooke, the US President's special envoy in the Balkans at the time, told him: "Even if Milošević says 'yes' to everything in the Rambouillet agreement, we'll still bomb the shit out of him ...". To which Holbrooke received the following reply: "Yes, Dick, that's the position of the President and the Secretary of State."

Such is the tragic contribution to the history of late-twentieth-century Europe made by NATO, a "purely defensive" bloc. Unfortunately, we currently cannot see any trend towards the rectification of this destabilizing policy by the North Atlantic Alliance – a policy that is undermining the European security architecture.

Thank you for your attention.