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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,  
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,  
AT THE 1265th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL  
VIA VIDEO TELECONFERENCE**

30 April 2020

**On the observance of human rights in the context of the coronavirus pandemic**

Mr. Chairperson,

The coronavirus pandemic is an unprecedented “resilience test” for all the OSCE participating States. It is a question not only of our capacities to counter the spread of the virus effectively, but also of our ability to do so while upholding human dignity. In particular, this means not permitting the unjustified and unlawful curtailment of rights and freedoms that are already being restricted in the interests of public security.

A key issue in the current difficult circumstances is that of upholding socio-economic civil rights, ranging from the right to health care and medical assistance to the right to education. While the quarantine measures introduced by most OSCE countries are already having a negative impact on the economic situation, it is extremely important for States to continue to fulfil their social obligations towards their populations. Indeed, for Russia this is an absolute priority – one that is not being eroded even in the face of so complex a challenge. The Russian authorities have already adopted a whole range of crisis response measures to support citizens who have lost their jobs, families with children, young and older people, war veterans, and small and medium-sized enterprises.

One should not forget, though, about other vulnerable groups in society: migrants, persons belonging to national minorities, and Roma. Under no circumstances should discrimination against them be tolerated, let alone the ramping up of any such discrimination in these difficult times. It is now more timely than ever to combat groundless stereotypes – and attempts, on the basis of such stereotypes, to pin the blame for the transmission of this novel infection on others. Otherwise, there is a risk of fresh outbreaks of intolerance and of upsurges in hate crimes, which have unfortunately already been observed in a number of countries. Representatives of human rights entities – including Ingibjörg Sólrún Gísladóttir, Director of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), and Lamberto Zannier, OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities – have drawn attention to these aspects.

In the context of the pandemic it is also necessary to maintain a responsible attitude towards the dissemination of information. At the same time as ensuring freedom of speech and freedom of the press in line with existing commitments, it has become essential to curb the spread of fake news in the media. The reasoning for this is straightforward: disinformation can trigger panic and impulsive reactions, which in turn

can derail efforts to combat the coronavirus. This was emphasized in a joint statement issued on 19 March by Harlem Désir, OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media; David Kaye, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression; and Edison Lanza, Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. I quote from that statement: “[F]alse information about the pandemic could lead to health concerns, panic and disorder.”

The ongoing crisis highlights the need to eschew politicized approaches in international relations and, above all, instruments such as unilateral sanctions. It is important to realize that the imposition of such restrictions hampers States in their efforts to combat the spread of the pandemic. It is ordinary people who are hit hardest: sanctions impinge on their rights, indeed even put their lives at risk. In that respect, we welcome the joint statement addressed on 6 April to US President Donald Trump by 24 high-ranking politicians, including former EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini, former US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and former Director-General of the World Health Organization Gro Harlem Brundtland, who pointed out that the sanctions against Iran “impact on the ability of Iran’s healthcare system to respond to the COVID-19 outbreak”. By implication, the sanctions are also impacting on the health of Iranian citizens and on their right to medical assistance.

In general, in the current situation it is essential to consider a radical reconfiguration of our basic approaches to inter-State relations as a whole. As far as our Organization is concerned, that means returning to the foundations on which the OSCE rests – namely, security and co-operation for the benefit of all countries and peoples. The security and lives of millions of people depend on our willingness to co-operate and display a sense of multidimensional responsibility. To quote the President of Russia, Vladimir Putin, “the life of every person is unique: it is invested with an absolute value given to us from on high”. The same idea was formulated by UN Secretary General António Guterres, who emphasized that “[p]eople – and their rights – must be front and centre”. It is precisely from this angle that we should approach and tackle the most pressing issues of our times.

Thank you for your attention.