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**STATEMENT BY
MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE
RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE 1348th MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

9 December 2021

**In response to the reports by the three Personal Representatives of the
Chairperson-in-Office on tolerance**

Mr. Chairperson,

We thank the distinguished Rabbi Andrew Baker, Ambassador Mehmet Paçacı and Associate Professor Regina Polak for their comprehensive presentations. The Russian Federation is a long-standing supporter of the activities of the three Personal Representatives of the Chairperson-in-Office on tolerance, and is in favour of enhancing the effectiveness and visibility of their efforts.

Unfortunately, this year the participating States once again failed to fulfil the tasks set by the OSCE Ministerial Council in Basel in 2014 to develop declarations on combating intolerance and discrimination against Christians, Muslims and members of other religions. The unwillingness of a number of countries to engage in dialogue sealed the fate of the negotiation process. We trust that the future Polish OSCE Chairmanship will succeed in finally addressing these serious shortcomings.

There is a long-overdue need for that to happen. The rights of followers of world religions have been violated in the OSCE area for a long time. We have repeatedly stressed the importance of stepping up concerted efforts on the basis of a comprehensive approach and with equal attention to all traditional faiths. At the same time, we believe it is advisable to focus on the implementation of existing obligations, rather than on the discussion of new concepts or definitions. The main criterion should be realism on the part of law enforcement practice, but also compliance with States' international obligations, not least their OSCE commitments.

We share the view of the distinguished Rabbi Baker on the "multiple sources" from which anti-Semitic incidents originate, these sources including the traditional right-wing and populist movements frequently associated with neo-Nazis and white supremacists.

We believe that another contributing factor in the rise of anti-Semitism is the campaign unleashed in certain countries to rewrite and falsify history, which includes waging war on monuments erected in honour of those who fought against Nazism and fascism, and also organizing neo-Nazi marches and torchlit processions acclaiming those who actively collaborated with the Nazis and were accomplices in their

crimes. One should also add to that list the establishment of memorials to those who fought alongside Hitler's Germany or collaborated with it, committing war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Flashes of common sense are particularly valuable against this backdrop. In particular, it recently became known that an international panel of historians had decided to recommend the dismantling of a monument to the Latvian SS legion in the Belgian town of Zedelgem entitled "The Latvian Beehive". We would remind you that the monument was erected in 2018. Three years later, the panel pronounced a verdict noting that the monument was designed to "pay tribute to the Nazi regime", "justify certain war crimes" and "deliberately hurt people". Incidentally, Inese Vaidere, a Latvian Member of the European Parliament, actively advocated its preservation, which once again confirms that the rewriting of history so as to pander to neo-Nazis is flourishing not only in the ranks of the highest executive branch of government but also in the legislative branch of that OSCE participating State. All this also casts a dark shadow on the European Parliament, though it did, to give it its due, adopt a resolution in October 2018 condemning the rise of neo-fascist violence in Europe.

We agree with the opinion of Ambassador Paçacı that, in many areas of society, anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim hatred and racism have deepened and become widespread in the OSCE area. According to a survey released in September by the University of California, Berkeley, some 68 per cent of Muslims in the United States of America have experienced various forms of Islamophobia.

In October, the National Council of Canadian Muslims noted that, over the past 20 years, anti-Islamic sentiment in Canada had become systemic in nature. As reported in the media, a candidate for the post of mayor in Quebec City, Alain Giasson, from the Alliance Citoyenne de Québec party, asserted in early October that "Islam is contrary to fundamental Quebec values. Islam is a cancer that is slowly growing inside Quebec society."

The European Union is not free from anti-immigration and anti-Muslim manifestations either. It is evident that the migration situation has revealed that some States are unprepared for the consequences of the West's artificial destabilization of the Middle East and North Africa. The presence of Islamophobic sentiment, in particular, is confirmed by the conclusions of a report for 2021 by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. It is noted there that 46 per cent of the survey participants responded that they would feel uncomfortable having a Romani neighbour; 33 per cent would feel like that if the neighbour were an asylum seeker or refugee, 32 per cent in the case of a Muslim neighbour and 14 per cent in the case of a Jewish one. By the way, it is worth recalling that we raised the issue of Islamophobia in the OSCE area at the Permanent Council in October.

We share to some extent Associate Professor Polak's opinion that, because of the ongoing multiple crises in the OSCE – dynamized by the pandemic – racism, xenophobia, intolerance and discrimination against ethnic and other minorities, Christians and members of other religions will increase in the coming months.

Moreover, we believe that the worrying rise in anti-Christian hate crimes should be considered in relation not only to the pandemic, as Ms. Polak suggests, but to the situation in the OSCE area as a whole. For it is by no means the first year that Christians, who are the majority religion in Europe and constitute the foundation of European civilization, have faced aggressive secularism. A "religious neutrality" bordering on religious intolerance is being foisted on societies. There are instances of persecution of Christians, desecration of holy sites and seizure of churches, and harassment and even killing of priests. Some States permit flagrant meddling in internal church affairs, foment schism and adopt discriminatory laws.

The plight of the parishioners of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in Ukraine continues to be of utmost concern. The artificially created schism in Ukrainian Orthodoxy has led to the lives of clergy and members of congregations being threatened, first and foremost by right-wing radicals. Churches, parishes and their property have become targets of aggression.

Let us cite a few recent examples. According to information from civil society, adherents of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU) – an ecclesiastical structure created in 2018 at the instigation and with the involvement of the political leadership of Ukraine – broke into churches in the villages of Haluzyntsi (Derazhnia district), Lysohirka (Letychiv district) and Stavnytsia (Letychiv district), all in the Khmelnytskyi region. In March, six OCU supporters savagely beat up a 63-year-old parishioner of St. Michael's Church in the village of Zadubrivka in the Chernihiv region. In April, radicals took over a church in the village of Pryputni (Chernihiv region); in May, they did the same to a church in the village of Zabolottia (Rivne region), in this case with the assistance of district councillors; and in September, a church in the village of Krasnosilka (Vinnytsia region). In November, the priests and congregants of St. Nicholas's Church in the village of Bakhtyn in the Vynnytsia region were prevented from entering their church – what is more, with the support of the police. The Ukrainian central authorities are turning a blind eye to these numerous instances of arbitrariness.

In connection with the suggestion by Ms. Polak to establish international dialogue platforms, where States and civil society organizations exchange positive country-specific experiences and best practice models, we should like to recall the proposal made in 2019 by a former Permanent Representative of Ireland to the OSCE, Philip McDonagh, to establish an Advisory Group of Religious Leaders at the OSCE. Such a format could also be extremely helpful.

We call on the relevant OSCE bodies, including the three Personal Representatives, to continue to pay particular attention to alarming trends in the OSCE area. We also wish to remind you that the distinguished Rabbi Baker, Ambassador Paçacı and Associate Professor Polak should follow consensus-based approaches, approved by all the participating States, in their activities. In closing, we should like to wish them all every success and the best of health.

Thank you for your attention.