

The OSCE Secretariat bears no responsibility for the content of this document and circulates it without altering its content. The distribution by OSCE Conference Services of this document is without prejudice to OSCE decisions, as set out in documents agreed by OSCE participating States.

PC.DEL/628/20
4 June 2020

ENGLISH
Original: RUSSIAN

Delegation of the Russian Federation

**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1270th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL
VIA VIDEO TELECONFERENCE**

4 June 2020

**On police violence and its serious implications for the human rights situation in the
United States of America**

Mr. Chairperson,

“Last week, on 5 February, a sheriff’s deputy shot 16-year-old Anthony Weber in Los Angeles.” This was the opening sentence of our statement to the Permanent Council on 15 February 2018 on the problem of racism and police violence in the United States of America. Unfortunately, we are once again obliged today to bring up this subject and the problems connected with it.

We are talking about the extraordinary situation that has arisen in that country following the murder by police officers in Minneapolis on 25 May of the African American George Floyd.

I remind you that he was brutally asphyxiated before the eyes of a large number of passers-by in the course of his arrest. According to US media, mass protests reflecting the public outrage at these criminal acts by the law enforcement authorities have taken place in over 200 cities in various states, including New York, Georgia, California, Virginia, Minnesota and Texas. More than 40 cities, including the capital Washington, D.C., have imposed curfews. The National Guard has been called in, thousands of people have been arrested and some have been killed, mostly African Americans. The Federal Government has promised to deploy the military in the cities if the disturbances do not stop. The television station CNN, which President Trump once characterized as “fake news”, has described such promises as “threats”. Local observers are drawing parallels with the mass protests in the United States in 1968 following the assassination of the black civil rights leader Martin Luther King.

We have always stressed that protests should be peaceful and have always strongly condemned violence by the participants in such actions. Moreover, we note with concern in this case that, at the instigation of the authorities, the US law enforcement agents are dispersing not only looters and hooligans but also peaceful demonstrators, showing an unjustifiable use of force against both protesters and journalists reporting on the events. The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has already expressed its opinion on the actions of the police, who have used rubber bullets and tear gas against media workers. We repeat that we consider the deliberate pepper-spraying by Minneapolis police of the RIA Novosti correspondent

Mikhail Turgiyev, in spite of the fact that he had clearly identified himself as a journalist, to be an act of unjustifiable brutality.

As of 1 June, local human rights organizations had recorded about 100 (and according to some reports at least 200) attacks on reporters in dozens of cities in the country since 28 May. We would remind the US authorities of their international obligations to ensure the safety and unhindered operation of journalists, as well as freedom of expression and equal access to information for all. The OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, Mr. Harlem Désir, also made this precise point when on 1 June he expressed his serious concern at the “wave of violence” against media representatives in that country.

We expect the perpetrators to be duly punished. The incident was just one more grim example in a series of manifestations of lawlessness and unjustified violence by the “guardians of law and order” in the United States. Nor do we see serious progress in addressing the accumulated systemic problems, including gross human rights violations, racial, ethnic and religious discrimination, police brutality, judicial bias, prison overcrowding, or the uncontrolled use of firearms and individual “self-defence”. Concern about “structural inequality and racism” in that country and the need for its eradication was also expressed on 30 May by Ms. Ingibjörg Sólrún Gísladóttir, Director of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR).

The excessive use of force by the US police is an alarming sign, highlighting the systematic failure to protect the constitutional rights of US citizens. Allegations of racism and the excessive use of force by the police are regularly voiced in local and foreign media. It is well known that it is African Americans like George Floyd who are on the receiving end of most of the violence by the guardians of law and order in the United States. Moreover, there is a deliberate absence of official statistics on a national scale of infractions, including murder, committed by law enforcement officers in the performance of their duties.

According to the human rights website killedbypolice.net, 994 persons were killed by the police in the United States in 2015, 962 people in 2016, 986 people in 2017, 992 people in 2018, 1,004 people in 2019, and already around 400 people in the first five months of this year.

Human rights defenders note that violence by the police and the failure to punish its officers is exacerbated by prejudice against those belonging to racial and ethnic minorities. According to mappingpoliceviolence.org, African Americans, who make up around 13 per cent of the population of the United States, accounted for 24 per cent of the victims of police shootings in 2019. It is calculated that African Americans are three times as likely to be killed by police officers. Impunity for police shootings is also illustrated by the fact that criminal proceedings against law enforcement officers are initiated in only 1 to 2 per cent of cases.

This is not even to speak of discrimination against African Americans in social and economic spheres. It is no secret that by virtue of the “traditions” prevailing in the United States, the black population are among the millions of marginalized people who have no possibility of leading a decent life and of earning a sufficient living not just to survive but also to provide in a normal manner for their families and to obtain a good education and adequate healthcare. Unemployment in the country has risen to almost 40 million. And this is the “shining light on the hill”?

The current crisis has merely once again laid bare this and other shortcomings of US society. But the establishment has preferred either to keep silent about them for reasons of political correctness or to shift the blame for their own blunders on to others, putting them down to machinations by some “outside detractors”. All this negates the US Government’s claim to moral leadership and mentorship in the human rights sphere. It should concentrate on its own problems.

In conclusion, I should like to recall that in Copenhagen in 1990 the participating States agreed that “all persons are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to the equal protection of the law. In this respect, the law will prohibit any discrimination and guarantee to all persons equal and effective protection against discrimination on any ground.” And in 2003 in Maastricht the OSCE countries confirmed that “practices related to discrimination and intolerance both threaten the security of individuals and may give rise to wider-scale conflict and violence”.

In that connection, we once again urge the authorities in the United States to make serious efforts to address the egregious state of affairs in this area and to resume the fulfilment of their international obligations in good faith. We expect the competent US authorities to conduct a thorough investigation of the incidents, and the specialist OSCE bodies – including the ODIHR, the Representative on Freedom of the Media, the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities and the Personal Representatives of the Chairperson-in-Office on tolerance – to continue to pay attention to the situation. In addition, it might be useful for the US Government to call on the expertise of these OSCE bodies to promote respect for human rights in the United States. The US people deserve to breathe freely without having a police officer’s knee on their throat.

Thank you for your attention.