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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,  
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,  
AT THE 1203rd MEETING OF THE  
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

22 November 2018

**On flagrant violations of the rights of persons belonging to the  
indigenous peoples of Canada**

Mr. Chairperson,

We should like to draw attention to the difficult situation of the First Nations in Canada, among which are the Indian and Arctic Inuit tribes, who are systematically oppressed. Repentance and apologies for the “horrors of discrimination” have become politically fashionable recently in Canada, but the situation of the indigenous population has not changed in any significant way.

In many respects, the indigenous peoples of Canada remain the most disadvantaged and discriminated category of the population. Against a background of hopeless poverty and social insecurity, this resource-rich member of the Group of 7 (G7) has an extremely high rate of suicide and alcoholism.

The situation of girls and women, an issue that is receiving increased attention in the OSCE, is particularly depressing. Even official statistics acknowledge 1,181 cases of disappearance or death under suspicious circumstances of women and girls from families belonging to the First Nations. Indigenous organizations contend that in reality there are at least 4,000 such crimes. One of the reasons for this “inconsistency” is the deliberate suppression by the police and authorities of the true extent of the problem. A study conducted at the end of 2017 revealed that Indian and Inuit women were victims of crime 12 times as frequently as women from other ethnic groups. We can confirm that with more than 100 new tragedies occurring since the government of Justin Trudeau came to power in late 2015 the state of affairs is only getting worse.

The situation in nearly 200 Canadian Indian reservations, which are completely dependent on federal subsidies and benefits, does not stand up to scrutiny in terms of basic indicators such as living conditions, employment opportunities or accessibility to education and health care. The state of affairs in the Attawapiskat reservation in Ontario is typical. Its inhabitants are barely surviving, with dozens of people being forced to crowd together in dilapidated buildings in unsanitary conditions without basic amenities.

The problem of special residential schools, in which until 1998 children from “indigenous” families were forcibly selected for re-education and assimilation, is quite extraordinary. This has damaged the children’s future prospects and violently deprived them of their identity. According to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, the majority of survivors of this horror still suffer from deep psychological and emotional trauma. We note that the Canadian authorities do not comply with many of the nearly 100 recommendations by this Commission, which worked from 2008 to 2015 to determine the extent of the damage caused to the Canadian indigenous population by the residential-school system<sup>1</sup>. According to official figures alone, more than 6,000 pupils at these schools died as a result of hunger, sexual and other forms of violence, epidemics and unsanitary conditions. In November 2017, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau was forced to recognize that the treatment of children in residential schools was a “dark and shameful chapter” in the country’s history.

Another shameful topic is the forced sterilization of aboriginal women. Until recently, it was thought in Canada that such practices belonged to the pages of history books. Some 1,200 cases were recorded in the 1970s. In the last few days, however, following a presentation by the non-governmental organization Transparency International, the media have begun to carry reports of incidents indicating that barbaric methods of birth control are still used in the country on members of the First Nations.

For example, human rights defenders obtained a report of the results of an inspection of the city hospital by the regional administration of the Ministry of Health in the city of Saskatoon in the province of Saskatchewan. According to the document, at least 16 women in the period from 2008 to 2012 were subject to forced sterilization by way of surgical ligation of their fallopian tubes. Moreover, this story turned out to be merely the tip of the iceberg, and it was soon revealed that similar practices still existed on a large scale in the provinces of Alberta, Manitoba and Ontario, and also in the territory of Nunavut and the Northwest Territories.

To draw the attention of the authorities and the public to this long-standing problem – the number of victims of such torture runs to the hundreds – two residents of Saskatchewan filed a claim for compensation for damage to their health in 2017. So far, a further 60 women have joined the litigation. By the look of things, their number will increase as new cases are expected in other provinces.

The Canadian Government has been forced to acknowledge the existence of the problem. According to the Minister of Indigenous Services Jane Philpott, the hard-hitting facts that have emerged about the forced sterilization of indigenous women represent a “very serious violation of human rights”.

Amnesty International has called on the federal authorities in Ottawa to appoint a special rapporteur on this scandalous issue. In the coming weeks, human rights activists expect to initiate a discussion on this subject in the United Nations Committee against Torture. I should like to remind you that in May this year Canada already came under harsh

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1 The residential-school system was officially created in 1831 to “civilize” the indigenous population. Around 150,000 Indians and Inuits between the ages of 7 and 16 passed through it.

criticism on this account when its country report was considered in the UN Human Rights Council in the framework of the Universal Periodic Review.

We consider it unacceptable that the massive violations of the rights of the indigenous population have persisted for such a long time in Canada. Against this background, the official position of the Canadian Government, which is so concerned about human rights in other countries, sounds hypocritical. Moreover, it is not only the extent of the information that is emerging about violations of human rights in Canada that is striking but also the evident unwillingness or inability of the authorities to take effective measures to solve the problem.

Canada is clearly in violation of its OSCE commitments in this area. I recall the decision of the 1992 Helsinki Summit in which the participating States noted “that persons belonging to indigenous populations may have special problems in exercising their rights” and agreed that “their CSCE commitments regarding human rights and fundamental freedoms apply fully and without discrimination to such persons.” Moreover, in Decision No. 15/05 of the 2005 Ministerial Council meeting in Ljubljana “Preventing and combating violence against women”, States acknowledged the “particular targeting or vulnerability to violence and hence the need for protection” of girls and women belonging to indigenous peoples.

We believe that consideration of the question of sending inspectors and observers to Canada to verify fulfilment of international obligations undertaken with respect to indigenous peoples is long overdue. We urge the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities Lamberto Zannier and the Director of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights Ingibjörg Sólrún Gísladóttir to assess the situation, and encourage the Canadian Government to implement its human rights commitments.

Thank you for your attention.