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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,  
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,  
AT THE 1239th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

5 September 2019

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

Mr. Chairperson,

We would once more like to draw attention to the difficult situation faced in Canada by the First Nations, which include the Indian and Arctic Inuit peoples.

The systematic way in which the rights of aboriginal peoples have been violated is confirmed by the grim conclusions of the report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, which was released in June. In this document it is unequivocally concluded that the system which emerged in Canada for dealing with the indigenous peoples – also on the part of government agencies – amounts to genocide.

The Secretary General of the Organization of American States (OAS), Luis Almagro, has expressed grave alarm in that regard. In view of the “evidence of genocide perpetrated against indigenous women and girls in Canada”, the head of the OAS sent the Canadian authorities an official letter on 3 June, proposing that an interdisciplinary group of independent experts be established under the aegis of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights in order to conduct an appropriate investigation. We should like to hear about the Canadian Government’s response to this proposal.

The aforementioned National Inquiry has drawn up 231 recommendations, which have to do with rectifying the legal and regulatory framework, the payment of compensation, promoting employment, and providing social and economic protections.

During her visit to Canada in June, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, confirmed the need for a national action plan to be adopted to implement those recommendations. In fact, she noted the incongruity between Canadian legislation and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, advising the authorities to carry out the necessary “harmonization”. Ms. Bachelet also assured the Canadian Government of her readiness to provide the necessary technical assistance. In our view, such assistance would indeed be much needed to remedy the situation.

Significantly, during meetings with the UN High Commissioner, representatives of civil society organizations of indigenous peoples called in effect for the situation of marginalized individuals and groups to be improved and for the justiciability of economic, social and cultural rights to be ensured.

To this day, the indigenous peoples remain the most disadvantaged and discriminated subgroup of the Canadian population. There continue to exist reservations where aboriginal peoples live on the brink of poverty and in unsanitary conditions – sometimes even without access to clean water. The percentage of underprivileged children in such communities is several times higher than among the white population.

Here are some recent examples. In July, it transpired that two First Nations peoples (the Attawapiskat and the Eabametoong) living in remote areas in the north of the province of Ontario had declared a state of emergency because of a drastic deterioration in water quality. A high concentration of chemicals (trihalomethanes and haloacetic acids) had been detected in water samples from the piped water network of the Attawapiskat community (2,000 inhabitants). These by-products are associated with serious effects on human health, even to the extent of causing cancer. The level of these chemicals in the water was found to be almost twice the guideline values. The Canadian authorities, despite being aware of the problem since 2009, have done practically nothing to solve it.

In this respect, the chief of the Attawapiskat community, Ignace Gull, accused the Federal Government of a discriminatory approach to the provision of water for the population. Two members of the community announced a hunger strike, demanding that the competent bodies allocate funds for resolving the water crisis, for developing infrastructure and for expanding the housing supply available to the Attawapiskat, and that they undertake to improve the mechanisms for providing social protection for children, health care and education, and also to stop the “looming genocidal encroachment” of mining companies on the traditional homelands of the indigenous peoples.

Against this backdrop, there appeared reports in the Canadian media about the even more critical situation faced by the Eabametoong community (around 1,500 inhabitants). There the concentration of harmful substances in the water is even higher, and it has been like that for over twenty years.

The cases described above are by no means isolated incidents in Canada. As at 10 July, long-term drinking water advisories had been lifted on 106 reservations, but such advisories still continued to be in effect on 57 reservations. Moreover, as a study by the newspaper *The Globe and Mail* has shown, the number of poorly functioning water supply systems remains unchanged.

According to a government report on the state of Canada’s penal system that was issued in 2018, over the past decade the number of indigenous inmates in federal correctional institutions has grown by more than 40 per cent, with such inmates now accounting for 28 per cent of the total prison population. The figures for women are even higher: 60 per cent and 40 per cent, respectively.

Additionally, as reported by Statistics Canada, during the period 2011–2016 the number of suicides among indigenous citizens was several times higher than among their non-indigenous counterparts. Thus, the suicide rate among the Indian peoples was 24.3 deaths per 100,000 persons (three times higher than the rate among non-indigenous people, which was 8 deaths per 100,000 persons); among the Métis the rate was 14.7 deaths per 100,000 persons (two times higher), while among the Inuit it was 72.3 deaths per 100,000 persons (nine times higher). This figure is even higher for Inuit youth, among whom the suicide rate is 11 times higher than the rate for non-indigenous youth. Profound depression caused by the living conditions they face is cited as the main cause of this phenomenon. This bleak picture is rounded off by estimates from the Canadian Human Rights Commission, which has found that the homicide rate among women from this risk group is 4.5 times higher than that of all other women in Canada.

The situation of the new generation of First Nations people is by no means rosier. Two in five children belonging to the indigenous peoples are living in extreme hardship. According to a report commissioned by the Assembly of First Nations, an NGO, the percentage of underprivileged children in indigenous communities is several times higher than among Canada's white population. At 47 per cent, the child poverty rate is highest among the First Nations peoples (in the provinces of Manitoba and Saskatchewan it is as high as 65 per cent), and it has been the same since 2006.

There continues to be a high level of violence against girls and women, including forced sterilization. According to the Native Women's Association of Canada, the trafficking of indigenous women and girls is a "persisting problem" in Canada. They also emphasize that finding a solution is impossible without analysing the country's colonial past.

All this constitutes a flagrant violation by Canada both of international human rights conventions and of its OSCE commitments, including a decision of the 1992 Helsinki Summit and the 2005 Ljubljana Ministerial Council decision on preventing and combating violence against women.

We call upon the High Commissioner on National Minorities, Lamberto Zannier; the Director of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, Ingibjörg Sólrún Gísladóttir; and other specialist bodies of the OSCE to evaluate the situation and keep a close eye on how it develops. We hope that the Canadian Government will take all the necessary measures to remedy the unacceptable situation of the First Nations.

Thank you for your attention.