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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1249th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

28 November 2019

**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 Professor Ingeborg Gabriel for their reports. We are in favour of preserving and strengthening the three Personal Representative posts and intensifying their activities. This work must become more visible. In particular, we look forward to their contribution in carrying out the instructions of the OSCE Ministerial Council in Basel in 2014 to elaborate declarations on combating intolerance and discrimination against Christians, Muslims and members of other religions.

Against the background of the rise in racist, xenophobic, neo-Nazi and other radical manifestations in the OSCE area, the rights not only of religious minorities but also of followers of world religions are being violated. In order to combat these phenomena, it is important to step up concerted efforts on the basis of a comprehensive approach and with equal attention to all traditional faiths.

We have repeatedly expressed our concern at the persecution of Christians, the desecration of their holy sites and the seizure of churches, and the persecution and even killing of priests. Some States allow flagrant meddling in internal church affairs and encourage divisions. As Professor Gabriel noted in her report, discrimination of Christians is no longer a marginal phenomenon in the OSCE area.

In that connection, the situation of members of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in Ukraine is of utmost concern. The Ukrainian Government's blatant use of the institution of the Church for opportunistic political purposes has led to a deepening of the division in Ukrainian Orthodoxy. As a result, the lives of clergy and members of the church are often in serious danger. Since September this year alone, 27 cases of threats and attacks by right-wing radicals on clergy and members of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church have been recorded in Ukraine. Its churches and property are victims of aggression.

We are also concerned about the situation of Christians in the Middle East. I am talking not only about thousands of human lives, but also about the direct threat to one of the oldest religions and a priceless stratum of world culture. Christians are being expelled from their homes and physically annihilated by extremist groups, and the barbaric destruction of Christian cultural heritage sites continues.

An aggressive secularism, which borders on religious intolerance, is intensifying in Europe as a whole.

Against the backdrop of the migration crisis in the European Union, many EU countries have shown themselves to be unprepared for coping with the consequences of the artificially destabilized situation in the Middle East and North Africa. Anti-migrant sentiments, which are mainly based on Islamophobia, are now on the rise in receiving States. Frequent cases of arson attacks on mosques and the burning of copies of the Koran are evidence of the growth of anti-Islamic sentiment, as Ambassador Paçacı noted in his report. Radicals and populists persevere in their attempts to link terrorism and Islam. This is completely unacceptable and contrary to OSCE commitments.

The rise in anti-Semitism is equally worrying. According to the World Jewish Congress, the number of neo-Nazi marches, particularly under the banner of anti-Semitic slogans, is increasing. Attempts are being made to falsify the history of the Second World War and revise the rulings of the Nuremberg Tribunal.

We welcome the fact that at the start of the year the Slovak Chairmanship held a conference in Bratislava on combating anti-Semitism. We regret that similar events in support of Christians and Muslims have still not taken place. We urge the incoming Albanian Chairmanship to fill this gap.

After all, there is no shortage of problems. Here are a few specific examples. According to the French Ministry of the Interior, between 2017 and 2018 the number of violent anti-Semitic attacks increased by 84 per cent, while the number of incidents against physical persons went up by 170 per cent during the same period. The German Federal Ministry of the Interior, Building and Community reported a 13.5 per cent increase in the number of anti-Semitic incidents in 2018. In the United Kingdom, this figure reached a record level of 1,652 cases last year.

As the distinguished Rabbi Baker noted in his report: “Nearly a third of American Jews say they avoid wearing anything in public that would identify them as Jews.” Indeed, anti-Semitism shows no sign of abating in that country. According to the Anti-Defamation League, an international NGO, between January and the end of October, more than 780 manifestations of anti-Semitism were recorded in the United States of America. Christians are also victims of attacks. On 12 October, an unknown assailant opened fire in a church in the town of Pelham, injuring members of the congregation. In April, there was shooting near a Baptist church in Baltimore. One person was killed and six were injured. Hate crimes against Muslims continue. According to a report by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, 188 such incidents occurred in 2018.

We call on the relevant OSCE bodies, including the Personal Representatives, to pay particular attention to these worrying trends.

In conclusion, we should like to encourage the distinguished Personal Representatives to strive for success and to meet more frequently with the participating States. As we bid farewell to Ms. Gabriel we wish her new discoveries in her academic and scientific endeavours.

Thank you for your attention.