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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1091st MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

3 March 2016

On the Marrakesh Declaration

Mr. Chairperson,

We also welcome the appointment of Mr. Vladislav Grib as the Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office on Combating Racism, Xenophobia and Discrimination against Christians and Members of Other Religions also Focusing on Intolerance and Discrimination, and Mr. Bülent Şenay as Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office on Combating Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims, as well as the extension of the mandate of Rabbi Andrew Baker, Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office on Combating Anti-Semitism.

The conference held in Marrakesh from 25 to 27 January this year was an important step in the promotion of religious tolerance and dialogue. The forum was attended by around 300 Islamic scholars and spiritual leaders from 120 countries, including the Supreme Mufti of Russia, as well as observers from other confessions. It is of symbolic significance that the event coincided with the 1400th anniversary of the Constitution of Medina, an agreement between the Prophet Mohammed and the people of Medina guaranteeing freedom of religion.

The Declaration adopted at the conference on the rights of religious minorities in Muslim societies stressed that Islam is a religion of peace that should not under any circumstances be associated with terrorism. It is important for theologians to condemn the use of violence and armed struggle as a tool for settling conflicts and imposing one's point of view. We note its recommendation to educational institutions to exclude from their curricula any material that instigates aggression and extremism, leads to war and chaos, and results in the destruction of societies. We support the call for a concerted effort to combat all forms of religious fanaticism, vilification and denigration of what people hold sacred. It is no coincidence that the Marrakesh Declaration was supported by around 50 leaders of other religions.

This document is highly relevant given the serious threat of terrorism and extremism for Christians and other religious minorities in a number of countries of the Middle East and

North Africa. The Declaration follows on from the outcome of the OSCE Conference on Enhancing Efforts to Prevent and Combat Intolerance and Discrimination against Christians.

The critical nature of this problem was emphasized in the Joint Declaration of the Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia and Pope Francis signed in Havana on 12 February this year. It calls upon the international community to act urgently in order to prevent the further expulsion of Christians from the Middle East and to put an end to violence and terrorism, whose victims also include adherents of other religious traditions.

We trust that all of these appeals will find a practical echo in the OSCE's activities. In that connection, we firmly believe in the need to follow up the task outlined at the Ministerial Council meeting in Basel in 2014 and to adopt two declarations at the next Ministerial Council meeting in Hamburg on combating intolerance and discrimination against Christians and Muslims.

Thank you for your attention.