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Delegation of the Russian Federation

**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE
1304th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL
VIA VIDEO TELECONFERENCE**

4 March 2021

On the seventh anniversary of the reunification of Crimea with Russia

Madam Chairperson,

On 16 March 2014, the people of Crimea voted for reunification with the Russian Federation in a free and peaceful referendum that met all international standards. On 18 March, a treaty was signed on the accession of the Republic of Crimea to the Russian Federation and the establishment of two new constituent entities – the Republic of Crimea and the federal city of Sevastopol. They have been an integral part of our country since then. I emphasize that the reunification process took place within the framework of the right to self-determination in strict accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, the provisions of which have been affirmed by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the Declaration on Principles of International Law concerning Friendly Relations and Co-operation among States in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations. I recall that, according to this Declaration: “The establishment of a sovereign and independent State, the free association or integration with an independent State or the emergence into any other political status freely determined by a people constitute modes of implementing the right of self-determination by that people.” The Crimeans’ choice was also in line with point VIII of the Helsinki Final Act, which enshrines the right of peoples to self-determination. Seven years later, the decision of the peninsula’s inhabitants on this crucial subject remains unchanged.

And that is understandable. Back in 1991, the Crimeans voiced their disagreement with the nationalist slogans of the Ukrainian Government. They then voted in a referendum for the restoration of Crimea’s autonomy within the USSR as an independent entity of the Soviet State, separate from Ukraine, which would maintain close ties with Russia. But in 1991, the opinion of the Crimean people was ignored.

In early 2014, following the violent, anti-constitutional coup d’état in Kyiv, the peninsula’s inhabitants found themselves defenceless against intimidation by radical nationalists and subsequent threats by the Maidan authorities to deprive the majority of residents of the right to use their native language. This prompted the Crimeans to take the only possible step in the current situation – to reunite with Russia as quickly as possible.

Memories still linger of the so-called “Friendship Train” with Right Sector nationalists, which left for Crimea on 27 February 2014 from riot-torn Kyiv. The impassioned youths certainly did not set out with peaceful intentions. They were carrying weapons and incendiary devices, and their leaders made direct threats of reprisals against dissenters. Crimeans also remember well the nationalist slogan that accompanied this action: “Crimea will be Ukrainian, or it will be emptied of its people.”

Under those circumstances, the inhabitants of Crimea had essentially only two alternatives: to become victims of the nationalists or to take their home region’s fate into their own hands. They have secured a peaceful future by avoiding the bloody scenario we witnessed in 2015 in Odessa and have seen for several years in Donbas.

However, instead of international understanding or approval, the Crimeans are now being subjected to an absurd “collective punishment” for their genuinely democratic and free decision. One instrument of such punishment has been the illegitimate unilateral sanctions imposed by the United States of America, the European Union and Canada, which have been extended year after year. Apparently, the long history of such unsuccessful restrictions on Cuba has not taught our Western colleagues, particularly those from the United States, anything.

The Maidan Ukrainian authorities went even further by imposing an economic, transport and water blockade on this Russian region. Moreover, with their full connivance, violent radicals sabotaged the transmission towers that supplied the peninsula with electricity. According to the Crimean authorities, the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar People, together with Right Sector extremists, were behind those acts of sabotage. They also prevented energy companies from promptly restoring the damaged transmission towers in order to exploit the situation for political purposes. Incidentally, no one has yet been held accountable for those crimes. What is more, even after seven years, the Ukrainian Government continues not just to hypocritically and inhumanely exploit the subject of the peninsula’s water supply, but also to back up its words with concrete plans. For example, it has recently announced its intention to complete the construction of a dam at the 107th kilometre of the North Crimean Canal. And all in order, as the so-called permanent representative of the President of Ukraine in Crimea put it, “to prevent water from entering the peninsula as much as possible”. Can this really be called concern for people whom the Ukrainian Government nominally considers to be Ukrainian citizens? Allow me to remind you that the right to water is an essential condition for the realization of other human rights, as confirmed by United Nations General Assembly resolution 64/292 and the jurisprudence of the European Court of Human Rights. As a matter of fact, denying a population access to water could be considered an attempt at genocide.

The jurisprudence of the European Court of Human Rights considers the denial of access to water as a violation of Articles 3, 8 and 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights, and of Protocol No. 12 (non-discrimination) to the Convention. Not to mention the 1992 United Nations Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes. This right is inextricably linked to the realization of other fundamental human rights, including the right to life, food, health and sanitation. The Ukrainian Government’s deliberate denial of rights and freedoms can be seen as a violation of important human rights obligations enshrined in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Article 6 – right to life), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (Article 11 – right to adequate food, freedom from hunger, equitable distribution of world food supplies), and others.

The consequences of the water blockade of the peninsula are devastating not only for Crimea, but also for the southern regions of Ukraine itself. And while Crimea has held its own, Ukraine’s Kherson region, which borders it, has found itself facing environmental, sanitary and epidemiological threats. This has clearly done nothing for the post-Maidan authorities’ popularity in the eyes of their own citizens, who have been held hostage by the Ukrainian Government’s Russophobic policies.

Now for the Crimean Tatars. The claims made by some colleagues today about the alleged political persecution of a number of representatives of this ethnic group have nothing to do with reality. The persons in question are accused of taking part in the activities of the *Hizb ut-Tahrir* terrorist organization, which was recognized as such by a decision of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation of 14 February 2003. This organization is banned not only in Russia, but also in Germany, China, Turkey, Pakistan and many Arab countries. In addition, in 2013, the European Court of Human Rights refused to consider the entity's claim against Germany, citing an article of the European Convention on Human Rights on prohibition of abuse of rights, because the terrorist organization in question could not benefit from the protection afforded under the Convention. The Court found that *Hizb ut-Tahrir*'s aims were contrary to the values of the Convention, including the peaceful resolution of international conflicts and the supreme value of human life. In particular, *Hizb ut-Tahrir*'s calls for the destruction of the State of Israel and for the formation of a Caliphate, including by violent means, are in no way compatible with the Convention. I wish to pose a direct question to my US and other colleagues: do you support *Hizb ut-Tahrir*'s policy of destroying Israel? Do you wish to see another Holocaust?

I stress that the Crimeans themselves have repeatedly stated that the people perceive the ban on radicals as a measure that has prevented the escalation of inter-ethnic and interconfessional tensions on the peninsula. The multi-ethnic people of Crimea are now living in peace and harmony and exercising their entire set of political, social, cultural and other rights.

The allegations of massive human rights violations in Crimea are also totally unfounded. In fact, conditions there are changing for the better in all spheres: socio-economic, infrastructure, politics, human rights and others. This can be confirmed by locals, foreign journalists, parliamentarians from several European States who have visited the Russian region, and even tourists. Incidentally, 7.43 million Russian and foreign tourists visited Crimea in 2019. They included 1.1 million Ukrainian citizens. You will agree that this is not a small number. In 2020, the figures were slightly lower, at 6,303,000 tourists, owing to restrictions due to the coronavirus pandemic. However, the second half of last year showed a steady, positive trend in the region's tourism sector. We also invite you, esteemed colleagues, to relax in the beautiful resorts of Russia's Crimea.

Against this background, there is a strong sense that Western representatives not only do not know, but also do not want to know about the true situation on the peninsula. This was also demonstrated by their flagrant disregard of the side event on the margins of the Third OSCE Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting on 10 November 2020, where Crimeans themselves spoke at length about various aspects of life on the peninsula. But it is apparently easier to politicize the issue on the basis of fiction rather than acknowledge objective reality.

We will come back to the conversation about the true state of affairs on the peninsula.

Thank you for your attention.