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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,  
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,  
AT THE 1295th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL  
VIA VIDEO TELECONFERENCE**

10 December 2020

**On the address by the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross,  
Mr. Peter Maurer**

Mr. Maurer,

We are pleased to welcome you once again to the Permanent Council and thank you for your informative and as always balanced address.

Russia pays serious attention to its traditionally constructive and fruitful partnership with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). We appreciate the high level of professionalism and the depoliticized approach that characterizes the staff of your organization. During your recent visit to Moscow on 16 and 17 November, the areas for further co-operation and projects for improving the situation of civilians in crisis situations were discussed at length.

The changing nature of international conflicts today and the emergence of new hotspots require additional resources to be invested in humanitarian work. In view of these challenges, the reconsideration of ICRC priorities and its increased needs, Russia has substantially stepped up its financial support to the Committee.

In the OSCE area, the Nagorno-Karabakh settlement has come to the forefront in recent months. The Red Cross has long been active in the region, in Yerevan and Baku but also directly in Stepanakert. Effective co-operation has been established with Russian peacekeepers deployed in accordance with the agreements of 9 November between the President of the Russian Federation, the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Prime Minister of Armenia. With their support, the ICRC can play an important role in dealing with the humanitarian consequences of the events in Nagorno-Karabakh. The Committee assists with the exchange of the remains of the dead and the return of prisoners and other detainees. We are aware of the plans to increase the ICRC's presence in the field. All this is necessary in order to restore normal relations between people of different ethnic and confessional backgrounds. The ICRC's example will also be useful to other international humanitarian organizations that are not yet active in the region.

The internal conflict in eastern Ukraine is another persisting and critical humanitarian crisis in the OSCE area. We note the consistent efforts of the Red Cross to help the millions of people in Donbas suffering hardship because of the blockade imposed by the Ukrainian Government. Apart from Russian

humanitarian convoys, the Committee's assistance remains one of the few sources of essential supplies for the people of the region.

In the Luhansk region, as is well known, there is still no possibility for the ICRC to transport goods across the line of contact by road, as it is doing in the Donetsk region. We regret that because of the position adopted by the Ukrainian authorities on the opening of the checkpoint in Shchastia, it has not been possible to optimize the logistics for delivering humanitarian goods to certain areas of the Luhansk region. The Ukrainian Government has unilaterally revised an agreement reached in the Trilateral Contact Group that this checkpoint should be one of the first in the Luhansk region to allow vehicle traffic, including humanitarian convoys. What is particularly cynical is that the Ukrainian authorities, having categorized it as an entry-exit checkpoint, have in fact made no provision for the entry or exit of people. The crossing has simply been declared to be for pedestrians and is still unable to operate in line with the original arrangements.

Continued attention needs to be paid to the problems of Donbas's unified water distribution network, which has been disrupted by the fighting. With the assistance of the ICRC, a functioning, albeit intermittent, cash payment mechanism for water supplies to Luhansk has been established. As for non-cash payment for water, the ball is still in the Ukrainian Government's court.

Ukraine must fulfil its obligations under paragraph 8 of the Minsk Package of Measures to ensure direct payment of pensions and welfare benefits to residents of Donbas and find appropriate solutions in dialogue with Donetsk and Luhansk. This applies especially to people with limited mobility, who are not always able to make their way even to those branches of Ukrainian banks closest to the line of contact. Overall, of course, what is needed is a complete lifting of the Ukrainian Government's ongoing blockade of vital functions in the region and the restoration of severed socio-economic ties.

We pay tribute to the ICRC's desire to create an effective mechanism for finding persons who have gone missing during the course of the conflict in Donbas. The preparations for the exchange of detainees and assistance in humanitarian demining also need to be stepped up.

We note your personal efforts, Mr. Maurer, in that regard. Virtually all of the issues mentioned were discussed at your recent meetings with the President of Ukraine and with the leadership of certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. We call for maximum facilitation of dialogue between them in the interests of a speedy settlement of the conflict in eastern Ukraine.

We also appreciate the ICRC's work in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, not least in containing the spread of the coronavirus disease in these States.

Overall, the coronavirus pandemic is not only exacerbating the humanitarian situation in problem regions, but also aggravating artificially or intentionally created difficulties. For example, it makes the burden of illegal unilateral sanctions even heavier for millions of people who are denied access to normal medicine, infrastructure or basic necessities.

Mr. Maurer,

In spite of the many challenges, including the pandemic, the ICRC continues to operate successfully and in strict compliance with its mandate. In many hotspots, the Committee is the only entity granted humanitarian access. We would like to assure you that the Red Cross can continue to count on Russia's assistance in its difficult but very worthwhile mission.

Thank you for your attention.