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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,  
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1340th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

21 October 2021

**On intolerance and discrimination against Muslims in the OSCE area**

Madam Chairperson,

The flow of refugees and forced migrants to OSCE countries from South Asia, the Middle East and North Africa is on the rise again today. These refugees are looking for a better life for themselves. What challenges will those who have left their homes and found themselves in a new reality face now already or in the future? The reality is quite stark, since Islamophobia, intolerance and discrimination against Muslims continue to flourish in many OSCE participating States.

There is no shortage of examples. The situation is closely monitored, in particular by the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation through its monthly reports.

There are also problems in our country. In Russia, Muslims still face some difficulties. However, since the followers of Islam have lived in our multi-ethnic State for centuries, these difficulties are mainly of a domestic nature and much less about violence or prejudice. Thus, according to prominent representatives of the Russian Islamic community, one of the key problems is the lack of mosques, especially in Moscow. The fact is that over the past few years the number of Muslims in the Russian capital has increased significantly, mainly through new arrivals. This has caused a shortage of places of worship. However, the issue is gradually being resolved. The Moscow municipal authorities are planning to build a large interfaith complex with a mosque and an Islamic cultural centre. Quite a number of mosques are also under construction in other Russian regions. Tatarstan is a good example, where the number of mosques has increased more than sixtyfold in 30 years, to over 1,500 today.

The problem is also being addressed in Crimea, where followers of Islam, primarily Crimean Tatars, have been in need of places of worship for years. The construction of the Muftiyat building and a large cathedral mosque for 4,000 people in Simferopol is in its final stages. Since the reunification of the peninsula with Russia, several dozen mosques have been built. In total, there are more than 300 mosques, other houses of worship and madrasas in Crimea.

The Council on Interethnic and Interfaith Relations was established under the auspices of the Head of the Republic of Crimea. The deputy chairperson of this Council is a member of the Presidential Council

of the Russian Federation for Inter-Ethnic Relations. At a meeting of the Kurultay of the Muslims of Crimea in 2018, the Shura (Council) of Crimean Tatars was established to focus on strengthening interaction with regional authorities. The Shura is made up of respected cultural figures and clerics who have been elected to this body.

Every year in the Republic of Crimea, Muslim holidays are designated public holidays, a pilgrimage to Mecca is organized, and the process of obtaining international passports is simplified for Crimean participants in the annual hajj.

In general, the vast majority of Crimean Muslims note that it was not until the return of the peninsula to the Russian Federation that they felt that their numerous and acute problems that existed during the Ukrainian administration of Crimea finally began to be resolved.

But in a number of other OSCE States, Islamophobia is on the rise. For example, the German Federal Ministry of the Interior recorded 1,026 attacks on Muslims in the country in 2020. However, it is likely that many more incidents simply went unreported. Moreover, the report states that anti-Muslim sentiment and anti-Semitism have become an everyday phenomenon in Germany. Incidentally, as Germany's Federal Minister of the Interior Horst Seehofer pointed out on 4 May, right-wing radical crime (not just against Muslims), which has been monitored since 2001, broke records in Germany in 2020. A total of 23,064 cases were registered.

The situation is no better in France, where religiously motivated crimes have become a regular occurrence of shocking brutality. We have heard about the terrible murders committed in France by people from predominantly Muslim countries. However, adherents of the Muhammadan faith themselves are often the victims of crime there. A recently released report (No. 30) by the French National Consultative Committee on Human Rights claims that the number of acts targeting Muslims was 52 per cent higher in 2020 than in 2019. There have also been a number of attacks on places of worship throughout 2021. On 23 February, for example, a mosque under construction in Strasbourg was vandalized and the phrases "No to Islam" and "Go back to your villages" were written on it. Between 8 and 9 April, intruders set fire to the door of a mosque in the city of Nantes. On 11 April, the Muslim community of Rennes discovered Islamophobic graffiti on the walls of a mosque and an Islamic cultural centre. They included insults to Islam and the Prophet Muhammad. On 21 April, a mosque under construction in the city of Bordeaux was also desecrated with Islamophobic graffiti.

In the United States of America, according to a Pew Research Center study released on 2 September, local followers of Islam have faced prejudice and discrimination on a massive scale over the past two decades since the attacks of 11 September 2001. According to the same document, seven out of ten Republican Party supporters and three out of ten Democrats have Islamophobic sentiments. And there are plenty of examples of manifestations of Islamophobia in that country. On 24 April, for example, offensive graffiti and swastikas were sprayed on the walls of a mosque in Minnesota.

In Canada, as a September report by the National Council of Canadian Muslims confirms, followers of Islam have over the past two decades (also since 11 September 2001) been "systematically facing not only increasing but also changing discrimination". Attacks on mosques occur frequently in that country. On 22 August, for example, unknown assailants broke into a mosque in Scarborough, vandalized prayer rooms, smashed collection boxes and threw several copies of the Koran on the floor. A month earlier, on 15 June, intruders painted a swastika on a mosque in the east of Edmonton.

In the United Kingdom, the Home Office recorded 70 cases of racism against asylum seekers between 1 January 2020 and 13 July 2021. The asylum seekers were housed in temporary detention facilities in Napier and Penally. A mosque was set on fire in a Manchester suburb on 10 September.

In the Netherlands, the Hagia Sophia mosque was vandalized for the second time in a year and its windows were smashed with beer bottles.

In the Albanian capital of Tirana, a knife-wielding man injured five worshippers at the Dine Hoxha mosque in April.

Vandals attacked a mosque in the Spanish town of Cabezo de Torres on 7 July. Unknown persons painted on its walls the slogans “No to Islam” and “Stop the invasion”. They left a pig’s head with a knife stuck in it near the mosque.

In addition, in a report, published in February and distributed on 13 April 2021, Ahmed Shaheed, United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, said that he had received numerous reports of attacks on Muslim property, community centres, homes and businesses that had been desecrated with offensive graffiti. Such attacks have been reported widely, including in France, Greece, Latvia, North Macedonia, Norway, Switzerland and the United States.

The list of cases of Islamophobia could go on and on.

On 17 March, the United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres said on the occasion of the International Day to Combat Islamophobia that “anti-Muslim bigotry is sadly in line with other distressing trends we are seeing globally – a resurgence in ethno-nationalism, neo-Nazism, stigma and hate speech targeting vulnerable populations including Muslims, Jews, some minority Christian communities as well as others”.

We once again urge all OSCE participating States to show solidarity in combating the shameful phenomenon of intolerance and discrimination against Muslims, Christians and followers of other religions, not least by implementing the widely known instructions of the 2014 OSCE Ministerial Council in Basel.

Thank you for your attention.