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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1166th MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

30 November 2017

**In response to the reports by the three Personal Representatives of the
Chairperson-in-Office on tolerance**

Mr. Chairperson,

We thank the distinguished Personal Representatives of the Chairperson-in-Office for their work this year to counter intolerance in the OSCE area. We fully support this work of importance for the entire Organization. We should especially like to wish Professor Şenay a speedy recovery.

Combating intolerance is one of the most urgent tasks and calls for a multilateral approach. Within the OSCE a wide range of commitments have been undertaken to promote tolerance and to combat racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, religious intolerance, aggressive nationalism and neo-Nazism.

However, the situation in the OSCE area in this regard remains serious. Racist, xenophobic and other radical manifestations are still on the increase. It is not only members of religious minorities who suffer but also followers of the largest global religions.

The persecution of Christians, desecration of Christian holy sites, occupation of Orthodox churches and the victimization and even killing of members of the clergy give great cause for concern. The serious threats, first and foremost from international terrorism, to the lives of Christians and to the very existence of Christianity in a number of OSCE Mediterranean Partner countries are well known.

In the light of the migration crisis in Europe, we have become persuaded that many European countries have not been willing to deal with the consequences of the artificial destabilization of the situation in the Middle East and North Africa. And now we are witnessing a growth in anti-migrant sentiments, which are also taking on a religious dimension. Anti-Muslim demonstrations, the desecration of mosques and religious symbols and hate-mongering, particularly in social media, are becoming more frequent. Moreover, radicals are attempting to link terrorism with Islam, which is completely unacceptable.

Obviously, the OSCE can and should help to confront these massive violations of human rights. But what are we seeing in practice? Some countries are obstinately impeding the adoption of declarations on combating discrimination and intolerance against Christians, Muslims and the followers of other religions, documents that could provide an important basis for common efforts to resolve serious problems undermining stability and security in our region.

Instead of this, we are hearing the dubious argument that society would apparently “misinterpret” the signal if the OSCE were to assume its responsibilities to defend “certain religious groups”. It is clear that these States have a poor understanding of the society they are referring to. The numerous OSCE events on the question of religion have repeatedly confirmed that the need for active measures by our Organization in this area is greater than ever.

The rise of anti-Semitism gives equal cause for concern. Cases of desecration of synagogues and Jewish cemeteries are multiplying, and anti-Semitic rhetoric is becoming more strident. Neo-Nazi movements promoting an ideology of racial superiority continue to gain momentum. There have been attempts to falsify the history of the Second World War and to revise the decisions of the Nuremberg Tribunal.

Against this sombre background, we should like to point out that the idea of merging the three Personal Representative posts into one, not to mention their abolition, is counter-productive. Their mandates cover a very wide and diverse set of questions. On the contrary, we believe that the work of these three Representatives should be stepped up.

In that connection, we are grateful to the Austrian Chairmanship for organizing the conference in Vienna on 18 October on countering intolerance and discrimination against Muslims and highly appreciate the results of the OSCE conference in Yerevan on 22 November on preventing and countering hate crimes against Christians and members of other religious groups.

Another ministerial event on the safety of Christians, including those in the Middle East, is taking place here on 7 December on the margins of the OSCE Ministerial Council meeting. It is being organized by Hungary and Russia and will be opened by their Ministers for Foreign Affairs, Péter Szijjártó and Sergey Lavrov. We invite colleagues to participate in the discussion.

We welcome the initiative by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Italy, Angelino Alfano, to hold an OSCE conference on countering anti-Semitism in Rome on 29 January 2018.

We should like to say a word in particular about the idea of the adoption by the OSCE of a working definition of anti-Semitism. Russia is willing to make a constructive contribution to this process on the understanding that there is a need for broad consensus with the involvement of all interested groups and also for thought to be given to the adoption of similar definitions for intolerance in connection with Christians and Muslims.

In conclusion, I should like once again to thank the distinguished Personal Representatives for their efforts in confronting these challenges to our common security and wish them success in this important and necessary work.

Thank you for your attention.