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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1083rd MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

17 December 2015

**Regarding violations of freedom of religion and the rights of
believers in Ukraine**

Mr. Chairperson,

The regime change in Ukraine in February 2014 and the subsequent deterioration of the domestic political situation has taken a very high toll on the situation of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate.

There have been mass seizures of churches and acts of vandalism. Their hierarchs, priests and parishioners have come under increased pressure, including indirectly on the part of government institutions, and incidents involving physical violence are multiplying. For example, at the end of July 2015 in Kyiv, a Ukrainian Orthodox Church cleric, the priest Roman Nikolayev, and a novice of the Florov Voznesensk convent, the nun Alevtina, were murdered.

With the connivance of the authorities, impunity and complete licence are flourishing for the extremists committing crimes against the church officers and parishioners of Moscow Patriarchate churches, often unfortunately aided and abetted by followers of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyiv Patriarchate.

Compulsory transfers of religious communities to the jurisdiction of the Kyiv Patriarchate are being organized in certain areas of Ukraine, predominantly in the western regions, with the involvement of the regional authorities and backed up by the force of ultranationalist units, usually the Right Sector.

The Kyiv authorities are hitting back hard at appeals for peace and criticism of the country's leadership in sermons. In some parts of Ukraine things have reached the point where deputies and members of the local authorities are essentially stirring up dissent among confessions. Unfounded political accusations are being made against the Moscow Patriarchate church communities.

Local administrations quite often facilitate the illegal reissue of the charter documents of the Moscow Patriarchate churches seized by Kyiv dioceses, or try to obtain control of the buildings themselves. No secret is made of the political background to such actions. Particular attention should be paid to the discriminatory rulings of the city councils of Kyiv (on 28 January 2014) and Ternopil (on 9 March 2015) on abolishing the favourable tax rate for the premises of Moscow Patriarchate communities. An amendment to the tax code that annulled those rulings was made by the Verkhovna Rada only on 14 May 2015 under pressure from the international community.

The Ukrainian media has been running a widespread campaign to discredit the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate, to provoke rejection of Russian orthodoxy on Ukrainian soil among the public.

One way in which administrative pressure is being exerted is through the requirement to effectively curtail the activities of the Moscow Patriarchate in Donbas. For example, on 25 September this year, the Ministry of Culture of Ukraine “recommended” to the church leadership that it remove all four dioceses operating in the south-east – Donetsk, Luhansk, Horlivka and Rivne – to Ukrainian government-controlled territory.

Even without this, considerable damage has been sustained by the Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate during the domestic conflict in south-eastern Ukraine. As a result of shelling by the Ukrainian armed forces in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, 9 churches were completely destroyed in 2014 and a further 77 were damaged. In the period from January to April 2015, no fewer than six churches in Donbas were either damaged or destroyed as a result of military action. Three clergy members died as a result of artillery bombardment in south-eastern Ukraine in 2014 and 2015 and many were injured.

No fewer than eight clerics of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate suffered interrogations including torture by Ukrainian security agency members.

Acts of vandalism are regularly committed against churches of the Moscow Patriarchate outside the armed conflict zone. Dozens of cases have been recorded involving arson, offensive graffiti calling for violence and the distribution of pamphlets and posters inciting inter-confessional and inter-ethnic discord.

The connivance and frequently even direct involvement in these crimes of the Ukrainian security agencies is a flagrant violation by Ukraine of its OSCE human rights commitments, including those undertaken under Ukraine’s own Chairmanship in 2013. All of these atrocities occur with the tacit consent of the European Union and the United States of America. We believe that the international community cannot remain impassive in the face of the events. A line must be drawn under this disgraceful practice.

Thank you for your attention.