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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1267th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL
VIA VIDEO TELECONFERENCE**

14 May 2020

**In response to the report by the Director of the
OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights,
Ambassador Ingibjörg Sólrún Gísladóttir**

Mr. Chairperson,
Madam Director,

The coronavirus pandemic is an unprecedented calamity that is putting the resilience of all our countries to the test. We share your view that the immediate task of States is to protect a fundamental right of their citizens, namely, the right to life. It is evident that, in the current situation, that right depends directly on fully upholding socio-economic rights, such as the right to health and access to health care. Moreover, in a context of self-isolation, the authorities need to support the labour market and small and medium-sized businesses, not to mention families with children. In the Russian Federation such measures have been adopted since the very beginning of the crisis. Indeed, only a few days ago, President Vladimir Putin approved a new package of measures to support the economy and the population.

The spread of COVID-19 has undoubtedly exacerbated existing problems in the OSCE area. In addition to the challenges you have enumerated, Madam Director – that is, the problem of the separation of powers, erosion of the rule of law, the situation of migrants and detainees – the following rights have come under threat: the right to an adequate standard of living, the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, the right to just and favourable conditions of work, and the right to education, including education in one's mother tongue.

Unfortunately, in the context of the pandemic there has been an increase in manifestations of racism and attempts to blame specific ethnic groups for spreading the disease. This is unacceptable. We share your view that “[i]t is only through the strength of our diversity that we will overcome the health crisis we are facing as well as the economic and social challenges likely to follow”. Moreover, recent studies have confirmed that neo-Nazism and anti-Semitism, which already constitute an acute problem for the OSCE area, are intensifying.

The pandemic, therefore, highlights the need to pay long-overdue attention to socio-economic rights. For it is precisely that category of human rights that has now come to the fore and calls for particular

attention. We urge you, Madam Director, to include these rights among the priorities for the work of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR).

The coronavirus crisis and the restrictions it has brought are having an inevitable impact on electoral processes and election monitoring in the OSCE area. We believe that, in these difficult conditions, it is important for the ODIHR to adjust its monitoring activities within the framework of its mandate, which involves following an equal and impartial approach when making assessments. In that respect, agreed principles and rules for election observation are now more than ever in demand.

Now for a few words about the report on the ODIHR's activities in 2019. We note the Office's traditionally high level of engagement in efforts to combat anti-Semitism and the attention it pays to Islamophobia. We look forward to the new guide on the security concerns of Muslim communities, which is scheduled to be presented on 15 May. We would be interested to know when the Office plans to present a similar study devoted to Christian communities – all the more so given that the negative trends observed in the OSCE area confirm the need for an in-depth analysis of that issue.

We have taken note of the ODIHR's efforts to set up a public database on the Internet that is in effect about monitoring countries' implementation of the Office's electoral recommendations. (So far, five States are featured in the database.) We assume that countries' participation in this project is to be on a purely voluntary basis.

We welcome the attention paid by the ODIHR to topics such as combating trafficking in human beings, torture prevention, the promotion of equality between women and men, and hate crimes.

That being said, the report contains some non-consensus-based formulations and confrontational concepts – for example, the references to “LGBTI communities”, “gender”, “gender-based hate crimes” and “survivors”. We have similar comments to make on the ODIHR's recently issued guide entitled “Hate Crime Victims in the Criminal Justice System”. We call on the ODIHR to perform its work in accordance with OSCE commitments.

Surprisingly, the report does not contain a single mention of neo-Nazism. It is difficult to believe that the ODIHR would deliberately be ignoring a threat that is on the rise in the OSCE area.

It is also important not to forget about such aspects as the human rights of migrants, traditional values, tackling large-scale statelessness, freedom of movement and human contacts, the rights of persons with disabilities, and non-discrimination in sports.

In general, as we have repeatedly stressed, the task of optimizing the whole human dimension of the OSCE is well overdue. It is a task also enjoined on us by the preliminary lessons from the pandemic.

Finally, we should like to wish you, Ambassador Gísladóttir, and all of the ODIHR's staff every success in your endeavours.

Thank you for your attention.