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**STATEMENT BY
MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE
RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE 1466th MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

21 March 2024

**On the twenty-fifth anniversary of NATO's aggression against the
sovereign State of Yugoslavia**

Madam Chairperson,

Let us say it outright: 24 March 1999 was one of the most sinister and tragic days that changed Europe as we had known it since the end of the Second World War. And it is arguably the most shameful chapter in the history of the OSCE. What happened on that date 25 years ago is that the United States of America and the NATO bloc led by it launched an illegal armed aggression against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. More precisely, it was an act of open aggression by a group of OSCE participating States against one of the members of our Organization. Seventy-eight days and nights of massive bombardment of the territory of Serbia brought untold suffering upon its population, resulting in numerous casualties and catastrophic destruction.

As a consequence of these barbaric attacks, around 2,500 civilians were killed, including 89 children aged between two and seventeen years. Some 12,500 people were injured and maimed. Projectiles fired from NATO aircraft and by a naval force grouping of the Alliance rained down on a good thousand civilian objects, destroying 148 residential buildings and 62 railway and road bridges and seriously damaging 300 schools, scores of kindergartens and hospitals, 176 cultural heritage sites and the television broadcasting centre in Belgrade.

During the illegal military operation, 38,000 sorties were flown by attack aircraft, 2,300 missiles were launched and 14,000 bombs were dropped, including depleted uranium ordnance and cluster munitions. The total destructive power of the explosives used in the course of the campaign, expressed as a TNT equivalent, was five times greater than the explosive yield of the atom bomb dropped over Hiroshima by the Americans in 1945.

The precise value of the material damage caused by the bombardments has yet to be determined; some estimates put it in excess of 100 billion dollars. On a separate note, I want to comment on the environmental consequences of that aggression. It led to the destruction or damaging of 78 industrial plants and 42 energy facilities, including over 70 per cent of Yugoslavia's oil refining capacity, which was accompanied by toxic releases that were unprecedented in the region. In order to knock out the power grid,

the NATO forces also bombarded transformer substations, in which there was equipment containing polychlorinated biphenyls. As a result, in Belgrade alone, 150 tonnes of such substances, one litre of which is capable of contaminating up to 1 million litres of water, ended up in the Sava River. At least 250 hectares of forest were destroyed by fires, while several thousand hectares of arable land became unfit for agricultural use. Given the scale of the contamination, it might take several thousand years to remediate the subsoil in these areas.

Between March and June 1999, according to Serbian sources, NATO aircraft used munitions containing up to 15 tonnes of depleted uranium. In 2021, a monograph entitled *The Truth about the Consequences of the NATO Bombing of Serbia in 1999 (Istina o posledicama NATO bombardovanja Srbije 1999. godine)* was published by Danica Grujičić, Director of the Institute for Oncology and Radiology of Serbia, with Zorka Vukmirović, PhD in physical and chemical sciences and in radiology, as his co-author. By their reckoning, there has been a significant increase in cases of cancer in Serbia since the aggression; tumours have noticeably become more aggressive and respond less well to therapy. One in six couples below the age of 23 years are affected by infertility – by both female and male infertility. Autoimmune diseases and genetic deformations are becoming increasingly widespread among children. Serbian specialists have assessed that the presence of uranium-238 will have a negative impact on the lives of the next 60 generations at least. Just let that sink in.

It sounds like mockery when the United States and NATO talk about the use of so-called precision-guided weapons that allegedly ensure that military operations are bloodless. For ethical reasons, we will not mention the names of those killed as a result of the use of such “precision-guided” weapons. Suffice it to recall, for example, the strike on a passenger train near Grdelica in southern Serbia on 12 April 1999, as a result of which 15 civilians were killed and 44 were injured. Or the bombing of a bridge in the town of Varvarin on 30 May 1999 as people were crossing it on their way home from church after a Sunday service: ten people were killed and 17 were seriously injured. And there were many other episodes like these. Such casualties would subsequently be labelled as “collateral damage”.

It is thus quite obvious that the US-led aggression by NATO against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was an egregious violation of international law, specifically the fundamental objectives and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, the CSCE Helsinki Final Act and the United Nations Security Council resolutions on the situation in Yugoslavia, and of the norms and principles of international humanitarian law – in particular, the Hague Conventions of 1907, the Geneva Conventions of 1949 relating to the protection of war victims and the 1977 Protocols Additional to these, and also the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict.

I shall cite in this connection a very remarkable passage from a statement by a US representative at one of the Permanent Council meetings in April 1999. Reacting to the numerous questions from the Russian Permanent Representative as to the compatibility of the actions by the United States and other NATO members with their commitments under the Helsinki Final Act, the Code of Conduct on Politico-Military Aspects of Security and other documents adopted at the OSCE, the US representative said the following (I quote): “The United States on behalf of allied NATO countries should say the following in response to the Russian Federation’s request to clarify conformity of Alliance’s action in FRY with the OSCE principles and commitments. NATO accomplishes its mission there to avert humanitarian catastrophe. Much more at stake than Helsinki principles and other OSCE norms and documents. The Alliance is fully prepared to fulfill its task to deter further tension in the region.” (end of quote)

Equally remarkable is the fact that the OSCE in no way reacted to what was going on. Instead, the Organization’s leadership back then was concerned only about the problem of evacuating the staff of the OSCE Kosovo Verification Mission, while at the same time continuing, as if nothing had happened, with

discussions on a broad agenda that was weighted towards preparations for the OSCE Summit in Istanbul. It was then that our Organization's inability to avert a disaster manifested itself all too clearly – its inability to bring to reason those fanning the flames of war in Europe; its inability to leverage for that purpose the entire toolbox for preventing conflicts and promoting settlements. Moreover, the OSCE Kosovo Verification Mission essentially facilitated NATO's actions against the Serbs, thereby flagrantly violating its mandate.

The result was a sad one: a sovereign OSCE participating State disappeared from the political map of Europe, borders on the continent underwent revision and the Helsinki principles were sacrificed to satisfy the ambitions of a group of Western countries striving to prove their superiority and to reshape the European landscape according to a transatlantic pattern. The OSCE's identity crisis can in effect be traced back to that time.

Madam Chairperson,

It would be highly misleading to suppose that the NATO aggression was undertaken in response to an allegedly imminent humanitarian disaster facing that country. At a hearing in the United States Congress in 1999 the commander of the NATO Allied forces in Europe, General Wesley Clark, admitted that preparations for the military operation had begun in June 1998, if not earlier. Here are also some excerpts from a special congressional hearing in 1999, during which the current US President, Joe Biden, then a senator, said the following: "I was suggesting we bomb Belgrade. I was suggesting that we send American pilots in and blow up all the bridges on the Drina. I was suggesting we take out ... oil supplies. I was suggesting very specific action."

A humanitarian catastrophe did indeed take place. But the point is it was brought on the land of Serbia by NATO shells and the rapacious ambitions of certain individuals. This is what the British journalist Tim Marshall, an eyewitness to those events, writes in his memoirs: "You might think Yugoslavia is a really important strategic nation, but for the big NATO countries you're just a small, irritating pimple ... NATO is now committed, its reputation and future as an organization is at stake, its leaders will do whatever it takes until you surrender."

Twenty-five years have elapsed since then. US and NATO approaches have not changed.

Thank you for your attention.