

Delegation of the Russian Federation

**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1198th MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

18 October 2018

**In response to the reports by the three personal representatives of the
Chairperson-in-Office on tolerance**

Mr. Chairperson,

We are grateful to Rabbi Andrew Baker, Professor Bülent Şenay and Professor Salvatore Martinez for their reports. We regret that not all of them were able to personally attend the meeting. Nevertheless, we fully support their mandates to combat religious intolerance in the OSCE area. Work in this regard needs to be stepped up. This was confirmed, in particular, by the results of the VI Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, held in Astana on 10 and 11 October.

“Protecting the Future”, the second international conference on combating anti-Semitism, racism and xenophobia, will take place in Moscow on 29 and 30 October. The event is organized by the World, Euro-Asian and Russian Jewish Congresses together with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. We welcome the fact that Rabbi Baker and the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, Lamberto Zannier, will participate in this important forum.

The fight against anti-Semitism and religious discrimination is one of the most pressing tasks, the fulfilment of which requires a holistic approach. The situation in a number of OSCE participating States is still serious. Racist, xenophobic and other radical manifestations are increasing. Not only members of religious minorities, but also followers of major world religions are suffering.

The persecution of Christians, the desecration of Christian shrines and the seizure of churches, and the persecution and even killing of priests are issues of great concern. Some States allow gross interference in internal church affairs and encourage inter-Christian divisions.

This is now happening in Ukraine on a large scale. As you know, the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church opposes those provocations currently being plotted by Patriarch Bartholomew I of Constantinople with direct public support from Washington. As for internal church issues, intervention in them is not legally allowed in Ukraine, as in the

United States of America. But when the US Special Representative for Church Relations directly welcomes the decision of Patriarch Bartholomew, when Mr. Kurt Volker, who has been called upon to facilitate the Ukrainian settlement on the basis of the Minsk agreements, makes inappropriate statements, this is, to put it mildly, a frankly biased position.

We hope that such extremely negative processes of replacing the culture of dialogue, negotiations and the culture of diplomacy with absurd dictates and gross blackmail will not remain outside the purview of the OSCE.

It is widely acknowledged that there are serious threats to the life of Christians and the very existence of Christianity in certain regions neighbouring the OSCE area. Therefore, during the OSCE Ministerial Council meeting in Vienna on 7 December 2017, the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Russia, Sergey Lavrov, and Hungary, Péter Szijjártó, held a special high-level event on the safety of Christians, including in the Middle East.

Against the backdrop of the migrant crisis in Europe, many countries were not ready to cope with the consequences of artificially destabilizing the situation in the Middle East and North Africa. Now, receiving States are experiencing an increase in anti-migrant sentiments, which are also based on religion and, primarily, Islamophobia. The number of anti-Muslim riots, cases of desecration of mosques and religious symbols, and incidents resulting in incitement to hatred has not abated. Radicals and populists from all walks of life are striving to link terrorism with Islam, which is completely unacceptable.

Of equal concern is the rise of anti-Semitism. The desecration of synagogues and Jewish cemeteries is becoming more commonplace. Anti-Semitic rhetoric is intensifying. Neo-Nazi movements continue to gain momentum. This is evidenced by the findings of Rabbi Baker on the results of his visits to the United States, Canada and other countries. Attempts are being made to falsify the history of the Second World War and to revise the judgements of the Nuremberg Tribunal.

In short, these issues are more than relevant. We therefore support the preservation and strengthening of the three posts of the personal representatives and the revitalization of their activities. This work should become more visible. We hope that they will make an adequate contribution to carrying out the instructions of the OSCE Ministerial Council in Basel in 2014 to elaborate declarations on combating intolerance and discrimination against Christians, Muslims and members of other religions.

We are grateful to the Italian Chairmanship for holding the International Conference on the Responsibility of States, Institutions and Individuals in the Fight against Anti-Semitism in the OSCE Area in Rome on 29 January. The Conference on Combating Intolerance and Discrimination, with a Focus on Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief: Towards a Comprehensive Response in the OSCE Region will take place in Rome on 22 October. We hope that the organizers will not get carried away with too wide an agenda and will focus the forum on the problems of Christians and Muslims.

In conclusion, we should like to wish the distinguished personal representatives success in their important activities and hope that they meet more regularly with the participating States.

Thank you for your attention.