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**STATEMENT BY MR. VLADIMIR ZHEGLOV,
DEPUTY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1323rd MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

8 July 2021

International Day in Support of Victims of Torture

Madam Chairperson,

In 1997, the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed 26 June as the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture. As is known, on that date ten years earlier the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment had entered into force.

Last year, at the OSCE Ministerial Council meeting in Tirana, our Organization made an important contribution to international efforts aimed at combating this evil phenomenon. We succeeded in reaching agreement on a comprehensive text that takes into account the numerous aspects involved in the process of preventing and eradicating torture. In particular, it is emphasized there that “no exceptional circumstances whatsoever ... may be invoked as justification of torture.” The unacceptability of prolonged incommunicado detention and of detention in secret places is pointed out. Among other things, the importance of bringing those responsible to justice and protecting victims is stressed.

In accordance with the decision, States will refrain from the use of interrogation techniques that are tantamount to torture or inhuman treatment. From a practical perspective, the reference to participating States’ notification and access obligations under the 1963 Vienna Convention on Consular Relations and relevant bilateral agreements is key.

It would seem that we are equipped with a whole array of sundry obligations that ought to cause torture to disappear. Unfortunately, reality shows otherwise.

In the United States of America, there continue to this day such practices as indefinite detention without trial; the extradition of detainees in circumvention of established procedures; the forcible and clandestine transferring of detainees to secret prisons on the territory of third countries; extended unlawful confinement; and interrogations using torture and other kinds of inhuman or degrading treatment. A glaring example is the prison at the Guantánamo military base. Significantly, all this frequently takes place with the direct involvement of other foreign States, including some OSCE participating States. One need only recall the secret prisons of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in Europe.

We stress once again the unacceptability of the US Government's misuse of the principle of extraterritoriality to avoid fulfilling its international obligations or applying federal law, which prohibits the use of torture.

There have been instances of the US intelligence services, including the CIA, using "enhanced interrogation" techniques, force-feeding prisoners and denying them adequate medical assistance, all of which ultimately amounts to torture or other inhuman or degrading treatment.

In addition, the United States is a hotbed of racism and police violence bordering on torture. A sad example is the death of the African American George Floyd, which convulsed all strata of US society. The systemic nature of this problem is also highlighted by the brutal response of the law enforcement authorities to the massive demonstrations that took place on the streets of US cities to protest against racism within the police.

While the Nazis' crimes became the symbol of inhumanity in the twentieth century, now in the twenty-first it is in fact the United States that is associated with the practice of torture. Moreover, this practice has effectively been promoted to State policy by the US Government. Is your "shining city on a hill" really fit to serve as a beacon to the international community?

Of particular concern is the situation in Ukraine, where such practices as arbitrary arrests, solitary confinement, torture and ill-treatment of civilians continue. Not to mention the fact that those responsible for the violent events of 2 May 2014 in Odessa's Trade Union House, where people were burned alive in full view of members of the law enforcement authorities, continue to this day to enjoy complete impunity.

The Ukrainian Government is not taking effective steps to investigate the systematic violations of human rights by the Ukrainian security forces or by nationalist battalions, which are notorious for their neo-Nazi discourse. The crimes they have committed include arbitrary arrests, torture, ill-treatment and intimidation – carried out not least at unofficial places of detention – with a view to obtaining information from people, or forcing them to confess or collaborate. These crimes have been flagged up repeatedly by international human rights bodies, including United Nations ones. Do you remember how the Prosecutor General of Ukraine showed journalists a secret prison of the Ukrainian Security Service? Is it still operating?

As we have noted several times, the Ukrainian security forces are evidently drawing inspiration from the "best practices" of the United States and a number of European Union countries, with Guantánamo and the secret CIA prisons in Europe serving as their models. We expect the Ukrainian authorities to undertake a thorough and objective investigation into cases of torture and inhuman treatment and, ultimately, to revert to universal norms of conduct.

The aforementioned facts confirm the need for all the OSCE participating States to implement in good faith their commitments on combating torture and inhuman treatment. What are called for are not mutual recriminations but the exchange of best practices in eradicating this evil.

Thank you for your attention.