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Human rights questions

**Letter dated 4 December 2000 from the Permanent Representative
of the Russian Federation to the United Nations addressed
to the Secretary-General**

I am transmitting to you the text of the statement by the participants in the Interreligious Peacemaking Forum, held on 13 and 14 November 2000 at the Saint Danil Monastery in Moscow under the patronage of the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia Alexy II (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would have the text of this letter and its annex circulated as a document of the General Assembly under agenda item 114.

(Signed) **S. Lavrov**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative



Annex to the letter dated 4 December 2000 from the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Statement by the participants in the Interreligious Peacemaking Forum

We, the participants in the Interreligious Peacemaking Forum, spiritual leaders of Christianity, Islam, Buddhism and Judaism, are alarmed at the manifestations of extremism and terrorism and the frequent attempts to justify them using religious rhetoric.

In Eurasia, followers of traditional religions have lived for centuries in peace and cooperation. Yet the end of the twentieth century has been marked by events that have caused acute pain in the hearts of the faithful, irrespective of their religion. The history of our countries in the decade just past has been marked by a plethora of bloody national and civil conflicts and an unprecedented intensification of ethnic, political and social enmity, xenophobia and alienation. We are particularly troubled by attempts to exploit religious feeling to achieve political and even criminal ends and to exacerbate disputes and conflicts. For injustice cannot be eradicated by anarchy, nor civil strife overcome by still greater hostility.

The faithful undoubtedly have the right to live their lives in accordance with their own beliefs. The authorities, society and the mass media must respect the feelings and way of life of the adherents of traditional religions — whether they represent the majority of the population or a minority. But no one must be allowed to take the lives of others or to violate their rights and freedoms in the name of religion. We wish to attest with conviction that not one traditional religion teaches this. On the contrary, the acts to which we have recently borne witness are sinful: abductions and expulsions, seizures of homes and property and attempts to force people to convert to another religion.

There is a real danger that the peoples of the northern Caucasus and the Central Asian region will have the choices of others forcibly imposed on them. Just beyond the southern borders of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the rule of law has been weakened and the drug trade, the uncontrolled proliferation of arms, and other forms of criminal behaviour are flourishing. This is an incontrovertible and tragic fact of international life, which has been recognized by the international community and reflected in decisions of the United Nations.

Unfortunately, these phenomena are also spreading to the CIS countries, not without malicious intent. Emissaries of the warring factions are penetrating those countries from various States and, exploiting the symbols of Islam for their own gain, are attempting to change fundamentally the historical course of the peoples of the Commonwealth countries and the way of life to which they have become accustomed. All this is accompanied by the establishment of illegal armed formations, blatant interference from abroad in the affairs of sovereign States and the creation of new hotbeds of tension, leading increasingly to the large-scale loss of innocent lives. The area affected by this malaise is expanding rapidly. Terrorism is becoming an international phenomenon and its centres therefore pose a threat to the stability of the entire world.

We frankly acknowledge that, in historical religious traditions, justification of the use of force is sometimes to be found in order to propagate and consolidate a religion. But today, given the fragility of peaceful human coexistence, we urge the faithful to renew the potential of religious ideals and values for peacemaking. May wise restraint, peaceable tolerance and brotherly love help us emerge from this dangerous pass.

We declare that terrorism and the wrongful use of force, on whatever pretext, must be unconditionally and consistently eradicated. The international community must decisively resist these criminal phenomena. Religious extremism must be countered by education, dialogue and support for the constructive efforts of the faithful.

The twentieth century has passed. Whether the new millennium will be free of injustice and deprivation, hatred and enmity, moral decline and fratricidal conflicts depends to a great extent on the efforts of the faithful. We shall pray fervently and work ceaselessly to strengthen peace and harmony in our countries.

(Signed) **D. B. Ayusheev**

Pandito Khambo-lama

Head of the Traditional Buddhist Sangha of the Russian Federation

(Signed) **Mufti R. Gainutdin**

Chairman of the Muslim Spiritual Administration in the European part of the
Russian Federation

Chairman of the Council of Muftis of the Russian Federation

(Signed) Metropolitan **Kirill**

Metropolitan of Smolensk and Kaliningrad

Chairman of the Department of External Church Relations of the Moscow
Patriarchate

Permanent member of the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church

(Signed) Father I. **Kovalevsky**

Chancellor of the Apostolic Administration for Roman Catholics in the northern
European part of the Russian Federation

(Signed) P. B. **Konovalchik**

Senior Pastor

Chairman of the Russian Alliance of Evangelical Christian Baptists

(Signed) P. B. **Lazar**

Chief Rabbi of the Russian Federation