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PERMANENT MISSION OF THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA TO THE OSCE

Statement

Azerbaijan's continued policy of aggression and violation of its obligations threatening further escalation of situation in and around Nagorno-Karabakh as delivered by Ambassador Armen Papikyan at the 1431st meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council

06 July 2023

Mr. Chairman,

We have raised this current issue to inform the OSCE participating states about the precarious situation and looming humanitarian disaster in Artsakh/Nagorno-Karabakh due to illegal and inhumane blockade by Azerbaijan.

Mr. Chairman,

On 15 of June, immediately after the staged provocation near the Lachin Corridor, when Azerbaijani soldiers, accompanied by the Russian peacekeepers, crossed the Hakari bridge connecting Armenia with the Corridor and attempted to install the Azerbaijani flag on the sovereign territory of Armenia, Azerbaijan completely closed the Lachin corridor. Almost three weeks now no food or any other essential goods have been transported to Nagorno-Karabakh.

Indeed, the situation is deteriorating with each passing day. The people of Nagorno-Karabakh are on the verge of humanitarian disaster as the scarce reserves are coming to an end. The shortage of bread, food and other essentials is more and more palpable, with the real possibility of malnutrition and even hunger.

For your reference, throughout more than six months of blockade Nagorno-Karabakh received only 7.5 percent of the usual supply of food and other essential goods.

In parallel, Azerbaijan has completely shut the supply of natural gas and the electricity, coming from Armenia, which further exacerbates the humanitarian situation causing also the deterioration of the critical infrastructure. Currently the hydroelectric power station of the Sarsang reservoir is the main source of electricity. However, water level in Sarsang has dropped to an unprecedentedly low level and once it drops below a certain level, it would not be possible to meet even the minimum energy needs of the people of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Against the background of the close humanitarian catastrophe, Azerbaijan continues to mislead and mock the international community claiming free passage through the Lachin Corridor. Instead of implementing the legally binding order of the International Court of Justice and, I quote from the order, “taking all necessary measures to ensure unimpeded movement of persons, vehicles and cargo along the Lachin Corridor in both directions”, end of quote, the Azerbaijani authorities installed a checkpoint in the Corridor on 23 April 2023, thus openly assuming the responsibility for non-compliance with the Court’s Order and for the looming humanitarian catastrophe in Nagorno-Karabakh.

Furthermore, since the installation of this illegal checkpoint Azerbaijan is continuously hindering the activities of the ICRC and the Russian peacekeepers aimed to address the immediate, life-saving needs of the conflict-affected population, including transfer of patients for urgent treatment and deliver essential goods to remote villages.

There were also cases when Azerbaijan refused to allow critically ill patients accompanied by the ICRC to cross the checkpoint under the pretext of their alleged participation in the war of 1988-1994. Under the same pretext Azerbaijani did not allow Russian peacekeepers to return the body of a Nagorno-Karabakh citizen, who died in Armenia, to his relatives for burial. There are 41 cases when Azerbaijan refused the return of bodies of Nagorno-Karabakh citizens, who died outside Nagorno-Karabakh, for burial in their homeland, and the relatives were forced to bury them in Armenia.

This clear evidence of the degree of depravity of the Azerbaijani authorities, of their hatred towards Armenia and the Armenian people in general, which drives them to fight not only with the living but also the dead, and indeed is indicative. Therefore, all the talk about the so-called quote-unquote “reintegration” is just a nice epithet, a synonym for Azerbaijani goal of ethnic cleansing and extermination of the people of Artsakh.

The rights and security of the Armenian people of Nagorno-Karabakh should be urgently addressed within the framework of an international mechanism, through special international attention, involvement and efforts, with clear and robust international guarantees.

We believe that there are available international tools and mechanisms, including legal ones, which could be applied to protect the people of Nagorno-Karabakh and ensure their security and the right to live in dignity and free of aggression and coercion.

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished colleagues,

Armenia has consistently expressed its concern over the continued disinformation disseminated by Azerbaijan containing allegations against the Defense Army of Nagorno-Karabakh (DANK). These baseless allegations then were used to stage new unprovoked military provocations against Nagorno-Karabakh.

The last such attack occurred on 27 June 2023, when the armed forces of Azerbaijan attacked the positions of the Defense Army of Nagorno-Karabakh with the use of artillery and attack UAVs, resulting in the four casualties on the side of the DANK. For days afterwards Azerbaijan was obstructing the transportation of the bodies of the two fallen soldiers for burial to Armenia according to the wishes of their relatives, with cynical propagandistic claims about the fallen soldiers being representatives of the armed forces of Armenia. These false claims were easily debunked by the documented proofs presented by the authorities of Nagorno-Karabakh.

However, this stubborn and unfounded insistence by Azerbaijan about the imaginary presence of the armed units of the Republic of Armenia should be alarming as it serves as pretext for another aggression against the people of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Mr. Chairman,

The propaganda of war, the almost permanent war mongering rhetoric is used by the Azerbaijani authorities not only as the tool for psychological pressure on the people of Nagorno-Karabakh, but also to brainwash their own people and by extension to sustain their own authoritarian rule.

The recent online poll launched during the live broadcast of the state TV channel with the question of whether they would support a new military aggression, the so-called “Revenge operation”, was to showcase the popular support of the Azerbaijani society for a new aggression against Nagorno-Karabakh, since 83% of respondents voted in favour.

One may consider that these figures should be taken with the degree of doubt, given the state of freedom of opinion in Azerbaijan, and this might be a staged show. On another hand, this number reflects the real level of hostility and hatred towards Armenia and the people of Nagorno-Karabakh that Azerbaijani authorities throughout the years managed to instill in the hearts and minds of the people of Azerbaijan with the constant hate propaganda starting

from the kindergarden and promoted at the level of the President of that country. In both cases the picture is alarming.

In another development, Azerbaijan launched sham court proceedings against two servicemen of Armenia, who were abducted from sovereign territory of Armenia while carrying out their duties. We deplore this act of Azerbaijan and call for their immediate release, along with other prisoners of war and civilian captives, which are still held in Azerbaijan as hostages in violation of norms of international humanitarian law and provisions of the 9 November 2020 trilateral statement.

Just a few weeks ago, in this very Council, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan was trying to portray the peace-loving nature of its Government and was insisting that Azerbaijan is committed to peace. This delegation continuously expressed its profound doubts regarding the sincerity of such statements, since war, conflicts, aggression, violence and hatred are essential commodities to ensure the longevity of the authoritarian regime and for consolidation of its power. The developments of recent weeks, unfortunately, once again proved that we were right in our assessments.

Mr. Chairman,

Distinguished colleagues,

We acknowledge with gratitude the continuous engagement of our partners to facilitate the process of normalization of relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan through providing their mediatory services for meetings between Armenian and Azerbaijani officials. We appreciate these efforts, while being cognizant of different restricting factors affecting those efforts.

The latest such meeting between the Foreign Ministers of two countries took place in Washington, on 27-29 June, and resulted in some progress and advancement of mutual understanding in some more articles of the draft peace agreement, meanwhile acknowledging that the positions on some key issues remain divergent.

We also appreciate numerous calls by international actors and organizations to Azerbaijan to lift the blockade of the Lachin Corridor and to implement the ICJ order.

The OSCE PA in its outcome document of the Vancouver session, among other things, called for "...guaranteeing the rights and security of the Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh in close co-operation with the international community," as well as full and speedy resolution

of all outstanding humanitarian issues in the Armenia–Azerbaijan peace process, including ensuring the free flow of people and commerce through the Lachin Corridor in accordance with the Order of the International Court of Justice of 22 February 2023;” as well as expressed hope about “withdrawal of Azerbaijani military forces from the sovereign territory of Armenia”.

Alice Wairimu Nderitu, Special Adviser to the UN Secretary General on Genocide Prevention reminded about the decision of the International Court of Justice, which has a binding force, and called to ensure free and safe movement through the Lachin Corridor.

At the same time, we believe that more could and should be done, including by sending a clear and unambiguous signal to the Azerbaijani leadership that no aggression will be tolerated and that the perpetrators would be held accountable, by making clear that there could not be compromises when it comes to fundamental principles of the international law, including the international humanitarian law.

This explicit campaign and advertisement for the new war of aggression against the people of Nagorno-Karabakh and the Republic of Armenia should ring a bell loud and clear for the OSCE leadership and its executive structures, which unfortunately is not the case. Instead, their choice is to become a silent bystander, under the convenient cover of consensus rule. This is a fatal blow to the standing of this Organization, especially when we see that the so-called consensus rule is not an impediment when there is a political will.

The OSCE should act to address Azerbaijan's disruptive and aggressive policy of the use of force and the threat of force against Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh, which is unacceptable under the international law and the fundamental principles of the Helsinki Final Act. It is necessary to consider imposing targeted sanctions against the Azerbaijani leadership in order to change its political calculus.

While the engagement of the OSCE in the unfolding alarming developments on the ground directly falls within its mandate, there are other international formats and mechanisms as well which could be called upon to prevent another war of aggression in the OSCE area.

Mr. Chairman,

Azerbaijan’s premeditated, carefully planned and executed efforts clearly demonstrate the intent to completely destroy the people of Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh) by inflicting on them conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part or to achieve its forced displacement which is a crime, punishable under international law.

The aforementioned line of action clearly contains elements of the crime of genocide and as it was rightly mentioned in the Joint Statement on the Commemoration of the 75th Anniversary of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide at the UN HRC “Genocide never happens suddenly. It is typically preceded by discriminatory practices against a national, ethnic, racial or religious group, and patterns of human rights violations and abuses.”

In conclusion, I reiterate the commitment of the Republic of Armenia to the peace and finding lasting resolution of the conflict and normalization of relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan in pursuit of its goal to bring peace and security to the South Caucasus.

I thank you.