



ԵԱՀԿ-ՈՒՄ ՀԱՅԱՍՏԱՆԻ ՀԱՆՐԱՊԵՏՈՒԹՅԱՆ ՄՇՏԱԿԱՆ ՆԵՐԿԱՅԱՑՈՒՑՉՈՒԹՅՈՒՆ  
PERMANENT MISSION OF THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA TO THE OSCE

## Statement

### of the Delegation of Armenia at the 1045<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Forum for Security Co-operation Security Dialogue on “Capacity Development in Humanitarian Mine Action”

17 May 2023

Madam Chair,

We would like to join the other delegations in thanking the distinguished panelists for their thought-provoking presentations.

Landmines, unexploded ordnance and other explosive remnants of war represent constant threat and cause casualties particularly among the civilian population after an active phase of a conflict. Comprehensive response and solution to this issue requires joint efforts and an even-handed approach in a non-politicized manner.

The issue of landmines and explosive remnants of war is particularly acute in conflict-affected areas and conflict zones. And in this context I should recall that in Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh), where since the First Nagorno-Karabakh War in early 1990s, the territories have been heavily contaminated by Azerbaijan with mines and other explosive ordnance, posing a serious and indiscriminate threat to the life, security and livelihood of the people of Artsakh. I should also recall that Azerbaijan has consistently neglected the acute humanitarian aspect of it, throughout these years refusing to provide maps of the minefields, and obstructing any international humanitarian demining activities in Nagorno-Karabakh, labeling them as illegal. Needless to recall that Azerbaijan blocked the renewal of the mandate of the OSCE Office in Yerevan on the basis of unfounded allegations of the latter's involvement in demining activities in Armenia and in Nagorno-Karabakh.

The indiscriminate use of cluster munitions by Azerbaijan, including in densely populated areas, during the subsequent aggressions launched in 2016 and 2020, have further exacerbated the already serious existing problem of landmine and unexploded ordnance contamination.

Thus, according to the 2019 report of the ICRC, its mission in Nagorno-Karabakh has registered at least 747 cases of landmine victims. The impact of landmine and explosive remnants of war (ERW) contamination has been compounded as a result of the 44-day war of aggression unleashed by Azerbaijan against Artsakh/ Nagorno-Karabakh/ in 2020.

According to the recent information released by the authorities of Nagorno-Karabakh, as of now, 1,076 persons fell victim to mines and other remnants of war, the vast majority of whom are civilians, including women and children. Since the end of the 2020 war, the local demining agency, Russian peacekeepers humanitarian demining unit, and "Halo Trust", a humanitarian NGO, financed by some OSCE participating States, have neutralized more than 220,000 items of unexploded remnants in Artsakh. Today, at least 700 hectares in the territories currently under the control of Nagorno-Karabakh still remain contaminated with explosives, posing a significant threat to the people of Artsakh.

Dear colleagues,

It is deplorable that while the responsible members of the international community consider the issue of landmines as of a purely humanitarian nature, for Azerbaijan this issue is nothing short of a convenient topic for propaganda campaigns to achieve its narrow political goals.

Since the signing of the Trilateral Statement of November 9, 2020, the authorities of Azerbaijan have been misusing conflict-related humanitarian issues, including the issue of landmines, to counter the legitimate demands of Armenia and the international community to repatriate the Armenian prisoners of war, illegally held in captivity in Azerbaijan for more than 2 and half years now.

Azerbaijan put into action the same narrative of landmines in search of justification of its military aggression against Armenia in May 2021 and September 2022, which resulted in hundreds of casualties, mass destruction of critical civilian infrastructure and occupation of, in total, more than 150 square kilometers of sovereign territories of Armenia.

Not surprisingly, Azerbaijan has again used the same false narrative among others, in the attempt to substantiate its ongoing illegal blockade of Nagorno-Karabakh for more than 5 months now in violation of its obligations under the Trilateral Statement of 9 November 2020 and the binding order of the International Court of Justice of 22 February 2023, obliging Azerbaijan to ensure the free movement of people, goods and vehicles along the Lachin Corridor, connecting Nagorno-Karabakh with Armenia and the rest of the world.

In fact, the false narratives and smear campaign of Azerbaijan on landmines have become the last defense line to justify its numerous provocations against Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia, and a smokescreen to avoid responsibility for its gross violations of the international humanitarian and human rights law, as well as its genocidal intentions against the people of Artsakh.

In this regard, let me recall the fact that the International Court of Justice twice rejected the Azerbaijani claims against Armenia related to the landmines. The last time such a decision was taken by the Court, was on 22 February 2023, when the ICJ with unanimous vote rejected Azerbaijan's claims. Thus, instead of implementing its commitments, Azerbaijan is engaged in manipulative interpretations, distortions and fabrications, including the so-called "landmines narrative".

Madam Chair,

Regrettably, today we have witnessed another attempts to misuse the OSCE assistance mechanism, which aims to legitimize the outcomes of Azerbaijan's illegal use of force against Nagorno-Karabakh. We once again call upon FSC Chairmanships and all OSCE structures to refrain from any action that might be perceived as endorsing Azerbaijan's war of aggression and massive use of force against people of Artsakh, accompanied by numerous gross violations of IHL by the Azerbaijani armed forces, including extrajudicial killings of prisoners of war and civilian hostages, torture and numerous other documented crimes and atrocities.

Thank you.