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PERMANENT MISSION OF THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA TO THE OSCE

**Address by H.E. Ararat Mirzoyan,
Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia
at the 1433rd Special Meeting of the Permanent Council**

20 July 2023

Mr. Chairperson,

Distinguished Ambassadors,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to thank the North-Macedonian OSCE chairpersonship for convening this Special PC meeting. This is already the second time that I am addressing this distinguished body during this year, and it's the second time I am here to speak about the humanitarian situation in Nagorno-Karabakh caused by the illegal blockade of the Lachin corridor by Azerbaijan.

I would like to bring to your attention the events that happened since my last address at the Special PC.

- On February 22, the International Court of Justice issued a legally binding order against Azerbaijan to take all necessary measures to ensure unimpeded movement of persons, vehicles and cargo along the Lachin corridor in both directions.
- In stark contrast to this order, on April 23, Azerbaijan illegally installed a checkpoint on the Lachin corridor, claiming that hereby it implements the Order of the Court.
- On June 15, Azerbaijan went further with fully blocking the corridor by banning any access to Nagorno-Karabakh, even humanitarian, including of the International Committee of Red Cross.
- On July 6, the ICJ issued another order reconfirming its previous ruling and reaffirming Azerbaijan's international legal obligation to take all necessary measures at its disposal to ensure unimpeded movement of persons, vehicles and cargo along the Lachin corridor in both directions and, therefore to immediately cease the operation of its checkpoint, as it unquestionably impedes the rights of Armenians living in Nagorno-Karabakh constituting a discrimination under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.

Dear colleagues,

As I speak today, the Lachin corridor, the only road connecting Nagorno-Karabakh with the rest of the world, remains effectively blocked by Azerbaijan. After more than 7 months of this illegal blockade, the situation on the ground is rapidly deteriorating.

I know that our delegation in the OSCE regularly updates the Permanent Council regarding the situation on the ground, therefore, I will not go into much details but rather would recap the main points.

From the humanitarian perspective, the most pressing are the energy and food security issues, as well as the disruption of the proper functioning of the healthcare system. I would like to present to you some facts and figures that will help to have a better understanding of the situation on the ground.

In relation to the energy security:

- Since January 9, 2023, Azerbaijan has disrupted the supply of electricity through the sole high-voltage line between Armenia and Nagorno Karabakh. There have been daily six-hour power outages, a 48% decrease in electricity consumption, and depletion of local electricity production and supply systems.
- Starting from December 13, 2022, Azerbaijan periodically, and since March 21, almost continuously, has been interrupting the only gas supply from Armenia to Nagorno Karabakh, thereby deepening the energy and humanitarian crisis.
- Due to the diminishing availability of fuel and other essential resources and the full interruption of supplies from Armenia, almost all agricultural work, as well as the functioning of other sectors of the economy, has halted.
- Furthermore, the transport system is also paralyzed, with public transportation, including the inter-community one, to stop functioning in the coming days, while private transportation has come to a standstill long ago. Due to the acute lack of fuel, the internal public transportation of the capital city of Stepanakert functions only with 2 buses serving over 60,000 people.

In relation to food security:

- The suspension of all humanitarian supplies since June 15, coupled with the gradual utilization of limited domestic stocks, has resulted in an acute food shortage and closures of shops. Prior to the blockade, around 90% of all consumed food was imported from Armenia, and with every passing day the people of Nagorno-Karabakh don't receive 400 tons of essential goods.
- Furthermore, by using force and the threat of force, Azerbaijan continues to obstruct agricultural activities on approximately 10,000 hectares of land adjacent to the contact line, which constitutes a significant portion of the total cultivated land.
- As a result, today the people of Nagorno-Karabakh are on the verge of hunger and starvation.

The illegal blockade resulted in violation of other fundamental rights of the people of Nagorno-Karabakh, including:

- The right to healthcare, as due to the lack of fuel, the work of the healthcare system is also affected, being often unable to organize even emergency transportation of patients to local hospitals. Daily power outages and fuel shortages have severely impacted the operation of medical equipment, leading to a decrease in the volume and quality of healthcare services.
- The growing shortage of medications and medical supplies, coupled with the ban on transporting medical patients to Armenia, poses an increasing threat to people's lives and well-being;
- Due to the lack of essential food and vitamins, approximately 2,000 pregnant women, around 30,000 children, 20,000 older persons and 9,000 persons with disabilities are struggling to survive under conditions of malnutrition.
- People with chronic diseases, including 4,687 individuals with diabetes and 8,450 individuals with circulatory diseases, are left almost without any medicine needed.
- The shelves of pharmacies are completely empty, unable to provide even first aid medicine.

Last but not least, social and educational rights are also violated due to the disruption of the functioning of educational institutions and social services as a result of the blockade.

In light of this humanitarian catastrophe, we cannot remain silent and indifferent, but should act decisively and without delay to prevent the looming tragedy.

We should clearly state and place on record that these actions, regardless of the fact by whom they are carried out, constitute a blatant violation of International Humanitarian Law and a breach of the Geneva Conventions and the Fourth Geneva Convention, in particular. It is the incontestable obligation of the States to ensure, and I quote, “the free passage of all consignments of essential foodstuffs, clothing and tonics intended for children under fifteen, expectant mothers and maternity cases” and “allow the free passage of all consignments of medical and hospital stores” intended only for civilians”, end of quote.

These deliberate actions of Azerbaijan cannot be called otherwise than illegal and inhuman. They not only violate basic human rights and dignity of the people, but also intend to create unbearable conditions for living and aim to ethnically cleanse Nagorno-Karabakh.

Mr. Chairperson,

Colleagues,

I would like to now turn to the political and security dimension and would like to reiterate that the Armenian side is committed to continuing its efforts for normalization of relations and opening a new era of peace in our region.

And taking this opportunity, I would like to highlight the importance of the negotiations mediated and facilitated by our partners. We appreciate their efforts and dedication to the peace agenda and a better future for our region.

We are convinced that durable peace in the region is possible and it's possible if the sides show utmost willingness to address the root causes of the conflict. In this regard, the issue of rights and security of the Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh is key.

As stated recently by the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia, we are ready to recognize Azerbaijan's 86,600 square kilometres, which includes Nagorno-Karabakh, however with the understanding that the issue of the rights and security of the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh must be discussed within a framework of an international mechanism, through Stepanakert-Baku dialogue. The respect for the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan should not and could not be anyhow misinterpreted and used as a license for ethnic cleansings in Nagorno-Karabakh.

For understandable reasons, I cannot go into much detail regarding the ongoing discussions and would like to just reaffirm our readiness to engage in good faith in finding solutions to extremely complex and sensitive issues and situations.

One of the most important issues in these negotiations relates to the mutual recognition of the existing interstate borders. According to the Almaty Declaration of 1991, the administrative borders of the former Soviet Republics of Armenia and Azerbaijan were recognized as interstate borders.

Armenia advocates having a clear borderline to avoid any future territorial claims and exclude the possibility of use of force for materializing those claims. And in order to avoid any further ambiguity, we propose to recognize as the basis for the delimitation of the state border the most recent existing maps.

To our deep regret, it seems that leaving much ambiguity in this regard is exactly what Azerbaijani leadership has in mind and strives for.

Furthermore, the establishment of peace and security also requires the implementation of certain confidence-building measures. With this in mind, we have proposed to create a demilitarized zone on the borderline between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Our suggestion is to relocate the forces to the borderline defined in the 1975 USSR General Staff maps and start discussions on modalities of the mentioned demilitarized zone or the distancing of forces.

Unfortunately, the Azerbaijani side is still hesitant to engage in these discussions, and the proposal of the Armenian side on mechanisms which was provided to Azerbaijan in written form more than a year ago has not been even considered.

Another issue of the negotiations agenda is related to unblocking of regional transport and economic links. Being a landlocked country and having closed borders with two out of four of our neighbors, Armenia is very much interested in pursuing this agenda, with the clear understanding that all communication links shall operate based on the sovereignty and national jurisdiction of the countries and according to the principles of equality and reciprocity. The progress achieved in the last three years on this issue gives us some optimism to pursue our vision on, as we call it, Armenian Crossroad.

At the same time, we see that in parallel with conducting negotiations on normalization of relations with Armenia, Azerbaijan consistently engages in actions on the ground that lead to worsening of the situation in and around Nagorno-Karabakh. In his speech of May 28 President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev himself publicly confessed his real intentions and

reluctance to properly address the issue of guarantees of rights and security of the people of Nagorno-Karabakh.

I would just refer to some messages from his speech:

- “The border checkpoint established on the border on April 23 **should be a lesson for Armenians** living in the Karabakh region today.”
- “We are about to **take the last step in our plans**, and that step will be taken – I have no doubt about that. I am telling them again from here, from the land of Lachin which they had been exploiting for many years and were engaged in illegal settlement, that **their book is closed**.”
- “My representative went and held the first meeting with them, and then we invited them to Baku to talk. They refused to do that. After that, we invited them to Baku for the second time, i.e. representatives of the Armenian minority living in Karabakh. They refused that too. **There will be no third invitation**. Either they **will bend their necks** and come themselves or **things will develop differently** now.”

These statements, along with the failure by Azerbaijan, under various false arguments, to implement the legally binding decision of the ICJ and violation of its commitments under the November 9, 2020 Trilateral Statement, are revealing and clearly illustrate the real mindset of the Azerbaijani leadership and their stance regarding the issues related to and resulting from the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The statements and actions of Azerbaijan equally reveal the lack of adherence to the international law and calls of the international community.

Mr. Chairperson,

Now I would like to turn to the issue of Armenian prisoners of war and other captives that are still kept by Azerbaijan in captivity three years after the 44-day war.

Azerbaijan refuses to return all the Armenian POWs and civilian captives. According to the data confirmed by Azerbaijan, 33 people, including three civilians, are still kept hostage in Baku. Moreover, on 26 May 2023, after the meetings in Brussels and Moscow, two more servicemen of the Armed Forces of Armenia, who were delivering provisions and water to combat outposts, were abducted by the armed unit of Azerbaijan, which illegally crossed the state border of Armenia. On July 7, they were sentenced to 11.5 years of imprisonment.

This is yet another violation by Azerbaijan of the international humanitarian law and Trilateral statement from November 9, 2020.

Mr. Chairperson,

Dear Ambassadors,

The OSCE, with its mandated structures, has been engaged in mediating the negotiations to resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict from the early 1990s. Unfortunately, the use of force and the war of aggression dealt a severe blow to these efforts.

Even though Azerbaijan falsely claims that Nagorno-Karabakh is an internal issue now, the humanitarian catastrophe created by Azerbaijan in Nagorno-Karabakh shows that without a viable international mechanism, no single Armenian will survive in Nagorno-Karabakh.

Although talks with Azerbaijan continue, further deterioration of the situation on the ground in Nagorno-Karabakh risks to seriously harm the ongoing political process. Thus, all the partners interested in peace and stability in the South Caucasus should take concrete actions. The situation is crystal clear: pressuring Azerbaijan to open the Lachin corridor will greatly contribute to the peace prospects of our region.

Concluding my speech, I would like to alarm you once again that the humanitarian catastrophe in Nagorno-Karabakh deteriorates with every passing hour. The current situation on the ground requires urgent attention of the international community. Needs assessment mission to Nagorno-Karabakh by relevant international organisations and humanitarian assistance to the affected population is of utmost importance.

Armenia expects from the Azerbaijani side:

- to restore freedom and security of movement of persons, vehicles and cargo through the Lachin corridor, in line with the previously reached agreements;
- to implement the order of the International Court of Justice, issued on 22 February 2023 and reconfirmed on 6 July 2023;
- to provide humanitarian access to Nagorno-Karabakh and cooperate with relevant international organizations, particularly with the United Nations agencies;
- to resolve any outstanding issues related to or resulting from the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict exclusively through peaceful means.

Closing Remarks

I would like to thank all those delegations who just spoke up clearly and unambiguously about the inadmissibility of the dire humanitarian situation created by the illegal closure of the Lachin corridor.

Let me once again emphasise that the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh is disastrous and can have unpredictable consequences. We are not speaking about a looming crisis anymore; we speak about the ongoing humanitarian disaster. The mediaeval practices should be ceased.

The siege of Nagorno-Karabakh and the blockade of the Lachin corridor should be immediately lifted and the issues of the rights and security of the people of Nagorno-Karabakh should be addressed properly and in good faith. This will pave the way for advancing the negotiations on the normalisation of relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan and bring the much-awaited peace to the region.

Silence, indifference and inaction are not an option anymore. International mechanisms should react swiftly within their mandated activities and existing instruments designed exactly for addressing such situations.

Thank you.