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PERMANENT MISSION OF THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA TO THE OSCE

STATEMENT

**In Response to the Director of ODIHR, Mr. Matteo Mecacci
as delivered by Ambassador Armen Papikyan
at the 1309th Meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council**

15 April 2021

Madame Chairperson,

The Delegation of Armenia warmly welcomes Director Matteo Mecacci in his first appearance at the Permanent Council and thanks him for the presentation of ODIHR's 2020 Annual Report.

Director Mecacci,

2020 has been an extremely challenging year for human rights and fundamental freedoms in the OSCE region and beyond. As you mentioned in your foreword, 2020 will remain in our memory as a year of pandemic, even though the world is far from overcoming this crisis and is still struggling with the countless waves of the COVID-19 pandemic. The issue of swift and smooth distribution of vaccines around the world remains a global challenge requiring urgent and joint response.

At the same time, for Armenia and for the collective memory of Armenians, it will also remain as a year of the war of aggression against Artsakh and its people unleashed by Azerbaijan during the pandemic, with the direct involvement of Turkey and Turkish-backed foreign terrorist fighters, despite the UN Secretary-General's urgent appeal for a global ceasefire in all corners of the world to focus on the true fight – defeating the COVID-19, which has multiplied the suffering of our people enormously.

Distinguished Director,

We are pleased to note that you consider it important that all ODIHR activities should be beneficial for the 1.2 billion people living in the OSCE region, without exception, be able to enjoy the rights and freedoms enshrined in the OSCE commitments and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. For years the Armenian delegation has been advocating this approach of universality of human rights and fundamental freedoms, and we are looking forward to seeing this in practice. For many years, Azerbaijan has been effectively blocking

the access of human rights mechanisms to Artsakh, despite this axiomatic principle of the universality of human rights and fundamental freedoms and the inadmissibility of “grey zones” when it comes to protecting and promoting human rights. Today Azerbaijan has gone even further, hindering the access of various humanitarian organizations, including UN agencies, to Artsakh, thus obstructing the provision of humanitarian assistance to the people of Artsakh, who are struggling to cope with the consequences of Azerbaijan’s aggression and the COVID-19 pandemic.

We also would like to draw the attention of the ODIHR to the persistent anti-Armenian hatred and xenophobia promoted by the authorities of Azerbaijan on all levels, starting from the highest. Moreover, the state perpetrated propaganda of extreme racial and ethnic based hatred towards Armenians aimed at dehumanization of the Armenian people has been manifested anew these days with the opening of the so-called “Military Trophy Park” in Baku. We consider this extreme manifestation of hatred and intolerance as yet another proof of the continuous policy of Armenophobia pursued by the authorities of Azerbaijan, which is fraught with new hate crimes and must be clearly condemned and denounced. We expect swift reaction from the ODIHR in this regard and we encourage ODIHR to closely follow the instances of hate crime and overwhelming hate speech and intolerance against Armenians in Azerbaijan, including at the highest political level.

Against the backdrop of its flagrant violations of almost all the principles of the Helsinki Final Act and the OSCE commitments, as well as despite its poor human rights record and flawed co-operation with human rights organizations, Azerbaijan is trying to engage them in a so-called “rehabilitation process” in the occupied territories of Artsakh with the sole purpose of legitimizing the results of its aggression and use of force against Artsakh. In other words, Azerbaijan is seeking for a “legitimate accomplice” of its crimes and our international partners, including ODIHR, should clearly understand this.

Distinguished Director,

Azerbaijan has been notorious for its poor human rights record even without the extensive list of its war crimes and violations of international humanitarian law during the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War, and was able to continue violating with impunity and disrespecting all the human rights and fundamental freedoms.

We are well aware of the efforts of the ODIHR in this regard, but unfortunately and apparently, they were not sufficient, were not effective enough to change the pattern of behaviour of the Azerbaijani leadership.

We would like to see a more vigorous and robust implementation of the mandate of the ODIHR especially in view of somewhat negative trends in the areas of protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Director Mecacci,

Armenia highly values its co-operation with ODIHR. Despite the challenges of 2020, we were able to maintain our traditional effective co-operation in many areas of the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms. ODIHR provided a number of important recommendations and legal opinions on national legislation, including on political parties, contributed to strengthening the judicial independence, conducted assessment visits and organized various events. The co-operation between ODIHR and the Human Rights Defender of Armenia, whose activities in the post-war situation have gained particular importance, is much appreciated. We also acknowledge the quick adaptation of ODIHR election observation activities to the pandemic situation.

Seizing this opportunity, I would like to inform you that 20 June has been preliminary scheduled as the day of early parliamentary elections in the Republic of Armenia. The OSCE PA has been also informed accordingly. Once there is an official announcement of the election date, invitations for observers will be sent out as well. Let me also reiterate our long-standing position on the Human Dimension Implementation Meetings, which remains unchanged. We support the inclusive nature of these meetings and emphasize the need to ensure the unrestricted and broadest possible participation of civil society representatives, including from conflict-affected areas. We very much hope that this year the situation will allow us to organize HDIM properly, with a physical presence in Warsaw.

In closing, Director Mecacci, let me once again thank you for the established effective co-operation and assure you of Armenia`s support.

I thank you.