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PERMANENT MISSION OF THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA TO THE OSCE

Statement

**by the Delegation of Armenia at the 89th Joint Meeting of the
Forum for Security Co-operation and the Permanent Council,
Security Dialogue on “Mental Health Impacts of War”**

8 November 2023

Distinguished Chairs,

The Delegation of Armenia expresses its appreciation for convening this joint FSC-PC on this very pertinent topic and thanks the panelists for their presentations.

War adversely affects military personnel and civilians, both physically, such as death, injury, disability, malnutrition, sexual violence, as well as emotionally, such as post-traumatic stress disorder. The impact of war is much wider and more severe when a certain group of people or even the entire population is systematically targeted for the purpose of ethnic cleansing. This is more than true for the case of the people of Nagorno-Karabakh and those residing in the territories of Armenia located close to the border with Azerbaijan.

Psychological costs of war are larger especially among the POWs and civilian captives, and their families. As confirmed also by numerous witness accounts, as well as video and photo records, Armenian POWs captured during and after the war of aggression in 2020 against Nagorno-Karabakh, and in 2022 against Armenia, were subjected to torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment during their transfer, or in custody at various detention facilities, while receiving limited food, items of hygiene, and medical attention. As a method of psychological and physical coercion, permission to contact their family members was used by Azerbaijan as a bargaining tool to acquire additional information during interrogations.

Apart from physical suffering, deliberate actions were also carried out with the use of modern technology to cause severe mental and psychological suffering to the Armenian population. In Azerbaijani Telegram channels, stickers of the photos of tortured and dismembered bodies of Armenian soldiers and civilians were created through chatbots. Furthermore, the photo and video records of the processes of torture and executions were either directly sent to the family members of the victims or disseminated through various social media networks targeting Armenian mass media and users, including minors, thus causing immense psychological suffering to the family members and the Armenian people at large.

Torture and ill treatment has always been a distinctive feature in the Azerbaijani penitentiary system. Therefore, the fate of the Armenian prisoners of war and civilians is particularly worrying, considering the precarious situation of those in Azerbaijani captivity. Azerbaijani authorities continue to deny the release of all Armenian prisoners of war and civilians remaining in captivity in Azerbaijan, who have been illegally sentenced to long terms of imprisonment on trumped-up charges, in clear violation of international humanitarian law, Geneva Conventions and additional protocols, as well as the trilateral statement of 9 November 2020.

Dear colleagues,

The trauma of war adversely impacts civilians, especially children and women, as the most vulnerable part of the population. This is true also in times of deep humanitarian crisis situations especially in conflict zones.

Around 10 months-long illegal siege of Nagorno-Karabakh by Azerbaijan, through imposition of blockade, accompanied by disruption of food, medicine and other essential products, had also taken a significant toll on the psychosocial wellbeing of the people, including 30 000 children and 60 000 women, and considerably reduced their capacities to cope and recover. Cases of miscarriages were tripled. These are clear violations of numerous international instruments, including Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, (1979), Convention on the Rights of the Child, (1989), Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1993).

Due to the illegal blockade, many families were separated, even bodies of those who died in Armenia were forbidden to transfer to Nagorno-Karabakh for burial, causing irreparable harm to their families and loved ones.

In fact, these deliberate actions fall under the Article 2 of the 1948 Genocide Convention, aimed at causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group and by deliberately inflicting on the group the conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part.

The total impunity for its brazen disregard of the IHL and the legally binding orders of the highest international judicial body, and further tightening of the suffocating grip around Nagorno-Karabakh licensed Azerbaijan to launch another war of aggression against Nagorno-Karabakh and its people on September 19 this year, accompanied by another wave of war crimes and atrocities including against civilians, and ethnic cleansing of the entire territory of Nagorno-Karabakh from its indigenous population.

During the forced displacement 64 people died on the way from Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia, due to the lack of food, medication, medical care and distress.

The forcibly displaced people of Nagorno-Karabakh, many of them having lost their parents, sons, brothers and sisters in the bloody wars, leaving behind their homes, centuries-old cemeteries of their ancestors, have endured severe psychological trauma and distress. In this regard, the international community, including specialized organizations, have a crucial role to play in providing aid and support and taking effective measures to guarantee the rights of the people of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Distinguished Chairs,

To conclude, we highlight the crucial need of international efforts in addressing the impacts of war on civilians and military personnel, including short- and long-term mental health impacts. Meanwhile, we believe that robust actions by the international community are required first of all in terms of early preventive measures, as well as strong engagement in addressing the root causes: holding accountable the perpetrators and those responsible for the war crimes and crimes against humanity, in order to effectively prevent their recurrence.

I thank you.