

**Statement by H.E. Mr. Ara Aivazian,
Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia
at the 27th Meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council**

3 December 2020

Thank you, Ms. Chairperson.

Dear Colleagues,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Ms. Chairperson, I would like to join colleagues and thank the Albanian Chairmanship, your team for tireless efforts and leadership of this Organization throughout the year.

The year 2020 has been marked and profoundly affected by the unprecedented challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet for the people of Artsakh and Armenia the large-scale war unleashed by Azerbaijan with the direct involvement of its allies - Turkey and foreign terrorist fighters and jihadists - added another dimension to the already dire situation.

During the 44 days of war Azerbaijan and Turkey, in a clear defiance of their international obligations and in violations of their commitments towards the OSCE, despite numerous calls made by OSCE Minsk Group Co-chair countries, despite three agreements to cease hostilities, despite persistent calls of international community, continued the offensive. The aggression was accompanied by numerous gross violations of the laws and customs applicable in armed conflicts, by war crimes including deliberate targeting of civilian population and critical infrastructure, executions, inhuman or degrading treatment of prisoners of war and civilian captives, beheadings, mutilation of dead bodies and other well documented crimes with the ultimate purpose of ethnic cleansing of the Armenian population from their ancestral lands.

In this context, we welcome the consensus reached on the draft Ministerial Council Decision on the Prevention and Eradication of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, which we consider as the most important outcome of this Ministerial.

Today we should acknowledge the efforts of the Russian Federation and personal engagement of President Vladimir Putin in establishing a ceasefire and stopping war also through providing peace-keeping forces on the ground. We are also grateful to France and the US for their efforts and engagement to achieve a ceasefire.

The actions of Azerbaijan and its allies created new dangerous precedent for addressing conflict situations in the area of responsibility of the OSCE.

First, it is the recruitment, transfer and deployment of foreign terrorist fighters and jihadists from Syria and Libya in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict zone by Turkey which flagrantly violates the international obligations and OSCE commitments on combating the phenomenon of the foreign terrorist fighters. This is the first time ever that two OSCE participating States have deployed terrorist fighters and jihadists in support of their armed forces in the context of conflict in the OSCE area of responsibility, a fact that was acknowledged not only by a number of the OSCE participating states, but the relevant UN body.

Second, Azerbaijan's aggression against Artsakh was greatly instigated and supported politically and militarily by the Turkish leadership in its pursuit of expansionist power projection into the South Caucasus and beyond.

Third, Azerbaijan and its allies unleashed the war against Artsakh falsely claiming the legitimate right to use force, which is a clear breach of international law. Furthermore, Azerbaijan and Turkey now insist that the situation resulting from the use of force, aggression and war, large-scale violations of international law, war crimes and ethnic cleansing, should be considered as resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. We strongly condemn the use of force against the right of people of Nagorno-Karabakh to self-determination and we will not accept any attempt to deprive the people of Nagorno-Karabakh of their rights.

Despite assurances that have been voiced out today as well, Armenians have been ethnically cleansed from the territories of Nagorno-Karabakh recently occupied by Azerbaijan, those few who stayed were killed or tortured and expelled by Azerbaijani armed forces from their ancestral homeland. This reality clearly attests to the fact that Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh cannot be placed under the jurisdiction of Azerbaijan.

The comprehensive resolution of the conflict aimed at achieving lasting and sustainable peace in the region include:

- Status of Artsakh based on realization of the right of self-determination, security of its people;
- De-occupation by Azerbaijan of the territories of Nagorno-Karabakh;
- Safe and dignified return to their homes of the recently displaced population of Artsakh;
- Preservation of Armenian cultural and religious heritage on the territories that fell under the control of Azerbaijan.

Immediate and unconditional exchange of prisoners of war and hostages based on principle all for all, repatriation of remains should be implemented without any further delay.

The trilateral statement of November 9 should be considered without prejudice to the final political and durable settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Only political, negotiated settlement that will respect rights of all may bring peace and reconciliation to the South Caucasus region.

At the same time, to achieve this Turkey, whose genocidal record against Armenians is well known, should abandon its destabilizing policy and refrain from any actions which could further fuel tensions. In this context we call on all OSCE participating States to continue exerting pressure on Turkey to withdraw its military personnel from the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict zone, from the South Caucasus, together with its affiliated terrorist fighters. So far there is no sign that foreign terrorist fighters are being withdrawn from the conflict area. Quite opposite, there are persistent reports on further spread of terrorist fighters and mercenaries and plans to resettle them in areas of NK, which is currently occupied by Azerbaijan.

The lasting and sustainable resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict should be achieved through the negotiations under the auspices of the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairmanship, which is the only internationally mandated mechanism to deal with settlement of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. In this context we took positive note of the statement of heads of delegations of the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chair Countries issued earlier today, which once again showed the unity and determination of the Co-Chair countries in pursuing negotiated comprehensive and sustainable settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

We also concur that all the foreign mercenaries, brought in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict zone by Turkey and Azerbaijan, should be withdrawn fully and promptly from the region.

In conclusion, I would like to welcome Sweden as incoming Chair and wish them every success.

Thank you.