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PERMANENT MISSION OF THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA TO THE OSCE

STATEMENT

**as delivered by the Delegation of the Republic of Armenia
at the 1036th Plenary Meeting of the Forum for Security Cooperation
Security Dialogue on "Mine Action"**

15 February, 2023

Mr. Chairman,

At the outset allow me to thank the distinguished panelists for the informative presentations and contributions.

As today's Security Dialogue concept note describes, addressing the impact of landmines and explosive remnants of war (ERW) contamination presents a long-term challenge to human security in many participating States. This challenge is particularly acute in conflict-affected countries and conflict zones such as Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh. Therefore, the issue of reducing the risk of Explosive Remnants of War has always been high on the agenda of the Armenian government and an area of cooperation with our international partners.

Dear colleagues,

The impact of landmines and explosive remnants of war (ERW) contamination has particularly exacerbated as a result of the 44-day war of aggression unleashed by Azerbaijan against Artsakh/ Nagorno-Karabakh in 2020, and the 2022 September aggression of Azerbaijan against sovereign territory of Armenia. During these aggressions a number of civilian settlements of Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh have been targeted accompanied by massive use of heavy artillery, MLRSs, as well as cluster munition, which resulted in massive destruction of civilian objects and infrastructure, and heavy contamination of explosive ordnance.

Mr. Chair,

For almost thirty years, landmines and other types of explosive remnant of war have been scattered across the whole territory of Artsakh by Azerbaijan, however through these years Azerbaijan has been obstructing any humanitarian demining activities in Nagorno-Karabakh, stigmatizing them as illegal, while this security threat has been persistent since the first Nagorno-Karabakh war. According to The International Committee of the Red Cross report of the 2019, 747 cases of landmine victims in Artsakh were recorded, 59 percent of whom were civilians. Furthermore, as a result of the large-scale war of aggression that Azerbaijan unleashed in 2020, additional contamination was registered throughout Nagorno-Karabakh after the use by Azerbaijan of cluster munitions, including in densely populated areas, as well as incendiary weapons. After the 2020 war, the sapper-engineers of the peacekeeping forces in Nagorno-Karabakh have demined 2508,3 hectares of land, around 689km of roads, 1940 buildings, and neutralized 26762 items of unexploded ordnance.

It should be noted that throughout around 30 years the Azerbaijani authorities have not merely rejected any cooperation on humanitarian demining in and around Nagorno-Karabakh but also actively hindered any international efforts in this regard. Unfortunately, the international community was reluctant to engage in demining activities in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict zone succumbing to the threats by Azerbaijan. As a result of such obstructionist policy, the HALO Trust, a humanitarian NGO financed also by some OSCE participating States, including the US, was not able to engage in demining activities in the adjacent territories of Nagorno-Karabakh. Similarly, Azerbaijan initiated and finally closed the OSCE Yerevan Office alleging the latter of assisting Armenian authorities in humanitarian demining projects in the region.

Dear colleagues,

Armenia has always been a staunch supporter of the international efforts towards bringing peace to our region, by constructively engaging into negotiations under the auspices of the OSCE MG Co-chairmanship, while Azerbaijan has consistently undermined those efforts and considered the use of force as the only means of solving the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. This was reflected in its policy of consistently disrupting the negotiations by constant violations of the ceasefire regime and rejection of earlier agreements, which eventually led to the initiation of the 44-day war of aggression against the people of Artsakh.

However, after the signing of the Trilateral Statement on November 9, 2020, Armenia, mindful of the need for steps to bring stability to our region, has unilaterally handed over to Azerbaijan all the maps of landmines under its possession, I repeat, all of them. Unfortunately, this act of humanitarian gesture was not reciprocated by Azerbaijan, quite the contrary, Azerbaijan, who did not

provide any single map of landmines to Armenia, has come up with allegations, as if the maps are 25% accurate. This is nothing else, but part of its policy of obstruction of any process that could contribute to establishing an atmosphere conducive to resumption of peaceful negotiations, aimed at achieving lasting peace and stability in the region.

Mr. Chair,

We believe that discussions on the challenges of addressing the impact of landmines and explosive remnants of war especially in conflict affected areas should be inclusive, first and foremost, because it is about security and livelihood of people, and because human rights are universal and cannot and should not be applied selectively. Hence, it is our collective responsibility to address all those challenges in a comprehensive and evenly manner.

Right of reply to the Delegation of Azerbaijan

Now, with your permission, Mr. Chair, I would like to exercise my right of reply to the Azerbaijani delegation.

The allegation on mine planting by Armenia in Azerbaijani-controlled areas after the 44-day war of 2020 is another fake narrative vehemently promoted by Azerbaijan. This pursues a sole goal to justify Azerbaijan's war of aggression on September 13-14, 2022 and the ongoing illegal blockade of the Lachin corridor in blatant violation of its undertaken international obligations and commitments, which aims at complete ethnic cleansing of Artsakh/ Nagorno-Karabakh.

I must underline that Armenia has indeed planted mines, but on its own sovereign territories. It serves as a defense capability against an aggressor, which openly threatens with use of force and constantly comes up with territorial claims against Armenia. This is evidenced by the large-scale attacks by Azerbaijan against Armenia in May and November of 2021, as well as the aggression in September 2022 and continued occupation of more than 140 square kilometers of sovereign territories of Armenia.

The so-called "evidence" referred by the Azerbaijani delegation, are nothing else, but fabrications, which cannot in any way serve as factual evidence both for the locale of the claimed incidents or the date of production of those mines.

We view Azerbaijan's project which is to be implemented in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict zone and in the occupied territories of Artsakh, as an attempt to legitimize 2020 war of aggression and the massive use of force against Artsakh and its people, which was accompanied by numerous gross violations of international law by the Azerbaijani armed forces, including deliberate targeting of civilians and critical infrastructure, extrajudicial killings of

prisoners of war and civilian hostages, torture and numerous other documented crimes and atrocities.

We once again call upon FSC Chairmanships and all OSCE structures to refrain from any action and activities that might be perceived as endorsing Azerbaijan's war of aggression and massive use of force against Artsakh and its peaceful people. Any conflict-related OSCE activity can only be carried out after careful consultation and clearly expressed consent of all parties concerned.

As for the accusations that units of the Armed Forces of Armenia continue to be deployed in Nagorno-Karabakh: this also does not correspond to reality in any way. As my delegation has stated on numerous occasions, currently there are no Armenian armed forces on the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh. The need for self-defense forces for the people of Artsakh is due to the security threats posed by the continuous attacks and provocations by Azerbaijan's armed forces.

For the record, since the signing of the Trilateral Statement on November 9, 2020, 3 civilians have been deliberately killed and dozens have been wounded in Artsakh/Nagorno-Karabakh by the Azerbaijani armed forces. There have also been 55 cases of attempted murder against civilians. During the mentioned period Azerbaijan launched 2 large scale attacks in Nagorno-Karabakh.

Armenia rejects the approach of resolving issues through the use of force and the threat of use of force. Armenia once again reaffirms its commitment to establishing peace and stability in the region through peaceful negotiations, including on comprehensive settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict within the mandate of the OSCE Minsk Group Co-chairmanship.

Unfortunately, the continued occupation of territories of Armenia, illegal detention of Armenian POWs, destruction and appropriation of Armenian cultural and religious heritage, the ongoing illegal blockade of 120 000 Armenian people of Nagorno-Karabakh cannot be regarded as signs of official Baku's willingness to re-engage in meaningful negotiations, rather than indications of its real intention, i.e. to continue obstructing any international efforts aimed at restarting peace process and to lay grounds for new aggression against Armenia and Artsakh.

Thank you.