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PERMANENT MISSION OF THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA TO THE OSCE

Statement
on “The Humanitarian Crisis in Nagorno-Karabakh
as a result of the unlawful blockade imposed by Azerbaijan”
as delivered by Mr Arman Hovhannisyán, Deputy Head of Mission
at the 1403rd special meeting of the Permanent Council

22 December 2022

Mr Chairman,

Distinguished colleagues,

Since 15 December 2022, when this Delegation brought to the attention of the Permanent Council the unfolding humanitarian crisis in Nagorno Karabakh, the situation continues to further deteriorate as the unlawful closure by Azerbaijan of the Lachin Corridor, the only lifeline connecting Artsakh with Armenia and the rest of the world, is still in place.

Today it is the 11th day of blockade imposed by the authorities of Azerbaijan under the disguise of bogus “environmental concerns” which is a flagrant violation of its commitments under the Trilateral Statement of 9 November 2020, as well as under the international humanitarian law and human rights law.

For 11 days people are trapped in their homeland, cut from the rest of the world. The Lachin Corridor which is under the control of the Russian peacekeeping contingent, has a vital significance for the people of Nagorno Karabakh. Hence, this act constitutes an infliction of a collective punishment upon the people of Nagorno-Karabakh which calls into question their very existence should they be left face to face with the predatory intentions of the leadership of Azerbaijan.

Colleagues,

On 20 December, upon the official request of Armenia an emergency meeting of the UN Security Council was convened. The discussion clearly indicated the strong and

unequivocal international consensus on immediate and unconditional deblocking of the Lachin Corridor and the restoration of safe, secure and unimpeded connection between Armenia and Nagorno Karabakh.

Armenia has also lodged an appeal at the European Court of Human Rights to impose interim measures on Azerbaijan. Just yesterday the Court granted Armenia's request on the basis of Rule 39. Armenia will continue its cooperation with the ECtHR and other international mechanisms to reach a full deblocking of the Lachin Corridor.

Let me once again remind colleagues that paragraph 6 of the 9 November 2020 Trilateral Statement stipulates that the Lachin Corridor shall provide a connection between Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia, remaining under the control of the Russian Federation peacekeeping forces, and that "the Republic of Azerbaijan shall guarantee safe movement of citizens, vehicles and cargo moving along the Lachin Corridor in both directions".

Needless to say that with such actions Azerbaijan once again vividly demonstrates that it is not a reliable partner when it comes to the adherence to its commitments and obligations and that even the written guarantees given by the authorities of that country are not worth the hill of beans, let alone their verbal assurances of their good intentions.

Dear colleagues,

The blockade and isolation of 120,000 thousand people of Nagorno Karabakh creates a dire humanitarian situation thus putting their physical existence into question. At least 1,100 civilians have been stranded along the blocked highway for the past week, unable to return to their homes. Children have been separated from their families. 270 minor children have to find temporary shelter across Armenia, while their parents and relatives remain in Artsakh in isolation. Provision of healthcare and social services has been obstructed, causing life-threatening situations and human suffering, pharmacies face a dramatic shortage or even absence of essential and indispensable medicine. The transfer of patients for urgent treatment in the Armenian hospitals has become impossible, which has already resulted in the death of a critically ill patient. Shortage of food and other essential goods has already been reported, as 4000 tons of supplies remain undelivered to the destination.

Dear colleagues,

There are many tragic and sad stories as a result of the unlawful actions by Azerbaijan. I will spare your time just referring to one of them.

Anna Muradyan, a young woman who lost her husband during the 44-day war in Nagorno Karabakh and these days was in Yerevan to visit her husband's grave in the Yerablur memorial cemetery. She was traveling back home when half way she learned that the only road leading to Nagorno Karabakh was blocked by Azerbaijan. Her children - Garegin 3 years old and Gourgen 6 years old, are now in Nagorno Karabakh without the only caretaker. The family has been separated for 11 days.

The medieval siege of the people of Nagorno-Karabakh came to be exacerbated by the disruption of the gas supply for three consecutive days in severe winter conditions. Lack of heating effectively disrupted all schooling processes, depriving children of their basic right to education.

To preempt another barrage of outworn lies and manipulative assertions by Azerbaijan it should be noted that since December 12, the transfer of 2 critically ill patients from Stepanakert to Yerevan was possible only through the facilitation by the peacekeepers and the ICRC and with their immediate escorting, which clearly indicates that the corridor remains effectively closed and the free and safe movement of citizens, vehicles and cargo is not guaranteed by Azerbaijan in contradiction with the norms of international law and the provisions of the Trilateral Statement November 9, 2020.

In the meanwhile, Azerbaijan continues to blame Armenia while more and more exposing its own inability to deliver on its commitments. The claims that Azerbaijan has not put any restriction on the Lachin Corridor, as disseminated by their authorities, are simply false and deceptive as they reflect the usual victim-blaming approach of that country in an attempt to deny their own responsibility for the grave violations of the existing international obligations.

Likewise, any reference to an environmental concern of any sort is a cynical lie and artificially invented pretext to try to justify further deprivation of the population of Nagorno-Karabakh of their means of subsistence and to deny their fundamental rights, in gross violation of the International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights as well as Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, along with the other fundamental international instruments.

Ironically, it is a well-established fact that, when it comes to matters of civil and political liberties, Azerbaijan maintains one of the lowest rankings of democracy in the world, with a proven track record of oppression of protests and with dozens of political prisoners punitive for the right to assembly. The suggested idea, therefore, that there could be civil society activists out there, in Azerbaijan, capable of launching a campaign of a similar size and scope without direct guidance and supervision of the state authorities is implausible, to say the least. In fact, there is sufficient evidence to support that the

Azerbaijani government is complicit in this staged “environmental” campaign; most of the so-called activists have been identified as agents of the Azerbaijani Government with irrefutable evidence persistent in the public domain.

Mr Chairman,

For the people of Nagorno Karabakh this is not a new phenomenon. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union they are struggling for their inalienable rights, most notably for the right to live freely in their homeland. The horrors of the distant and recent past are still fresh in their memory and this tactic of medieval siege of the peaceful population has been repeating from time to time. Just within a month this is the second closure of the corridor. The first one occurred on December 3, 2022 under the same fabricated pretexts.

This has also been the case back in 1991 when the population of Nagorno Karabakh has been entirely cut off from the rest of the world as a result of the notorious “Koltso Operation ” which has been organised and executed jointly by Soviet special forces and Azerbaijani militia. This operation had disastrous consequences and led to mass atrocities in Armenian populated villages of Nagorno Karabakh. It is with such actions aiming to exterminate the people of Artsakh and with mass pogroms and atrocities that the then authorities of Soviet Azerbaijan were pursuing the policy of suppression and ethnic cleansing which forced the people of Artsakh to stand-up for their rights and self-defence under the threat of looming genocide.

Today, in an atmosphere of total impunity, when none of the crimes committed by Azerbaijan receive adequate reaction from the international community, this country, due to its status of a hydrocarbon exporter, is confident that it can easily get away with any type of wrongdoing it has or accomplishes. And regrettably, their calculations are not baseless, given that some members of the international community opt to engage more closely with that state, while turning a blind eye on its abysmal track record and crimes committed both internally and externally.

We often hear in this room about the modus operandi of authoritarian regimes which is based on internal oppression and external repression, however, when it comes to this particular case some of our partners become eloquently silent with eyes wide shut.

Under such circumstances, the risks of imminent existential threats are not exaggerated and seem to be more than real. It is obvious that Azerbaijan imposes this blockade with a far reaching aim to ethnically cleanse Nagorno-Karabakh from its indigenous Armenian population. The fate of Shushi and Hadrut towns and other territories that were occupied in 2020, where no single Armenian is left, clearly attest to this fact. Moreover, the

continued policy of erasing and denying the Armenian cultural heritage in and around Nagorno Karabakh offers ample evidence of the far-reaching plans by Azerbaijan to ethnically cleanse Nagorno Karabakh. It also aims to destroy all traces that Armenian had ever lived in Nagorno Karabakh, to kill the history. Once it is done, Azerbaijan will reinvent the past.

Mr Chairman,

The alarming situation in Nagorno-Karabakh is close to turning into a humanitarian catastrophe. Despite the efforts of the peacekeeping forces on the ground, the negotiations of the Nagorno-Karabakh authorities with the Azerbaijani side with the aim to restore the safe and unhindered operation of the corridor so far have not yielded any results. The coordinated character of the actions of Azerbaijan, including the preceding incidents targeting civilian population and critical infrastructure, are yet another evidence that the closure of the Lachin Corridor is, indeed, a pre-planned operation being implemented by the authorities of Azerbaijan with the intention to inflict harm upon the civilian population and to create a large-scale humanitarian crisis in Nagorno-Karabakh.

The unabated provocations and aggressive actions of Azerbaijan come to confirm that the aggressor will be encouraged to continue testing the limits of resilience and determination of the international community, including of the OSCE, in upholding its principles and commitments. Therefore, the international community can and should exert pressure, including by way of sanctioning the leadership of Azerbaijan.

This situation should also compel us to think of alternative routes for the essential supplies to the people of Nagorno Karabakh, since the reliability of the land route is extremely fragile and could be disrupted again and again, anytime as the ongoing blockade of the Lachin Corridor is not just an isolated case but yet another demonstration of systematic violence masterminded by the Azerbaijani authorities with the aim to subject the people of Nagorno-Karabakh to ethnic cleansing.

Dear colleagues,

On several occasions, we also brought to the attention of the PC the hostile and aggressive behavior of Azerbaijan which has been consistently resorting to violence targeting the Armenian civilians, including those performing agricultural activities, as well as the psychological pressure imposed on the population of border communities including with the use of loudspeakers and through other means.

Azerbaijan not only threatens, on a regular basis, to use force against Armenia, but also continues to keep under illegal occupation more than 140 sq km of the sovereign territory of my country. Azerbaijan continues to disregard the Order of the International Court of Justice on the Provisional Measures issues under the Convention on Elimination of Racial Discrimination against Azerbaijan in December 2021 in relation to the humanitarian obligations vis-a-vis the Armenian POWs as well as the need to address the pervasive anti-Armenian rhetoric, including at the level of public officials and institutions.

We underscore that international commitments, including the strict implementation of the commitments undertaken by the Trilateral Statement of November 9, the refusal of the use of force or the threat of the use of force, strict observance of the ceasefire regime, ensuring of uninterrupted movement in the Lachin Corridor under the supervision of Russian peacekeepers, are of key importance for the political settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, establishment of lasting peace and stability in the region, and for peaceful coexistence of peoples.

We reaffirm that Armenia is committed to continue its efforts towards establishing peace and stability in the South Caucasus region in line with the agreements reached at various meetings at the level of leaders, as well as Foreign Ministers of the two countries.

I kindly ask that this statement be attached to the journal of the day.

Thank you.