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PERMANENT MISSION OF THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA TO THE OSCE

Statement
in response to the current issue raised by the Delegation of France on behalf
of the three Co-Chair countries of the OSCE Minsk Group
as delivered by Ambassador Armen Papikyan
at the 1348th meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council

09 December 2021

Madame Chairperson,

I would like to thank distinguished Ambassador of France for presenting also on behalf of the delegations of the United States and Russian Federation the statement of the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs of 4 December, as well as the statement by the Co-Chairs on 7 December.

We took positive note of the joint statement made by the U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation Sergey Lavrov, and French Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs Jean-Yves Le Drian, representing the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chair countries. We consider this statement as a genuine effort to resume the Nagorno Karabakh peace process under the auspices of the Minsk Group Co-Chairs.

We concur that despite the aggressive actions of and continued warmongering by Azerbaijani authorities, there is no alternative for peaceful resolution of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. This was the position of Armenia for the last 30 years, including during the First Karabakh War of 1990-1994, as well as before, during and after the 44-days war.

We may only regret that the Foreign Minister of Azerbaijan did not avail himself of the opportunity to continue the dialogue offered by the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs in Stockholm and chose, instead, to continue obstructing it. We equally regret that the opportunity offered by the Chairperson in office was also neglected. Attempts by Azerbaijan to justify its refusal to meet under the auspices of the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs by invoking the visit of Armenian parliamentarians to Nagorno-Karabakh do not stand any criticism. Armenian parliamentarians have been visiting Nagorno-Karabakh before, during and after the war and, therefore, it was not an extraordinary occurrence.

In a stark contrast, Armenia expressed its readiness to continue this dialogue, despite the abduction and killing of an innocent 65-year-old shepherd by Azerbaijani forces on the eve of the planned meeting between the two foreign ministers. This once again comes to confirm that the words and deeds of the Armenian government do not diverge, that Armenia indeed is committed and stands ready to continue the dialogue that started in New York and Paris and to work towards finding a lasting, just and sustainable solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

Madame Chairperson,

We also agree with the Co-Chairs that the inflammatory rhetoric and provocative actions impede the resumption of the peace process. Indeed, the inflammatory statements of Azerbaijani state and public officials and aggressive and provocative actions of Azerbaijani military are contrary to the calls of the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chair countries and, indeed, of the international community.

Incursions of Azerbaijani troops into the sovereign territory of the Republic of Armenia disrupted the road connections between Armenian towns and villages and severely affected the everyday life of people in the region. However, despite this, the Armenian government repeatedly stated its readiness to engage in good faith in the discussions with a view of addressing the issue of border demarcation and delimitation, stressing at the same time that any such process should be conducted by diplomatic means and never through the use or threat of force or through unilateral

actions. We, therefore, welcome the reaffirmation by the Co-chairs that the use or threat of force to resolve border disputes is unacceptable.

Madame Chairperson,

Let me also briefly reflect on the issue of landmines. As a humanitarian gesture Armenia provided the maps of landmines in its possession even though Armenia has no legal or political obligation whatsoever in this regard.

Armenia believes that all humanitarian issues should be addressed and settled. We agree with the Co-Chair countries that concrete progress is needed on humanitarian issues, such as detainees, missing persons, protection of cultural heritage and site.

However, more than a hundred Armenian prisoners of war and civilians continue to be held captive in Azerbaijan, in violation of all the norms of international humanitarian law as well as of paragraph 8 of the trilateral statement. Moreover, Azerbaijan continues to conceal the real number of Armenian prisoners of war, thus putting them at risk of enforced disappearance. The mock trials and the imposition of lengthy sentences based on bogus charges against prisoners of war clearly demonstrate the anti-Armenian hatred policy and smear campaign that is being conducted in Azerbaijan from the highest levels downwards.

It is particularly alarming that most of the Armenian historical and cultural heritage sites, including places of worship, cemeteries and monuments, together with thousands of museum exhibits, which remained in the territories of Artsakh that came under the control of Azerbaijan, have been subjected to destruction, desecration and vandalism. In this regard, it is worth recalling that the Ghazanchetsots (Holy Saviour) Cathedral in Shushi, which within a few hours on 8 October 2020 was targeted by the Azerbaijani armed forces twice using high-precision weapons, was subsequently also vandalized and desecrated. Moreover, under the pretext of restoration work, the Azerbaijani occupation administration in Shushi is currently changing the architectural appearance of the cathedral in an attempt to erase its Armenian origin and identity.

Immediately after gaining control over the territories of Artsakh, the Azerbaijani leadership launched a campaign of appropriation of the Armenian cultural heritage. The example of Dadivank, an ancient Armenian monastery dating back to the 9th century, is a case in point, where President Aliyev ordered to completely remove all Armenian inscriptions.

We also concur with the Co-chairs that the international humanitarian organisations should have unhindered access to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict area and we call on Azerbaijan to seize the undue politicization of this issue. All humanitarian and specialised organizations and agencies should receive full and unhindered access to Nagorno Karabakh and carry out their mandated work without undue interference and restrictions.

Madame Chairperson,

Today's early morning attack against Armenian positions by the Azerbaijani troops, who have infiltrated the sovereign territory of Armenia in May this year, is the response of Azerbaijan to the Statements issued by the Co-Chairs and the Co-Chair countries. In defiance of the call of the Co-Chairs to refrain from provocative actions Azerbaijan today morning launched another attack within the territory of Armenia.

This is a clear message to those who believe that statements and calls are enough to contain the aggressive actions and expansionist intentions of Azerbaijani authorities - of a regime which has lost any sense of reality and enjoys full impunity for its actions. Azerbaijan should bear full responsibility and face consequences for obstructing the resumption of the peace process, for its bellicose actions and be held accountable. International community should sanction Azerbaijan for continued violations of international law and international humanitarian law and for flagrant violations of its commitments and obligations taken at the international, regional level and other formats.

Madame Chairperson,

We are ready to continue our engagement towards resumption of dialogue within the OSCE Minsk Group Co-chairmanship as a logical continuation of the meetings held in New York and Paris and preparatory work for Stockholm.

Armenia is looking forward to welcoming the Co-Chairs in Armenia and also looking forward to their full-fledged and much overdue visit to the region to assess the situation on the ground. We urge the Co-Chairs to redouble their efforts in this regard to carry out a full-fledged visit to the region and implement their mandated work.

Thank you.