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PERMANENT MISSION OF THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA TO THE OSCE

Statement

of the Delegation of Armenia

at the 1419th Meeting of the Permanent Council in Response to the Secretary-General's Thematic Report on Trafficking of Cultural Property *20 April 2023*

Mr. Chair,

We took note of the report by the Secretary General and would like to thank her for the presentation.

Cultural heritage is a driving force of identity and historical memory for societies. We strongly believe that the only way to protect world cultural heritage is to apply a system based on the principles of dialogue, respect for cultural diversity and cultivation of peace. The fulfillment of this objective requires joint efforts and commitment, and Armenia has always been keen to make its own contribution in this regard.

Moreover, considering the growing role of cultural heritage and its impact on peace and security as a fundamental prerequisite for sustainable development of communities, especially in conflict affected areas, recognition of cultural identities, proper heritage conservation, and fighting against illicit trafficking of cultural property based on shared values may foster tolerance and respect among different communities.

Armenian cultural heritage, cultural property as constituting this heritage - monuments of architecture, art and history, both religious and secular, archeological sites, works of art, manuscripts, collections of books, scientific collections, depositories of archives, as well as Armenian intangible cultural heritage have created and continue to create lasting values for centuries and are truly considered to be the gems of world cultural heritage.

Thus, cooperation on preserving cultural heritage has a special meaning for the Armenian people, especially within the context of already documented cases of destruction of Armenian cultural heritage and imminent threat of its destruction and subsequent trafficking in the territories fallen under control of Azerbaijan as a result of the 2020 war of aggression unleashed by Azerbaijan against the peaceful people of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Mr. Chair,

I would also like to exercise my right of reply with some brief remarks regarding the statement by the delegation of Azerbaijan.

First of all, I strongly reject all the fabricated allegations presented by that delegation.

I assume there is a reason behind this behavior; The Azerbaijani delegate most probably strives to avoid Azerbaijan's responsibility and accountability for deliberate destruction and desecration of the Armenian cultural heritage of Nagorno-Karabakh, in particular, in the territories fallen under the control of Azerbaijani armed forces as a result of the 2020 war of aggression unleashed against the peaceful people of Nagorno-Karabakh.

In this vein, let me recall the statement made by the Minister of Culture of Azerbaijan Anar Karimov on February 3, 2022 on the establishment of a working group for the destruction and change of the identity of the Armenian religious and historical-cultural monuments in Nagorno-Karabakh fallen under the control of Azerbaijan

The creation in Azerbaijan of a special commission at the state level is a gross violation of the Order of the International Court of Justice on provisional measures, which is binding and requires official Baku to prevent and punish acts of vandalism and desecration of the Armenian cultural heritage.

Dear colleagues,

The IHL obliges parties to an armed conflict to protect and respect cultural property, enshrined in international treaty and customary law, including the 1954 Hague Convention on the Protection of cultural property in the event of armed conflict and its two Protocols as well as the 1977 Additional Protocols to the 1949 Geneva Conventions.

During and after the 2020 war, we witnessed deliberate targeting of the Armenian religious heritage, such as the Holy Savior Ghazanchetsots Cathedral located in occupied city of Shushi of Artsakh, partial destruction or complete erasure, as well as numerous cases of distortion of the identity of Armenian churches and other cultural heritage in the territories fallen under the control of Azerbaijani armed forces.

The deficiencies of international norms and systems, and lack of robust response mechanisms allow the perpetrators to avoid justice and seriously endanger the 1.500 Armenian cultural property and 19.000 museum exhibits, which are currently controlled by Azerbaijan and under the threat of trafficking, taking also into account the refusal of Azerbaijan to grant access to international specialised agencies and organisations.

The acts of destruction and desecration, including acts of misappropriation and cases of misrepresentation that we face today in the occupied territories of Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh) are not a new phenomenon. In fact, what we are witnessing today is a well-known pattern and consistent state policy, which we have encountered at different stages of our history.

It is crucial to spearhead international efforts and act appropriately to prevent the Armenian cultural heritage in Nagorno-Karabakh sharing the tragic fate of 28.000 annihilated properties of the Armenian cultural heritage of Nakhijevan.

It is worth recalling that Azerbaijan is still rejecting the deployment of UNESCO fact-finding mission to Nagorno-Karabakh and the surrounding territories.

In view of the current situation, the immediate intervention and unimpeded involvement on the ground of the international community, in particular UNESCO, is becoming more urgent for the preservation and prevention of the cases of vandalism against the Armenian monuments of Nagorno-Karabakh, which are part of the universal cultural heritage.

Thank you.