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PERMANENT MISSION OF THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA TO THE OSCE

STATEMENT

On Children and Armed Conflict

**as delivered by the Delegation of the Republic of Armenia
at the 1021th Plenary Meeting of the Forum for Security Co-operation**

14 September 2022

Mr Chairman,

The concept note for today's Security Dialogue highlights three of the six grave violations against children in times of war, as identified by the United Nations, namely:

- Killing and maiming of children;
- Attacks against schools or hospitals; and
- Denial of humanitarian access for children.

Children are indeed the most vulnerable part of the civilian population in any armed conflict with massive use of force, and the protection of their rights to life and other fundamental rights constitutes a key part of the obligations of States under international law and OSCE commitments.

Unfortunately, this is not the case in relation to one of the participating States of this organization. During its wars and aggression against Nagorno-Karabakh, the Azerbaijani army committed numerous war crimes and violations of international humanitarian law both against civilians and military personnel, which remained unpunished and demonstrated the lack of effective mechanisms for protection of human rights during armed conflict, and particularly the rights of children. We recall that, during the very first hours of its aggression against Artsakh in 2016, also known as the Four-day War, the Azerbaijani army shelled a school in the Martuni region of Artsakh, as a result of which a 12-year-old boy was killed, and two other children were injured.

The Azerbaijani authorities have even involved children in the state policy of promoting anti-Armenian hatred, which includes encouraging hatred and killing of Armenians,

education of children in schools and kindergartens in an atmosphere of hatred towards Armenians, dehumanizing all Armenians, and distributing videos of these kinds of classroom activities. Children are also taken to the notorious “Trophy Park” with mannequins of killed Armenian soldiers, which is nothing but a shameful "monument" of racial hatred. It is noteworthy that the President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev himself attended the opening ceremony of this park.

Moreover, during the 44-day war of aggression unleashed by Azerbaijan and its allies against Nagorno-Karabakh in 2020, the Azerbaijani armed forces again deliberately targeted towns and villages, including civilian infrastructure and facilities: hospitals, schools and kindergartens. The Azerbaijani armed forces used multiple-launch rocket systems, heavy artillery, attack UAVs, as well as prohibited weapons, such as cluster and incendiary munitions both against military personnel and civilians, which clearly demonstrated the deliberate nature of such attacks that put the peaceful population, including children, at the risk of serious injuries and loss of life. The 44-day war against the people of Artsakh claimed the lives of 81 civilians, including one child, while 163 civilians, including 9 other children were seriously injured. Further casualties among the civilian population were avoided only thanks to the effective civil protection measures taken by local authorities.

As a result of Azerbaijan’s aggression against Artsakh in 2020, 71 schools and 18 kindergartens were destroyed or seriously damaged. 125 schools, 18 kindergartens, 4 art schools, 4 sports schools, 3 children's art centers remained in the territories currently under the control of the Azerbaijani armed forces.

As a result of the unprovoked and unjustified war of aggression by Azerbaijan, over 90 thousand civilians, including over 40 thousand children were displaced from their homes. Many of them, especially children who had to stay in shelters until the end of hostilities, still suffer from psychological disorders and traumas. Currently, around 30 thousand people, most of them children, forcibly displaced from their homes in Nagorno-Karabakh still reside in different regions of Armenia, and in addition to numerous deprivations, social and economic difficulties, continue to face problems in fully exercising their rights, including their right to education. Let alone the thousands of children, who have been deprived of their parents and care-givers.

Even after the cessation of hostilities, Azerbaijan has been continuing its policy of ethnic cleansing in Nagorno-Karabakh, including by targeting critical civilian infrastructure, occupying villages and areas close to the line of contact, as well as terrorizing the civilian population and forcing them to leave their homes under the threat of force. Here again, children are the ones who suffer most from the intimidation and severe psychological pressure.

It should be noted that, despite the agreements reached, Azerbaijan continues to deliberately impede the involvement of specialized humanitarian organizations, including the relevant UN structures, in Nagorno-Karabakh, thereby blocking the access of the people of Artsakh, including children, to humanitarian aid and assistance.

Dear colleagues,

At present, a number of densely populated Armenian civilian settlements, including the city of Jermuk and the village of Verin Shorzha, as well as many other nearby towns and villages continue to be under indiscriminate shelling by the Azerbaijani armed forces. The attacks have intensified since 8 am local time today. The civilian population in these areas, including children, women and the elderly, are forced to take refuge in cellars or leave their homes.

As a result of this military aggression by Azerbaijan, accompanied by deliberate targeting of civilian settlements of the Republic of Armenia, the right children to education was also violated in a number of communities in the Gegharkunik, Vayots Dzor and Syunik provinces of Armenia. The Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports of the Republic of Armenia, based on security considerations, has decided to suspend the work of educational institutions in these areas.

Thus, we all can see the same pattern of behaviour, the same trajectory of crimes and violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law, and I regret to say, the same atmosphere of impunity for the perpetrator.

Dear colleagues,

The OSCE and the Forum for Security Cooperation cannot and should not serve as a platform for addressing issues of concern, based on geopolitical, geographic or other preferences. The OSCE, as an organization, must strictly pursue and commit itself to its founding principles and norms, enshrined in the Helsinki Final Act. Therefore, we expect a clear and unequivocal condemnation and adequate measures to be taken by participating States, individually and collectively, including within this organization, to deter the militaristic and expansionist aspirations and aggression of one participating State, Azerbaijan, against another participating State, Armenia.

Dear colleagues,

The distinguished representative of UNICEF has shared his experience in the conflict areas. I wish I could also hear the name of Nagorno-Karabakh together with the mentioned locations, where children enjoyed international humanitarian aid. This is, because of the “generosity and commitments” of Azerbaijan to its international obligations, that the voice of the thousands of children in Nagorno-Karabakh remain unheard, and their eyes with grief, and traces of at least 2 wars, unseen.

Human rights are universal, and they must prevail over any political considerations or calculations.

I thank you.