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PERMANENT MISSION OF THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA TO THE OSCE

STATEMENT

In response to the Delegation of Azerbaijan

as delivered by the Delegation of the Republic of Armenia at the 1030th Meeting of the OSCE Forum for Security Co-operation

07 December 2022

Mr. Chair,

As my delegation has already stated on numerous occasions, currently there are no Armenian armed forces on the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh. As for the Artsakh Defense Army, since the peacekeepers have not been deployed along the entire contact line, which is impossible due to the small number of contingents, the units of the Artsakh Defense Army have the right and must be on their duty in the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh, given the continues security threats by Azerbaijan, as well as use of force and atrocities perpetrated by the Azerbaijani armed forces even after the ceasefire was established.

The people of Artsakh/Nagorno-Karabakh cannot survive in their historical homeland without the Defense Army, and the proposal of withdrawing the Defense Army from Artsakh is a proposal of expelling the Armenians of Artsakh.

With regard to the misuse by the Azerbaijani authorities of the subject of landmines in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict zone before and after the 44-day war of 2020 I would like to refer to the Note Verbale distributed by my delegation under the reference number SEC.DEL/574/22.

In particular, since signing of the November 9, 2020 Trilateral Statement the authorities of the Republic of Azerbaijan have been misusing conflict related humanitarian issues to counter the legally justified demands of Armenia and international community to repatriate the prisoners of war and other captives still held by Azerbaijan, in contravention of the Geneva Conventions.

The issue of landmines is a first tool of Azerbaijan in this regard. Azerbaijan exploits this issue in order to justify its numerous violations of international law, including extrajudicial

executions, enforced disappearances and other war crimes that were committed during the 44-day war, as well as during the September 2022 aggression against the sovereign territories of the Republic of Armenia.

The mine contamination of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict zone dates back to the First Nagorno-Karabakh war. As a matter of fact, both sides of the conflict planted mines during the first war, and both sides used USSR-era landmines. After the 1994 ceasefire, the large portion of Nagorno-Karabakh and adjacent territories remained heavily contaminated by landmines fields. As a result, the people of Nagorno-Karabakh were indiscriminately subjected to the fatal effect of landmines owing to Azerbaijan's refusal to provide maps of the minefields, leaving thousands of mines buried and undiscovered to date.

From 1994 to 2020 Azerbaijan not merely categorically rejected any cooperation on humanitarian demining in and around Nagorno-Karabakh and on its borders with Armenia, but actively hindered any international efforts in this regard. As a result of such obstructionist policy, the HALO Trust, an international organization financed by foreign governments including US, was not able to engage in demining activities in the adjacent territories of Nagorno-Karabakh. Similarly, Azerbaijan initiated and finally closed OSCE Yerevan Office alleging the latter of assisting Armenian authorities in humanitarian demining projects in the region. Azerbaijan has never ever provided minefield maps to Armenia: neither before the 2020 war nor afterwards. As a result, substantial territories of Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia were still contaminated with mines and ERWs even before the 2020 war initiated by Azerbaijan.

Furthermore, as a result of the large-scale aggressions that Azerbaijan initiated in 2016 and 2020, additional contamination was registered throughout Nagorno-Karabakh after the use by Azerbaijan of cluster munitions, including in densely populated civilian areas.

After the 2020 war, the sapper-engineers of the peacekeeping forces in Nagorno-Karabakh have demined 2495 hectares of land, 689 km of roads, 1940 buildings, and neutralized 26762 items of unexploded ordnance.

Dear colleagues,

Since the establishment of ceasefire on November 10, 2020, unlike Azerbaijan, Armenia has unilaterally transmitted all the minefield maps under its possession as a goodwill humanitarian gesture, though Armenia had no such a commitment under the Trilateral Statement of November 9, 2020.

Azerbaijan, who did not provide any single landmine map to Armenia, claims that the information in the maps provided by Armenia are only 25% accurate. Armenia has stated on numerous occasions that it has provided all the information it had regarding the minefields and does not possess any "better maps".

It is worth mentioning that Azerbaijan has been trying to justify its September 13-14, 2022 military aggression against Armenia by promoting another fake narrative of mine

planting. According to Azerbaijan Armenia planted new Armenia made landmines in Azerbaijani-controlled Lachin, Kalbajar or Dashkesan after the 44-day war of 2020. The photographs previously presented by Azerbaijan by no means can serve as factual evidence for the locale or the date of the incident or, for that matter, date of the production of the mines. Instead they are nothing but fabrications of the Azerbaijani side with possible transfer of the mines from the border of Armenia into the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict area.

Armenia deplores the misuse of issues related to landmines by Azerbaijan to whitewash its occupation policy and war crimes committed during and after the 44-day war of 2020, especially when Azerbaijan had been planting landmines in the conflict zone itself. Armenia has contributed to the demining efforts in good faith by unilaterally providing the minefield maps in its possession.

I also firmly reject the accusation by the delegation of Azerbaijan, of so-called "occupation". Armenia has never been an occupier, Artsakh defended itself from the war unleashed by Azerbaijan in 90s, in response to the exercise by the people of Nagorno-Karabakh of their right to self-determination and the right to live freely and securely in their historic homeland.

In conclusion, I call on the representative of the Azerbaijani delegation not to distort the essence of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, which is not resolved yet. It should be resolved only through peaceful negotiations within the internationally agreed format of the OSCE Minsk Group Co-chairmanship. And I hope, that Azerbaijan will eventually have the courage to engage in a good faith into peaceful negotiations and will refrain from any actions to further escalate the situation in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict zone and from the deliberate actions of intimidation of the 120 000 people currently living in Nagorno-Karabakh.

Thank you.