

**Statement by Edward Nalbandian, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Armenia
at the 22nd Meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council**

03.12.2015

Mr. Chairman,

Dear Colleagues,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to join the previous speakers in expressing our deep condolences with regard to the tragedy in California.

Dear colleagues,

I would like to thank Chairman-in-Office, Ivica Dacic and his team for their contribution to the activities of this Organization throughout the year, as well as to extend my gratitude to the Government of Serbia for the warm hospitality.

The 2015 marks the Centennial of the Armenian Genocide which has rallied a worldwide support, sympathy and condemnation of this heinous crime. In six days, on December 9th for the first time ever the International Day of Commemoration and Dignity of Victims of Genocide will be marked. Its proclamation was recommended by the Resolution on the Prevention of Genocide initiated by Armenia and unanimously supported by the UN Human Rights Council in March 2015 and then adopted by the UN General Assembly again upon Armenia's initiative. As a nation which passed through the horrors of genocide we feel moral obligation in contributing to the international efforts of prevention of crimes against humanity.

Today, we cannot remain indifferent to the repetition of such crimes by ISIS/Daesh, Al-Nusra, other terrorist groups and foreign terrorist fighters. Two years ago, when in the framework of the OSCE Armenia condemned atrocities committed by those groups in Iraq and Syria, particularly against the national and religious minorities, including our own compatriot Armenians in Kessab, Deir Zor and other places, one could have hardly imagined how the violence by terrorists would magnify and erupt in places far beyond the region.

Armenia values unambiguous implementation and strengthening of the OSCE commitments related to combating terrorism. We encourage further efforts aimed at the protection of ethnic and religious minorities, including Christians whose fundamental rights and cultural heritage have been targeted. It is also important to adequately address the ongoing crisis of migrants and refugees emanating from the OSCE neighborhood. Armenia is not a bystander in this regard and has already received more than 17 thousand refugees from Syria.

Mr. Chairman,

40 years ago at the signing of the Helsinki Final Act German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt made a statement that sounds as a prophecy today. He said "it remains our aim to work for a state of peace in Europe in which the German nation will regain its unity through free self-determination". In a month Germany will assume the

Chairmanship of this Organization exactly as was preached - unified and in a state of peace. Not only the German nation but many others embraced the principles empowering the people to promote and protect their rights and to freely pursue their own future and thus contributing to the peace and security.

Mr. Chairman,

Unfortunately, peace continues to be challenged by those who refuse to abide by the common norms and principles. It has been more than two decades now that Azerbaijan rejects to recognize the right of the people of Nagorno-Karabakh to self-determination. It turns a blind eye that this very right is proclaimed by the presidents of the Co-chair countries of the OSCE Minsk Group as one of the basic principles of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict resolution. Azerbaijan fails to notice that the determination of the final legal status of Nagorno-Karabakh through a legally binding expression of will stands at the core of the settlement proposed by the Co-chairs.

The blatant defiance to the proposals of the Co-chairs is not the only path through which Baku tries to undermine the peace process. It boasts about solving the conflict through the military buildup pumped by oil revenues and continues provocations on the line of contact with Nagorno-Karabakh and the borders with Armenia. The cease-fire violations by Baku have reached alarming levels. Baku uses heavy weaponry and deliberately targets civilians, which resulted in high numbers of casualties. Azerbaijan has an illusion that it can gain by negotiating with guns.

It does not come as a surprise that the Co-chairs directly called upon Azerbaijan to observe its commitments to the peaceful resolution of the conflict and to agree to the proposal on the creation of the mechanism of investigation of incidents, which Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh have long accepted. The Co-chairs have also stated that Baku's attempts to change the format or create parallel mechanisms can disrupt the negotiation process and impede progress towards a settlement. They called Azerbaijan to respect their mandate and the duties of the OSCE monitors.

Unlike Azerbaijan, Armenia has never criticized the Co-chairs. Attempts of Azerbaijan to blame the Co-chairs for setbacks in the negotiation process only mask the primary obstacle to peace – the lack of political will in Azerbaijan to reach a negotiated settlement.

Mr. Chairman,

The conflict resolution requires necessary political will which is manifested through unconditional adherence to the peace process, full implementation of the commitments, and readiness to build up trust. We have been witnessing time and again throughout the whole negotiation process the consistent efforts of Azerbaijan to disrespect prior agreements. Baku's refusal to accept proposals that are the product of the tireless efforts of about twenty summits, several dozen ministerial-level meetings, and innumerable visits of the three Co-Chairs to the region has inflicted a serious blow to the negotiation process and severely damaged the trust. Therefore, curbing Azerbaijan's destructive behavior at the negotiation table is key to the success of the peace process.

Armenia, unlike Azerbaijan, has stated many times that it is ready to continue negotiations, based on the proposals of the presidents of the Co-chair countries. As for Azerbaijan, it tries to present its distorted approaches as a position of the Co-Chairs, misinterpreting the ideas presented by foreign ministers, the statements adopted by the presidents of the Co-chair countries and even the UN Security Council resolutions. However, a mere glance reveals that the approaches of Azerbaijan contradict to the principles and elements of the five well-known statements of the heads of the Co-chair countries.

Needless to say that successful peaceful settlement requires cessation of hostilities on the ground, creation of the conditions conducive for negotiations, through full respect to the 1994 trilateral cease-fire agreement and the 1995 agreement on the consolidation of the cease-fire regime. These documents, which do not have time limitations, are agreed and signed by Nagorno-Karabakh, Azerbaijan and Armenia and are prerequisites of the peace efforts.

The OSCE can contribute to the peace process by reaffirming its support to the cease-fire agreements encouraging the implementation of the confidence and security building measures, reinforcing the office of the Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairman-in-Office on Nagorno-Karabakh as the only permanent presence on the ground in the conflict zone, through increasing the number of monitors, allocating more resources and technical means.

Mr. Chairman,

Azerbaijan tries to invoke the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in an effort to justify the noncompliance to the OSCE commitments. Likewise, Baku attempts to divert the attention from the outrageous human rights situation in Azerbaijan and the growing international criticism in this regard by escalating the military situation in the conflict zone. We are confident that the international reaction to Baku's policy of escalation of tensions should not be less targeted and strict as it is on the human rights situation in Azerbaijan.

Baku's consistent policy of reducing OSCE presence in the region is another worrying trend that cannot be disregarded. Having first downgraded and then closed the OSCE Office in Baku, imposing restrictions on ODIHR election monitoring mission, now Azerbaijan is trying to curtail activities of the Personal Representative as well. Apparently, Azerbaijan would prefer to continue its destructive policy without international witnesses. This applies also to the ICRC – the work of which Baku is continuously impeding and using for the purposes of propaganda. Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh have closely cooperated with the Red Cross to address humanitarian issues, particularly that of missing persons. We value this cooperation which should be always based on status neutral approach and impartiality.

Mr. Chairman,

Finally, I would like to brief you on the Constitutional referendum that will take place in Armenia in couple of days. The reform process is based on Armenia's commitment at development and consolidation of the democratic institutions and good governance,

protection and promotion of human rights, strengthening the rule of law, enhancing the independence of judiciary. According to the opinion of the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe the draft is of “extremely high quality” and “is in line with international standards”. We have invited the ODIHR and other international institutions to observe the referendum, not having a formal commitment to do so.

Mr. Chairman,

The ever evolving security environment makes it even more important to have a unifying agenda of cooperation at the OSCE. We stand with the incoming German Chairmanship in ensuring the unity of our efforts throughout three dimensions and enhancing the viability of this Organization and its capacity to strengthen the safety and security in the OSCE region.

Thank you.