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PERMANENT MISSION OF THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA TO THE OSCE

STATEMENT

**Installation of an illegal checkpoint by Azerbaijan in the Lachin Corridor in violation of its international obligations
as delivered by Ambassador Armen Papikyan
at the 1420th meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council**

27 April 2023

Mr. Chairperson,

The delegation of Armenia raises this current issue to draw the attention of the Permanent Council to the continued blockade of the Lachin Corridor and to the installation of an illegal checkpoint by Azerbaijan in the Lachin Corridor, the only life-line between Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia and the rest of the world, in flagrant violation of the paragraph 6 of the 9 November 2020 trilateral statement and the legally binding order of the International Court of Justice.

On 23 April, the militaries of Azerbaijan illegally installed a checkpoint in the Lachin Corridor and in the area of responsibility of the Russian peacekeeping contingent. With installation of the checkpoint the Azerbaijani authorities have now officially closed the Lachin Corridor, blocking not only the access to Nagorno-Karabakh but also putting four villages of Nagorno-Karabakh in complete isolation and no connection neither with Armenia nor with capital Stepanakert.

This is not yet another provocation, this is a gross violation of commitments under the Trilateral statement, the paragraph 6 of which reads, and I quote: “The Lachin Corridor (5 km wide), which will provide a connection between Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia. shall remain under the control of the Russian Federation peacekeeping forces” and “The Republic of Azerbaijan shall guarantee the security of persons, vehicles and cargo moving along the Lachin Corridor in both directions”.

I shall also once again recall that on 22 February, this year, the International Court of Justice issued a provisional measure, according to which Azerbaijan shall “take all measures at its disposal to ensure unimpeded movement of persons, vehicles and cargo along the Lachin Corridor in both directions”.

Thus, Azerbaijan fails to implement the Court’s legally binding Order and its commitment under the Trilateral statement, by closing the Lachin Corridor through the installation of

checkpoint and deployment of soldiers in the area that should be under the control of the Russian peacekeeping contingent.

Mr. Chairperson,

As per its usual tactics, Azerbaijan, prior to this illegal action, in an attempt to prepare grounds for its actions conducted disinformation campaign alleging that weapons, ammunition and military personnel were being transferred from Armenia to Nagorno-Karabakh accompanied by the Russian peacekeepers without presenting any evidence to substantiate these absurd claims and allegations.

Azerbaijan uses these spurious narratives to continue its aggressive policies. The false narratives and smear campaign of Azerbaijan on landmines become the last defense line to justify its numerous provocations against Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia. In this regard, let me recall the fact that the International Court of Justice twice rejected the Azerbaijani claims against Armenia related to the landmines. The last time such a decision was taken by the Court was on 22 February 2023, when the ICJ with unanimous vote rejected Azerbaijan's claims. Instead of implementing its commitments, Azerbaijan is engaged in manipulative interpretations, distortions and fabrications, including the so-called "landmines narrative", which, as we have seen, have little value in the court of law.

Furthermore, Armenia officially stated at the highest level and I would like to reiterate that Armenia has no military personnel in Nagorno-Karabakh and has not transferred any military personnel or equipment to Nagorno-Karabakh. By saying this, I should state that the Defense Army of Nagorno-Karabakh, which is under the command and control of the elected authorities of Nagorno-Karabakh, is the military force, which has been created during the first Nagorno-Karabakh war to defend its people from combined soviet-azerbaijani aggression. And in the face of the continued Azerbaijani aggression the Defense Army is indispensable.

Azerbaijan, by branding the Defense Army of Nagorno-Karabakh as Armenian military and pushing for their removal, pursues the goal of removing the last defensive capacity of the people of Nagorno-Karabakh, thus paving the way for unhindered and complete ethnic cleansing of the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh with impunity.

Let me recall that Armenia officially has proposed to send an international fact-finding mission to Lachin Corridor and Nagorno-Karabakh, which would monitor the situation on the ground and would serve as a reliable and unbiased source of information. However, Azerbaijani leadership repeatedly rejected this proposal, in particular, during the four-party meeting in Prague on 6 October 2022, which is rather indicative, since such a mission would completely refute all the Azerbaijani false claims and allegations. But no wonder, as we see, Azerbaijan tirelessly keeps repeating the same narrative.

Armenia's offer is still valid, since we firmly believe that such a mission not only would become a source of reliable information, but also would be a useful instrument to diffuse the tensions thus contributing to the creation of the atmosphere of trust.

Mr. Chairperson,

The Armenian delegation has been continuously raising this issue of the blockade of the Lachin Corridor at the Permanent Council to present in detail also the humanitarian consequences of the blockade and the deteriorating humanitarian crisis in Nagorno-Karabakh.

For 137 days now the people of Nagorno-Karabakh live under effective siege as a result of the blockade. Azerbaijan also continues to use energy warfare against Nagorno-Karabakh and since January damaging a high-voltage power transmission line from Armenia to Artsakh Azerbaijan to this date prevents any repair works. This has exacerbated the energy crisis in Nagorno-Karabakh given the fact of the complete disruption of gas supply.

Currently, the hydroelectric power station of the Sarsang reservoir is the main local supplier of electricity. However, the water level in Sarsang has dropped to an unprecedented low level. As of now, there is only 100 million cubic meters of water in the reservoir, which has a capacity of 600 million cubic meters. About 70% of the remaining water is in the dead volume, which cannot be used to generate electricity. The level of water is decreasing rapidly, and once it drops below a certain level, it will be impossible to operate the Sarsang hydroelectric power plant safely, and even the minimum energy needs of the population of Artsakh cannot be met.

Apart from targeting the critical infrastructure and impeding the supply of natural gas, electricity and connectivity for Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh), Azerbaijani side has also engaged in psychological warfare directed at the people of Artsakh and aimed at terrorizing and intimidating the civilian population. Azerbaijan announced at the highest level that it can lift the blockade for all those who want to leave Nagorno-Karabakh.

Mr. Chairperson,

We appreciate the prompt reactions from our international partners with unequivocal messages addressed to Azerbaijan on the unacceptability of the installation of the checkpoint and continued disruption of the traffic along the Lachin Corridor. At the same time Armenia believes that the time has come to move from words to actions and to targeted sanctions against Azerbaijan.

We also call on the Russian Federation to fulfill the obligation under paragraph 6 of the Trilateral statement by eliminating the illegal blockade of the Lachin Corridor and ensuring the withdrawal of Azerbaijani forces from the entire security zone of the corridor.

The continuous illegal blockade of the Lachin Corridor under fabricated environmental narratives and the installation of a checkpoint under false and groundless pretexts today are aimed at the consistent implementation of Azerbaijan's policy of ethnic cleansing in Nagorno-Karabakh with complete annihilation of Armenians from Nagorno-Karabakh. This intention has been clearly stated by the President of Azerbaijan.

We have been warning the Permanent Council about the intentions of Azerbaijan. By now, and in light of complete blockade of the Lachin Corridor by Azerbaijani military, it should be beyond any doubt of the international community that Azerbaijan's premeditated, carefully planned and executed efforts clearly demonstrate their intent to completely destroy the people of Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh) by inflicting on them conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part or to achieve its forced displacement which is a crime, punishable under international law.

Armenia, as a signatory to the November 9 Trilateral statement, considers the installation of a checkpoint in the Lachin Corridor by Azerbaijan unacceptable and demands the immediate withdrawal of Azerbaijani forces from the entire security zone of the Corridor.

This illegal installation of the checkpoint by Azerbaijan, as well as the previous similar actions are aimed at disrupting negotiations on normalization of relations between Armenia

and Azerbaijan and demonstrate that this country is not committed to working collectively towards establishing peace and security in the South Caucasus.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairperson, I would like to reiterate the steadfast commitment of the Government of Armenia to the peace agenda and its readiness to continue its efforts towards normalization of relations with Azerbaijan. However, for maintaining a constructive dialogue in pursuit of sustainable peace and stability and development in the South Caucasus we need an environment free from hate speech, from warmongering rhetoric, from threats or use of force.

I kindly ask you to attach this statement to the journal of today's meeting.

I thank you.