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PERMANENT MISSION OF THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA TO THE OSCE

Statement
" Humanitarian Crisis in Nagorno-Karabakh "
as delivered by Ambassador Armen Papikyan
at the 1410th meeting of the Permanent Council

09 February, 2023

Mr. Chairperson,

The delegation of Armenia raises this current issue to once again draw the attention of the Permanent Council to the continued blockade by Azerbaijan of the Lachin Corridor and the resulting humanitarian crisis in Nagorno-Karabakh.

For 60 days Azerbaijan is keeping the entire population of Artsakh hostage in clear violation of international human rights law, international humanitarian law and of paragraph 6 of the 9 November, 2020 Trilateral Statement.

Since December 12, 2022, Azerbaijan has disrupted the operation of the Stepanakert-Goris (Artsakh-Armenia) highway, the only road linking Artsakh with Armenia and the rest of the world. As a result, 120,000 people of Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh) are now entirely encircled by Azerbaijan, completely cut off from access to the outside world.

For two months now people are deprived of their fundamental right to free movement which consequently restricts such rights as right to family and private life, the right to education, right to medical care, the right to food.

I would like to bring to the attention of the OSCE participating States some statistics which reflects the dire humanitarian situation on the ground.

As a result of the blockade 120,000 people of Nagorno-Karabakh, including 30,000 children, 20,000 elderlies, 9000 people with disabilities face the risk of malnutrition. Tens of thousands of tons of vital supplies due to the blockade have not reached Artsakh. Grocery store shelves are almost empty and food is rationed.

Throughout the almost two months of criminal blockade, no private vehicle, civilian or commercial traffic was able to pass through the Lachin Corridor due to the overall

security risks created by the agents of the Government of Azerbaijan in civilian clothes, who present themselves as “eco-activists”.

After long mediation, only a limited number of vehicles of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) were allowed to communicate between Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh) and Armenia through the Lachin corridor, which have delivered limited amount of food and medicine to Artsakh, mostly distributed to healthcare institutions, maternity ward and groups of people with specific needs.

Besides the ICRC, the vehicles of the Russian Peacekeeping Contingent (RPC) were also allowed access to Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh) for the supply of the peacekeeping contingent with their daily necessities. On a few occasions, the RPC has distributed a limited amount of food packages to the local residents.

Around 590 people are deprived of receiving necessary medical treatment due to suspension of all planned surgeries in the hospitals of Artsakh. Nine children are in the neonatal and in the intensive care units at Children’s hospital. Seven adult patients are in the intensive care units, three of whom are in a critical condition. Pharmacies are running out of medicine. A death has already been registered and numerous others are at the risk of similar fate. As of today 76 critically ill patients who require urgent treatment in Armenia are trapped in Nagorno-Karabakh. Transportation of very limited numbers of patients from Artsakh to Armenia continues to be carried out exclusively by the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Russian peacekeeping forces.

41 kindergartens, 20 day-schools have been completely closed since January 9, as a result more than 5,528 children are deprived of proper care and education.

Hundreds of businesses have been closed consequently at least more than 5,100 people have lost their jobs and their income.

Mr. Chairperson,

This tactic of medieval siege of Azerbaijan is aimed to achieve its primary goal – to ethnically cleanse the Nagorno-Karabakh of its people. At the same time Azerbaijan is also using the systematic disruption of the critical infrastructure, such as gas pipeline and electricity transmission lines, as an additional leverage in its hybrid warfare against Nagorno-Karabakh. Psychological warfare is another tool in the arsenal of the Azerbaijani political leadership.

Azerbaijan hopes that by making the life of the people of Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh) intolerable, by creating unbearable living conditions and increasing the suffering of people in freezing winter conditions, it could either forcefully subjugate them or

pressure them to leave. We have seen numerous statements, including at the highest political level of that country, where this policy goal is clearly and equivocally expressed.

Mr. Chairperson,

This situation on the ground is the result of the war of aggression unleashed by Azerbaijan in 2020 against Artsakh and its people. As a result, Azerbaijan now controls not only several regions of Artsakh, but also the critical infrastructure that was built for the last 30 years.

The 9 November 2020 trilateral statement contains a number of commitments and stipulations that the Azerbaijani side purposefully failed to implement. On the contrary, Azerbaijan has used and abused the trilateral statement to further advance its aggression and unsubstantiated claims, including territorial ones, against Artsakh and Armenia proper.

To recall, in May and November 2021, as well as in September 2022 Azerbaijan staged aggression and attacks against the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Armenia, resulting in occupation of Armenia's territories.

In violation of international humanitarian law and the November 9 Trilateral Statement, Azerbaijan continues to hold Armenian prisoners of war and civilians as hostages, and the fate of many forcibly disappeared remains unknown.

The destruction of the Armenian historical-cultural and religious heritage of Nagorno-Karabakh is ongoing in the territories fallen under the Azerbaijani control. Azerbaijan is still rejecting the deployment of UNESCO fact-finding mission to Nagorno-Karabakh and the surrounding territories.

Mr. Chairperson,

Emboldened by the results of the use of force in the past and impunity for violation of norms and principles of Helsinki Final Act and its OSCE commitments, Azerbaijan now seeks to normalize violence and aggression and to impose unilateral solutions and conduct the policy of ethnic cleansing of the Armenian people of Nagorno-Karabakh.

In parallel, almost on a daily basis Azerbaijani propaganda machine spreads anti-Armenian narratives and conducts aggressive disinformation campaigns, using for this purpose the geopolitical tensions and controversies in the region.

The blockade is imposed by Azerbaijan in conjunction with other coercive measures such as the regular disruptions of natural gas supply and damaging of the electricity transmission line from Armenia to Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh), causing further

hardships for the people of Artsakh in subzero winter temperatures. Those actions clearly demonstrate that the final goal of Azerbaijan remains the complete destruction of 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 deportation which is a crime, punishable under international law.

Azerbaijan should immediately and unconditionally unblock the Lachin Corridor in line with the para 6 of the 9 November 2020 trilateral statement, which stipulates that Azerbaijan shall guarantee the safety of movement of citizens, vehicles and cargo through the Lachin Corridor, and that the Lachin Corridor shall remain under the control of the peacekeeping contingent of the Russian Federation deployed in Nagorno-Karabakh.

The strong and clear messages from the OSCE participating States, on issues of utmost importance to my country are truly important. We appreciate the unambiguous statements and positions of many OSCE participating States expressed so far which called upon Azerbaijan to immediately and without preconditions lift the blockade and ensure the free and unimpeded movement through the Lachin Corridor. I would encourage OSCE participating States to further increase the pressure on Azerbaijan for it to comply with its own commitments.

At the same time, we firmly believe that the OSCE and other international presence on the ground, including the deployment of an international fact-finding mission to the Lachin corridor and Nagorno-Karabakh, is of vital importance to prevent the escalation of the situation and prospect of new aggression and war.

In order to avert the unfolding humanitarian disaster and prevent further escalation with detrimental impact on the prospects of regional peace and stability, the international community should urgently take unambiguous stance and targeted actions to condemn and punish Azerbaijan in order to prevent the ethnic cleansing of Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh) of its native Armenian people and their eventual extermination.

The government of Armenia remains committed to its peace agenda and continues to pursue the normalization of relations with Azerbaijan. Armenia has repeatedly announced its readiness for constructive dialogue in an environment free from hate speech, preconditions and warmongering rhetoric, for the sake of sustainable peace and development in the South Caucasus.

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

I thank you.