

STATEMENT BY H.E. MR. EDWARD NALBANDIAN

MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA
AT THE 71TH SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY
GENERAL DEBATE

Mr. President,
Secretary General,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to congratulate and wish success to Peter Thomson, the President of this session and to thank his predecessor Mogens Lykkesøft.

I would also like to take this opportunity to express our high appreciation to the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his able leadership.

Mr. President,

Two days ago, Armenia celebrated the 25th anniversary of its independence. In this relatively short period of time much has been done to strengthen democratic institutions, rule of law, good governance, protect human rights and advance economic reforms.

We have been able to make a significant progress also with regard to the social and economic development agenda. However, challenges still remain. The needs of the most socially vulnerable groups have been placed in the center of Armenia's Prospective Development Strategy for 2014-2025. Likewise, our Government has launched the Plan of Actions for its National Strategy on Human Rights Protection. In this regard, Armenia continues actively working with all UN human rights mechanisms, including special procedures and treaty bodies.

Our new constitutional reform, which followed an inclusive process of broad public discussions aimed at achieving a new and improved governance system with increased transparency and accountability, was approved at a nation-wide referendum last December and welcomed by relevant international bodies.

Mr. President,

The United Nations has a considerable role to play in changing the environment conducive to intolerance, racial discrimination, xenophobia, violent extremism and terrorism.

On numerous occasions Armenia has condemned the crimes committed by DAESH, other terrorist groups, which threaten the peoples of the region and beyond. The war in Syria has a devastating impact on its civilian population, including national and religious minorities who face existential threats due to identity based crimes. The violence has not bypassed Syrian-Armenians, many of whom lost their lives. The Armenian settlements, churches, schools and cultural institutions were destroyed. One hundred years ago Armenian refugees found shelter in many Arab countries after the Armenian Genocide. Today thousands of Armenians, together with other people of the Middle East, again are forced to flee their homes. From Syria alone more than 20 thousand found refuge in Armenia. Therefore, we know what it means to be a refugee and to host refugees.

The Government of Armenia has undertaken considerable efforts in assisting the refugees and facilitating their integration. We believe that wider international cooperation is needed to adequately address the challenges posed by massive displacement. The full implementation of the commitments of the New York Declaration on refugees and migrants adopted few days ago by this august body stands as an important milestone in this regard.

We would like to stress the significance of addressing the root causes of large movements of people through the prevention of crimes against humanity, peaceful settlement of disputes and achievement of lasting political solutions.

Mr. President,

Armenia has been continuously supporting and contributing to the elaboration of the mechanisms of prevention, in particular by regularly initiating Resolutions on the Prevention of Genocide in the Human Rights Council.

As a nation who experienced the first genocide of the 20th century and continues to face the denial of this horror, Armenia reaffirms its strong support to the fight against impunity for genocide. 2016 marks the first anniversary of the UN General Assembly Resolution initiated by Armenia, proclaiming December 9th as an International Day of Commemoration and Dignity of the Victims of Genocide.

As the threat of violence continues to spread in different parts of the world it is crucial to make our joint efforts for peace and security more efficient. It is with this understanding that Armenia has participated in a number of UN and UN-mandated Peace Operations, thus actively contributing in the most direct way to the building of international peace and security. As the UN Assistant Secretary General noted "Armenia's support is important not only for its contribution but also for the Armenian history and the challenges overcome during it". Indeed, history teaches us that the security of one is closely connected to others.

Mr. President,

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the adoption of the International Covenants on Human Rights, as well as the 30th anniversary of the Declaration on the Right to Development. These major documents proclaim that "All peoples have the right of self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development." It is well known that the UN Charter underlines the respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples as a purpose of this organization.

Aggressive military response of the state to the peaceful aspiration of people to exercise their right to self-determination only legitimizes such aspiration and deprives the aggressor of any claim to authority over such people. The UN Expert on the promotion of a democratic and equitable international order rightly stated that rather than perceiving self-determination as a source of conflict, armed conflict should be seen as a consequence of the violation of the right to self-determination.

Azerbaijan stubbornly refuses to recognize the right of the people of Nagorno-Karabakh to self-determination. As part of Azerbaijan's policy of ethnic cleansing and aggression, starting from the late 80s and beginning of 90s Armenians were massacred and expelled from their homes. Nobel Peace Prize winner Andrei Sakharov called it a threat of a new genocide of the Armenian people.

This year again, in early April in blatant violation of the cease-fire agreement, Azerbaijan unleashed another large scale aggression against Nagorno-Karabakh, indiscriminately targeting civilian infrastructures and population. Among the victims were a 12 year old boy and 92 year old woman. Three captive soldiers of the Nagorno-Karabakh armed forces were beheaded in DAESH style, which was subsequently demonstrated in towns and villages and publicized through social networks. Furthermore, the leader of

Azerbaijan publically decorated the perpetrators of this crime. During the exchange of bodies of the deceased between Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijan, carried out through the mediation of the International Committee of the Red Cross, it was registered that the corpses transferred from the Azerbaijani side had undeniable signs of torture and were mutilated. Such despicable atrocities go beyond elementary norms of the civilized world and constitute gross violations of international humanitarian law.

The April aggression severely undermined the peace process. To restore the trust in peaceful resolution of the conflict measures should be taken to prevent the use of force and to create conditions conducive to the advancement of the peace process. This was the main aim of two Summits on Nagorno-Karabakh held in Vienna in May and in St. Petersburg in June. First of all, it is imperative to implement what was particularly emphasized and agreed upon at these Summits - first, the full adherence to the 1994-1995 trilateral ceasefire agreements, which do not have time limitations; second, the creation of mechanism for investigation of ceasefire violations; third, the expansion of the capacity of the Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office.

Against all odds the people of Nagorno-Karabakh have been able to defend themselves and create a free and democratic society.

Armenia, together with the mediator countries - Russia, the United States and France – the Co-Chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group, will continue its efforts towards exclusively peaceful resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

The Co-Chairs have proclaimed a rather civilized formula for the settlement – ballots instead of bullets. The proposal outlined by the presidents of the Co-Chair countries stipulates future determination of the final legal status of Nagorno-Karabakh through a legally binding expression of will of its population. The mentality that supports medieval barbarism, as witnessed in April, can hardly accept the civilized approaches of the modern world.

Mr. President,

Armenia welcomes the integration of the Vienna Programme of Action for the Landlocked Developing Countries into the Agenda 2030 as an important step to promote sustainable and inclusive development. To ensure the effective implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action and mainstream it into our policies, the Government of Armenia has recently adopted a national strategy for its implementation. We deplore

policies that stipulate unilateral economic measures as an instrument of political pressure.

Agenda 2030 reconfirms once again that such measures are detrimental to sustainable development. The unilateral land blockade of Armenia by Turkey is a gross violation of international law. It continues to severely hamper regional transit communication routes, economic cooperation and integration.

Mr. President,

Armenia welcomes the central role of the United Nations in the implementation of the new and comprehensive Agenda. We do not underestimate the challenges facing all of us - equally we should not downplay the opportunities. More than seven decades on, we must show the same insight and vision to safeguard the future of this Organization and ensure the best possible future for the peoples of the United Nations. Armenia is fully committed to these goals.

Thank you.