

Statement of H.E. Mr. Ararat Mirzoyan, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia, at the 78th session of the United Nations General Assembly

Honorable Mr. President,

Excellences,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, let me congratulate Mr. Dennis Francis on assuming the Presidency of the 78th session of the United Nations General Assembly.

I will not be the first and definitely not the last speaker in this august body who will identify global threats for democracies, challenges for security, violations of the principles and purposes of the UN Charter, including non-use of force and peaceful resolution of conflicts as a main source of instability and tension in the world.

The devastating developments of the past years, which disrupted the security architecture in the world and especially in Europe, have significantly damaged multilateralism. If a couple of years ago we were contemplating the decline of multilateralism, today we see erosion of that very tenet and its foundation such as international law, human rights and cooperative security.

This is not just a theoretical inference but a reality with which the Armenian people in the South Caucasus are coping for the last three years. The repetitive aggression of Azerbaijan against the sovereign territory of the Republic of Armenia and military attacks against the people of Nagorno-Karabakh significantly disrupts peace and stability in our region, massively violates human rights and humanitarian law representing existential threat for Armenians.

My government, having a sincere belief and aspiration to establish peace and stability in our region, has made significant and duly recorded efforts to this end. Alas, we do not have a partner for peace but a country who openly declares that “Might has Right” and constantly uses force to disrupt the peace process. Literally a year ago, from this very stage the PM of Armenia presented the fact of aggression and occupation of the Republic of Armenia’s sovereign territories by neighboring Azerbaijan. Since then, the situation has deteriorated even more and today I have to present yet another very recent act of large-scale offensive, this time against the indigenous people of Nagorno-Karabakh, in blatant violation of the international law and Trilateral Statement of November 9, 2020.

It happened this week and the timing was not accidental. It shows open disregard and defiance of Azerbaijan against the international community who gathered here in New York. The

message is clear: you can talk about peace and we can go to war and you will not be able to change anything. The 120,000 people, whose sole aspiration is to live and create in peace and dignity in their ancestral homeland and who have already been suffering under the 9-month blockade and siege by Azerbaijan, were subjected to military attack by tens of thousands of troops. In the course of this inhumane attack, the whole territory of Nagorno-Karabakh, Stepanakert and other towns and settlements came under intense and indiscriminate shelling with heavy weaponry such as rockets, artillery, combat UAVs, aviation, including prohibited cluster munition.

This atrocious large-scale offensive which claimed hundreds of lives, including of women and children, was cynically defined as a local counter terrorist operation. According to the recent information there are confirmed cases of more than 200 killed and 400 wounded, including among civilian population, women and children, also accepted by the Azerbaijani Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The fate of hundreds of people is uncertain.

As I speak today, 30 percent of the population of Nagorno-Karabakh is displaced. The entire population of Nagorno-Karabakh remains without any means of subsistence, as just limited humanitarian assistance has been able to enter into Nagorno-Karabakh. There is no food, no medicine, no shelter, no place to go, separated from their families, terrorized and scared for their lives.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The policy and actions of Azerbaijan for the last 9 months, evidently demonstrate the pre-planned and well-orchestrated nature of this mass atrocity. On December 12, 2022, Azerbaijan blockaded the Lachin Corridor - the only road, the lifeline connecting Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia and the outer world, in blatant violation of its obligations under the international humanitarian law and the Trilateral Statement of 9 November 2020. The blockade was further consolidated by the installation of illegal check-point since April 23, as well as with the complete cessation of any movement, even for humanitarian aid through the Corridor since June 15.

The 9 months-long blockade of Nagorno-Karabakh caused a severe shortage of food, medical supplies, fuel and other essential goods, almost depleting the resources necessary for the survival of the population. The blockade was accompanied by deliberate disruption of electricity and natural gas supplies, further exacerbating the situation into a full-fledged humanitarian crisis.

I would like to emphasize that on 22 February, 2023 the International Court of Justice indicated a provisional measure, according to which (and I quote) “Azerbaijan shall take all measures to ensure unimpeded movement of persons, vehicles and cargo along the Lachin Corridor in both directions” (end of quote). This order was later reconfirmed by the Court’s order of 6 July.

A number of partner states, international organizations, including UN Special Rapporteurs, the International Committee of the Red Cross, Human Rights Watch, Freedom House, Amnesty International, Transparency International had been continuously voicing an alarm about the deteriorating situation on the ground. Moreover, on August 16, during the emergency meeting of the United Nations Security Council conveyed by the request of Armenia, the majority of UNSC member states expressed clear position regarding the need to unblock the Lachin Corridor and halt the suffering of the people of Nagorno-Karabakh and ensure their fundamental human rights. Whereas, in response to these clear-cut calls, Azerbaijan has worsened its inhumane actions by launching this military attack against the people of Nagorno-Karabakh.

On September 21, 2023, the United Nations Security Council gathered once again to discuss the devastating situation in Nagorno-Karabakh. The majority of the UNSC members expressed their position regarding the imperative of cessation of hostilities by Azerbaijan, opening of the Lachin corridor, ensuring international humanitarian access and addressing the rights and security of the people of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The chronology of truly devastating developments in our region come to prove that the issues cannot be addressed merely with statements and generic calls. Armenia has repeatedly warned the international community about the need for concrete and practical action, including the dispatching of a UN inter-agency needs assessment and fact-finding mission to Nagorno-Karabakh. But the international community, the United Nations failed to come to the rescue of people for the last 9 months, 285 days.

The use of starvation as a method of warfare, depriving people of their means of subsistence, obstruction and denial of humanitarian access of UN agencies, hindering the ICRC humanitarian activities, constitute early warning signs of an atrocity crime. A number of international human rights organizations, lawyers, genocide scholars, reputable independent experts, including the former ICC Prosecutor and the former Special Advisor of the UN

Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide have already characterized the situation on the ground in Nagorno-Karabakh as a risk of genocide. Just yesterday, the Special Advisor of the UN Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide Alice Wairimu Nderitu stressed and I quote: “Military action can only contribute to escalate what is already a tense situation and to put the civilian population in the area at risk of violence, including risk of genocide and related atrocity crimes. All efforts need to be made to prevent violence and sustain peace”, end of quote.

Let me draw your attention to the fact that after failure of preventing Genocide in Rwanda, the United Nations managed to create mechanisms for prevention, thus making the “never again” a meaningful pledge. But today we are at the brink of another failure.

The people of Nagorno-Karabakh, trapped in this inhumane blockade and hostilities inflicted by Azerbaijan and under the threat of their very existence, still hope that prevention will not remain a feature of language, but will become a line of actions.

The claims that the United Nations is not present on the ground, so has no capacity to verify the situation cannot be an excuse for inaction. The United Nations is a universal body, which should stand with the victims of mass atrocity crimes all over the world regardless of the status of territory instead of delivering dismissive statements.

We are hopeful that the international community, namely the UN will demonstrate a strong political will to condemn the resumption of hostilities and targeting of civilian settlements and infrastructure and demand full compliance with obligations under the international humanitarian law, including those related to the protection of civilians, in particular women and children, and critical civilian infrastructure,

The international community should undertake all the efforts for an immediate deployment of an interagency mission by the UN to Nagorno-Karabakh with the aim to monitor and assess the human rights, humanitarian and security situation on the ground. The unimpeded access of the UN agencies and other international organizations to Nagorno-Karabakh in line with the humanitarian principles are an imperative. In this regard we also stress the need to ensure full cooperation of the parties in good faith with the International Committee of the Red Cross to address the consequences of the military attack, including the removal and identification of the bodies, search and rescue of missing personnel and civilians, release of POWs, safe and unimpeded delivery of humanitarian assistance, in strict compliance with the international humanitarian law.

Azerbaijan must finally adhere to its legally binding obligations and ensure freedom of movement of persons, vehicles and cargo, along the Lachin corridor, in line with the ICJ orders.

We firmly believe that relevant mechanisms must be introduced to ensure the return of persons displaced in the course of the recent military attack, as well as persons and refugees displaced as a result of 2020 war, to their homes in the territory of Nagorno Karabakh and adjacent regions under the monitoring and control of the UN relevant agencies, as it was foreseen in the Trilateral Statement of November 9, 2020.

A sustainable and viable international mechanism for preventing the ethnic cleansing of the indigenous population of Nagorno-Karabakh and for ensuring dialogue between representatives of Nagorno-Karabakh and official Baku to address the issues related to rights and security of the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh is an imperative. Furthermore, excluding punitive actions against NK political and military representatives and personnel should be guaranteed.

We also believe that the international community must demand the exit of any Azerbaijani military and law-enforcement bodies from all civilian settlements in NK to exclude panic, provocations and escalation, endangering civilian population and create a possibility for a United Nations-mandated Peacekeeping Force to keep stability and security in Nagorno Karabakh.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The ethnic cleansing policy against Nagorno-Karabakh is just a part of a bigger picture. In this regard we clearly see an intention to involve the Republic of Armenia in military actions thus widening the geography of hostilities into our sovereign territories.

The unwillingness of Azerbaijan to genuinely and constructively engage in the peace process with Armenia, including to recognize the territorial integrity of the Republic of Armenia, withdraw its Armed forces from the occupied territories of Armenia, delimitate the Armenian-Azerbaijani interstate borders based on the latest available maps from 1975 corresponding with Almaty 1991 declaration, create a demilitarized zone along the interstate border, clearly illustrates the mentioned intentions.

Likewise, Azerbaijan has a hidden agenda when it comes to unblocking regional transport and economic communications. As a landlocked country, Armenia is vitally interested in implementation of the agreement on the unblocking of all the regional communications on the basis of sovereignty, national jurisdiction, equality and reciprocity. Armenia is a long-standing advocate of the inclusive and equitable transport connectivity with the view to promote trade, cooperation and people-to-people contacts, whereas our neighbors continue to impose the three decades-long blockade of Armenia, as part of its well-established policy of economic coercion of my country. The so-called “corridor” logic promoted by Baku and their hidden and open

sponsors is aimed at undermining the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Armenia and justifying its territorial claims. The narrative generated by them along with the use of force by Azerbaijan both against the Republic of Armenia and the people of Nagorno-Karabakh shows that forcefully imposing on Armenia an extraterritorial corridor, a corridor that will pass through the territory of Armenia but will be out of our control can be the next target. This is unacceptable for us and should be unacceptable for international community.

Mr. President,

Despite all the challenges Armenia continues to engage in the negotiations to achieve normalization of relations and establishment of lasting peace and supports the efforts of the international partners to this end. Respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty within the internationally recognized borders, addressing the underlying causes of the conflict, namely the rights and security of the people of Nagorno-Karabakh are the foundation of a lasting peace.

In the end, let me state that the people of Armenia will firmly stand for our sovereignty, independence and democracy and will overcome the hybrid-war unleashed against us.

I thank you.