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Agenda items 34, 71, 114 and 135

Prevention of armed conflict

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**The responsibility to protect and the prevention of
genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes
against humanity**

**Security Council
Seventy-fifth year**

Letter dated 31 October 2020 from the Permanent Representative of Armenia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I am writing to you with regard to the ongoing large-scale military aggression by Azerbaijan against the people of Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh).

It has been over a month since Azerbaijan unleashed a pre-planned large-scale war against the people of Artsakh with the open and direct military support of Turkey and the involvement of foreign terrorist fighters and mercenaries from the Middle East. Throughout this period, Azerbaijan has launched massive targeted air bombardments, artillery and missile strikes on more than 120 settlements in Artsakh, including the capital city Stepanakert, as well as Martakert, Martuni, Shushi and Hadrut. The indiscriminate attacks have resulted in the killing of 43 civilians, including women and children and other vulnerable persons, with hundreds of injured.

Since the outbreak of the offensive on 27 September, Azerbaijan has been using all types of heavy weaponry, including multiple-launch rocket systems, artillery, missiles, various types of uncrewed aerial vehicles and military aircraft, including F-16 fighters of the Turkish air forces, attack helicopters and banned cluster munitions to conduct targeted attacks on the civilian population. Hundreds of cluster bomblets and sub-munitions spread across civilian settlements in Artsakh are causing a serious security risk to civilians, in particular children.

Azerbaijan's attacks have inflicted massive damage on residential buildings, schools, kindergartens, hospitals, water and gas pipelines and electricity networks, causing a humanitarian crisis in Artsakh and putting in danger the lives of 150,000 people in Artsakh. Perpetrated amid the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, Azerbaijan's military aggression has led to the destruction of critical civilian



infrastructure, including health-care institutions, severely limiting the capacities of the authorities to contain and respond to the spread of COVID-19.

In the past few days, the armed forces of Azerbaijan have intensified the bombardments and shelling of the capital Stepanakert, the second largest city of Nagorno-Karabakh, Shushi, and other settlements. Among the most recent civilian targets is the maternity hospital of Stepanakert, which has come under deliberate strike causing most tragic casualties among the civilian population.

The ancient Armenian cultural heritage of Artsakh has come under imminent threat, as deliberate attacks were launched at one of the Armenian landmark religious sites, the Holy Saviour Ghazanchetsots Cathedral, located in the cultural capital of Artsakh, Shushi, causing significant damage to this magnificent structure. The air strike led to the wounding of foreign journalists and civilians who were seeking shelter in the Cathedral.¹ Such actions openly replicate the style of international terrorist organizations responsible for the destruction of historical monuments and religious sites in the Middle East.

All the available evidence clearly indicates that the Azerbaijani attacks have been planned well in advance and constitute nothing short of an offensive campaign directed against the defending Nagorno-Karabakh with the aim of seizing territory by force and conducting ethnic cleansing. There is no shortage of credible evidence that these criminal actions are being carried out with the direct involvement of thousands of foreign terrorist fighters and mercenaries recruited and transferred to the conflict zone by Turkey.²

Since July, Ankara-affiliated private contractors have initiated the recruitment of foreign terrorist fighters from conflict zones in the Middle East and North Africa to transfer them to Azerbaijan. The recruitment has taken place mainly in the Turkish-controlled Syrian territories of Idlib and Aleppo provinces. Thousands of members of Al Nusra Front, Sultan Murad, Al Hamza and other Turkish-backed terrorist organizations have been concentrated in Azerbaijan and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict zone. The tracking of the fighters' personal data demonstrates that many of them have been previously engaged in conflicts in Syria, Iraq and Libya. The recruitment and transfer of foreign terrorist fighters by Turkey has been acknowledged by several countries and continues to be extensively reported and documented by independent observers on the ground and the international media.^{3,4,5}

The destabilizing role of Turkey in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict also extends to a point of direct engagement in the military operations of the Azerbaijani army conducted under the command and control of Turkish high-ranking officers. Turkish uncrewed aerial vehicles and their operators, as well as F-16 fighters of the Turkish air forces are directly involved in the hostilities in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict zone. After several days of desperate attempts to deny Turkey's engagement, in the face of the mounting evidence, the leader of Azerbaijan was eventually compelled to acknowledge the fact of the Turkish military presence.⁶ At the instigation of Turkey, Azerbaijan aims to expand the area of hostilities to the territory of Armenia by targeting border settlements and infrastructure in the Gegarkunik and Syunik regions

¹ See <https://artsakhombuds.am/en/document/740>.

² See www.reuters.com/article/armenia-azerbaijan-turkey-syria-int/turkey-deploying-syrianfighters-to-help-ally-azerbaijan-two-fighters-say-idUSKBN26J258.

³ See www.france24.com/en/20201002-macron-reprimands-turkey-accusing-erdogan-of-sending-jihadists-to-azerbaijan.

⁴ See <https://tass.com/world/1209115>.

⁵ See www.theguardian.com/world/2020/oct/02/syrian-recruit-describes-role-of-foreign-fighters-in-nagorno-karabakh.

⁶ See <https://en.president.az/articles/44435>.

of Armenia.⁷ Armenia resolutely rejects the actions of Turkey aimed at destabilizing the region and projecting its influence through proxy terrorist organizations.

At present, the hateful and overtly anti-Armenian, racist rhetoric dominating the political discourse of the Azerbaijani and Turkish leaderships has reached unprecedented levels, constituting all elements of incitement to violence as a significant indicator of clearly detectable risk of atrocity crimes. In both countries, high-ranking officials have been using most inflammatory, derogatory language in relation to the Armenians, such as “cancer”,⁸ “rats”,⁹ “dogs”¹⁰ and other forms of dehumanization.

Well in line with the long-standing policy of incitement to ethnic hatred, the ongoing aggression against Nagorno-Karabakh is being accompanied by instances of executions of civilian population by the Azerbaijani military and their external supporters. On 10 October, an Azerbaijani subversive group penetrated Hadrut city and committed atrocity crimes, executing at least four civilians, including a woman and a disabled person. There is vast evidence of torture, inhuman, degrading treatment of prisoners of war and mutilation of bodies of military personnel. Reports of the human rights defenders of Armenia and Artsakh, which have been shared with the membership, contain documented and verified information in this regard.¹¹

Despite the calls of the international community to immediately cease hostilities, Azerbaijan has been consistently undermining all ceasefire and mediation efforts. The establishment of a humanitarian ceasefire on 10 October in accordance with the agreement reached by the foreign ministers of the Russian Federation, the Republic of Armenia and the Republic of Azerbaijan in Moscow,¹² which was reaffirmed in the statement issued in Paris on 17 October¹³ and reiterated on 25 October, through the joint statement of the United States, Armenia and Azerbaijan,¹⁴ remains unimplemented, demonstrating Azerbaijan’s inability to respect its own obligations. Moreover, despite the agreement to take a number of steps on an urgent basis, including not to deliberately target civilian populations, reached on 30 October in Geneva, Azerbaijan resumed targeted attacks on the capital city of Nagorno-Karabakh, Stepanakert, and other settlements, causing civilian casualties and severe damage to vital infrastructure. On 30 October, reports emerged on the use by the armed forces of Azerbaijan of munitions containing chemical elements of white phosphorus causing forest fires and potentially environmental disaster.

We appreciate the strong support voiced by the Secretary-General to the mediation efforts and the calls for immediate cessation of hostilities and urgent resumption of a dialogue without preconditions under the auspices of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Minsk Group Co-Chairs.

In the face of the ongoing violence, atrocities and deteriorating humanitarian situation, it is long overdue for the international community to explicitly condemn the party responsible for unleashing armed aggression, violating the ceasefire

⁷ See A/75/495-S/2020/981.

⁸ See www.duvarenglish.com/diplomacy/2020/10/13/armenia-has-cancer-and-its-chemo-includes-enmity-against-turkey-turkish-nationalist-party-head/.

⁹ See https://azertag.az/ru/xeber/Intervyu_Prezidenta_Ilhama_Alieva_rossiiskomu_agentstvu_Interfaks_OBNOVLENO-1626301.

¹⁰ See <https://defence.az/en/news/146240/president-aliyev-azerbaijani-soldiers-drive-them-away-like-dogs>.

¹¹ See <https://artsakhombuds.am/en/document/735>.

¹² Available at www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/4377004.

¹³ Available at www.mfa.am/en/interviews-articles-and-comments/2020/10/17/cf/10537.

¹⁴ Available at www.state.gov/u-s-armenia-azerbaijan-joint-statement/.

agreements, obstructing the establishment of a ceasefire verification mechanism and continuing military offensive.

I kindly request that the present letter be circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda items 34, 71, 114 and 135, and of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Mher **Margaryan**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative
