



**THE PERMANENT MISSION OF THE REPUBLIC OF AZERBAIJAN
TO THE UNITED NATIONS**

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**Statement by H.E. Mr. Yashar Aliyev
Permanent Representative of the Republic of Azerbaijan to the United Nations
at the Security Council open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict**

23 May 2019

Mr. President,

At the outset, I would like to thank the Government of the Republic of Indonesia for convening this important open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

This year marks several important anniversaries in the protection of civilians, namely, the adoption of the 1949 Geneva Conventions, a cornerstone of international humanitarian law, the holding by the Security Council of its first open debate on the topic in February 1999, with a presidential statement as its outcome (S/PRS/1999/6), the adoption later that year of the first Security Council resolution on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, resolution 1265 (1999), and the authorization, in resolution 1270 (1999), of a UN peacekeeping operation with the explicit mandate to protect civilians under Chapter VII of the UN Charter.

However, civilians continue to suffer from inadequate protection in situations of armed conflict. A defining feature of most, if not all, conflicts is still the failure of the parties to respect and ensure respect for their obligations to protect civilians. Indeed, as the concept note points out (S/2019/385), ensuring the implementation of international humanitarian law are the central challenges today and should be the key priorities of Member States for the years ahead.

Fundamental to enhancing respect for international law is the need to ensure accountability for wrongdoings. It is critical that peace efforts under no pretext encourage, accept or tolerate the situations achieved by the unlawful use of force and other egregious violations of general international law, such as war crimes, crimes against humanity, ethnic cleansing and genocide.

Azerbaijan supports the increased focus on the problem of forced displacement as a result of armed conflict. There is a need for strengthened efforts to prevent, address and resolve the challenges of such displacement, particularly by supporting the return of refugees and internally displaced persons in safety and dignity.

Among the pressing issues requiring urgent action is that of civilians taken hostage and reported missing in connection with armed conflict. We continue our consistent efforts to raise awareness on the problem at the international level and further develop the rules-based guidance to that effect, including through the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and the Commission on the Status of Women, of which Azerbaijan is a main sponsor.

Mr. President,

The issue we are discussing today is of utmost importance for the Security Council, the entire international community and for my country in particular.

The forcible deportation of some 250,000 Azerbaijanis from their homes in Armenia at the end of the 1980s was accompanied by killings, enforced disappearances, the destruction of property and pillaging.

At the end of 1991 and the beginning of 1992, full-scale war was unleashed against Azerbaijan, which claimed the lives of tens of thousands of people and caused considerable destruction of civilian infrastructure, property and livelihoods in my country. A significant part of the territory of Azerbaijan, including the Nagorno-Karabakh region, the seven adjacent districts and some exclaves, was seized by Armenia and remain under its occupation, in violation of international law and Security Council resolutions 822 (1993), 853 (1993), 874 (1993) and 884 (1993).

The occupied territories were ethnically cleansed of all Azerbaijanis. As a result, my country has one of the largest displaced populations in the world, as has been stated by the representatives of the Secretary-General on the human rights of internally displaced persons.

Besides, purposeful measures are being undertaken by the Armenian side to prevent the Azerbaijani internally displaced persons from returning to their homes and properties. Such measures include the implantation of settlers in the occupied territories, infrastructure changes, destruction and desecration of historical and cultural heritage. These activities undermine the rights and freedoms of hundreds of thousand people uprooted from their homes and pose an imminent threat to peace, security and stability in the region.

Furthermore, as of 1 May 2019, 3,888 citizens of Azerbaijan were registered missing in connection with the conflict. Among them are 718 civilians, including 71 children, 266 women and 326 elderly. As the Secretary-General pointed out in his report, it is incumbent on parties to conflict to respect and ensure respect for international humanitarian law as it relates to missing persons and, in particular, to take all feasible measures to account for those reported missing (S/2019/372, para. 45).

In this connection, I would like to stress that denial of responsibility for crimes is a defiance of human rights and a direct obstacle to lasting peace and genuine reconciliation.

To conclude, we believe it is critically important that the Security Council consistently maintain its focus on the protection of civilians affected by armed conflicts and systematically reiterate its demand that all parties to armed conflict comply fully with their obligations under international humanitarian law.

Thank you