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Agenda items 35, 40, 86 and 135

**Protracted conflicts in the GUAM area and
their implications for international peace,
security and development**

The situation in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan

The rule of law at the national and international levels

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

**Security Council
Seventy-fifth year**

Letter dated 12 October 2020 from the Permanent Representative of Azerbaijan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to enclose the comments of the press service of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan on the blatant lie disseminated by Armenia in regard to the alleged deliberate shelling of a church in the occupied city of Shusha (see annex).

First and foremost, as has been repeatedly stated by the Government of Azerbaijan, the armed forces of Azerbaijan do not target civilian objects unless they are used for military purposes.

In contrast, Armenia has systematically violated its obligations to respect and protect the cultural heritage of the occupied territories of Azerbaijan, employing barbaric and atrocious methods of warfare, destroying and pillaging cultural and historical monuments, mosques, churches, synagogues and other religious centres and pilgrimage sites there. In the course of the outbreak of hostilities that erupted in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan as a result of the act of aggression perpetrated by Armenia against Azerbaijan on 27 September 2020, the armed forces of Armenia have directed their attacks against cities, towns and villages in Azerbaijan situated far beyond its occupied territories, destroying or damaging also religious sites and cultural objects.

It is pertinent to recall that Shusha is Azerbaijan's historical centre and cultural cradle, with a predominantly Azerbaijani population before the war. As a result of the Armenian offensive in May 1992, the city of Shusha and 30 villages in the Shusha



district were captured by the invading Armenian forces, A total of 195 Azerbaijani civilians were killed, 165 were wounded and 58 persons went missing. The city of Shusha and the surrounding villages were ethnically cleansed of their Azerbaijani population: more than 24,000 residents of Shusha were forced to leave their native lands and properties.

As a result of its occupation, Shusha has suffered considerable damage at the hands of the aggressor. Purposeful actions have been taken to erase any signs of the city's Azerbaijani cultural and historical identity. Many unique historical, cultural and religious sites in Shusha, such as Panah Khan Castle, Gara Boyukkhanyim Castle, Yukhary Govharagha, Ashaghy Govharagha, Saatly, Khoja Marjanly, Merdinli, Kocharli, Julfalar, Hajy Yusufli, Chol Gala, Taza Mahalla and Chukhur Mahalla mosques, the caravanserais and mosque of Mashadi Shukur Mirsiyab and Mashadi Huseyn Mirsiyab, the madrasas of the Yukhary and Ashaghy Govharagha mosques, the House of Natavan, the Shusha Museum of History, the Shusha branch of the Azerbaijan State Museum of Carpets, the Karabakh Museum of History, the Karabakh Museum of Literature, the State Gallery of Pictures, the Museum of Uzeyir Hajybayov, the Museum of Bulbul, the Museum of Mir Mohsun Navvab and the mausoleum of Molla Panah Vagif have been destroyed or plundered.

Against that background, it is not at all surprising that Armenia has not supported the United Nations Plan of Action to Safeguard Religious Sites, launched by the Secretary-General in 2019, and has even opposed calls to implement the recommendations contained therein.

Armenia must be brought to account for the heinous crimes it has committed in the course of the war and forced to comply with its international obligations. There is no doubt that that all the occupied territories of Azerbaijan, including Shusha, will be liberated from aggressors, terrorists and criminals, that the demographic composition and the cultural structure and heritage of the liberated areas will be restored and that the right of the forcibly displaced population to return to their homes in safety and dignity will be ensured.

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda items 35, 40, 86 and 135, and of the Security Council.

(Signed) Yashar **Aliyev**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

Annex to the letter dated 12 October 2020 from the Permanent Representative of Azerbaijan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Comments of the press service of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan on the statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia on the targeting of the places of religious worship and cultural monuments in the occupied city of Shusha

9 October 2020

The statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Armenia on the targeting of the places of religious worship and cultural monuments in the occupied Shusha city by the armed forces of Azerbaijan is yet another false accusation and provocation of Armenia aimed at diverting the attention of the international community from its deliberate shelling of the densely populated residential areas, civilian infrastructures and cultural monuments in Azerbaijan.

Almost for 30 years, Armenia has pursued the policy of deliberate destruction of the Azerbaijani historical and cultural monuments in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan with the purpose of removing any signs heralding their Azerbaijani legacy. The recent rocket strikes on Ganja, the second largest city and the centre of historical and cultural heritage of Azerbaijan, clearly demonstrated Armenia's long-standing policy of vandalism.

Azerbaijan is among the most religiously tolerant countries in the world where cultural diversity is sensed clearly and openly. Unlike Armenia, which has committed cultural genocide, destroyed and desecrated the Muslim Mosques in the occupied territories, Azerbaijan attaches great importance to preserving the traditions of tolerance. The fact that the Armenian Saint Gregory Church in the downtown of Baku was fully refurbished and is under State protection is a vivid example to that policy.

As was officially stated by the Military Command of the armed forces of Azerbaijan, the targets of the Azerbaijani Army are the military infrastructure, fire positions and military units of the enemy. The armed forces of Azerbaijan undertake the counteroffensive measures on the sovereign territories of Azerbaijan in accordance with international humanitarian law and the Geneva Conventions.

We reiterate that Armenia's attacks directed at civilians that caused indiscriminate or disproportionate harm to civilians and civilian objects in Azerbaijan amount to war crimes under international humanitarian law, for which Armenia bears the liability and which also incur individual criminal responsibility of the perpetrators.

There is no doubt that all historical, cultural, religious monuments of Azerbaijan destroyed as a result of Armenia's aggression will be restored as soon as Nagorny Karabakh and the surrounding districts of Azerbaijan are liberated from the occupation.