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**Remarks by Mr. Tofiq F. Musayev, Deputy Permanent Representative of the Republic of Azerbaijan to the United Nations, at an Arrria-formula meeting of the Security Council on the “Protection of Cultural Heritage in Armed Conflict”**

**UNHQ, CR7, 2 May 2023**

Mr. Chair,

Azerbaijan has consistently promoted international humanitarian law and the principles and rules governing the protection of cultural property in armed conflict at the international level. Thus, for example, among other efforts, Azerbaijan initiated the adoption by the UN Human Rights Council of the resolution on the protection of cultural rights and property in situations of armed conflict, as well as contributed to the drafting and publication of the UNESCO Military Manual on the Protection of Cultural Property.

States and international organizations have expended considerable efforts to develop a sophisticated body of international law for the protection of cultural property in armed conflict. In addition, both the General Assembly and the Security Council addressed the protection of culture in conflict situations, highlighting in particular the connection of the destruction of and trafficking in cultural heritage with terrorism and organized crime.

Security Council resolution 2347 (2017) recognized that the unlawful destruction, looting and smuggling of cultural property in the event of armed conflicts, and the attempt to deny historical roots and cultural diversity in this context, can undermine security, stability, governance, social, economic and cultural development of affected States.

Impunity for war crimes against cultural heritage remains one of the major impediments to peace, justice and reconciliation in some parts of the world.

Furthermore, racist ideologies and ethnic and religious hatred are often the driving force behind attacks on cultural heritage and thus require enhanced attention. It is also critical that the United Nations continue confronting disinformation aimed at targeting distinct cultural heritage and concealing scientific evidence.

In this sense, it is not difficult to predict that the comments that Armenia is going to make later at this meeting will fully fit into the logic of such disinformation. It would be quite surprising to hear something different from a monoethnic country, which is responsible for mass atrocities against Azerbaijani cultural heritage committed on a racially discriminatory basis with the purpose to advance its ethnonationalist goals and deny and distort Azerbaijani history, culture and ethnic identity.

We have consistently provided the UNESCO and the international community as a whole with extensive detail on Azerbaijani cultural heritage, which has been looted, vandalized, desecrated and destroyed both throughout Armenia and in the formerly occupied territories of my country.

The facts are really shocking and unprecedented. Suffice it to mention just a few. Thus, out of 67 mosques in the formerly occupied territories 64 were destroyed. The deliberate use of mosques as pens for pigs and cows during the occupation was a potent and symbolic action intended as a particular insult. Over 900 cemeteries in those territories were either destroyed or desecrated. They were targeted deliberately due to their family, historical, and cultural importance to our people.

These and numerous other offences against Azerbaijani cultural heritage have been internationally condemned in the strongest possible terms. However, international organizations have not been allowed to verify the state of Azerbaijani cultural heritage in Armenia and in the territories of Azerbaijan when they were under occupation.

Only following the end of the 44-day war in 2020, at the invitation of the Government of Azerbaijan, many international organizations, officials and independent experts visited the liberated territories to witness and document the damage caused during the 30 years of occupation and familiarize themselves with ongoing restoration works. Despite Azerbaijan's extensive rebuilding and restoration efforts, much of the loss of cultural heritage is irreversible.

Azerbaijan instituted proceedings before the International Court of Justice to hold Armenia accountable for the violations of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.

In conclusion, respect for the sovereignty of States must be the fundamental prerequisite across all protection efforts. This was clearly stressed in Security Council resolution 2347 (2017). Azerbaijan is keen to continue its efforts towards promoting mutual understanding and diversity and looks forward to enhanced cooperation with all stakeholders in achieving these goals.

Thank you.