



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

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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 virtual open debate on the theme:  
“Protection of objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population”  
under the agenda item “Protection of civilians in armed conflict”**

*27 April 2021*

Mr. President,

At the outset, I would like to thank the delegation of Viet Nam for having convened this important meeting to highlight experiences, challenges and recommendations regarding the protection of objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population in armed conflict.

The protection of civilians from direct and indiscriminate attacks is one of the cardinal objectives of the international humanitarian legal regime and there are numerous prohibitions on acts that undermine this objective. The principle of distinction is at the heart of this regime. Civilian objects are subject to many of the same protections as apply to civilians themselves.

Azerbaijan is among those countries that have seriously suffered from the devastating effects of the conflict. As is known, in early 1990s, Armenia unleashed full-scale war against Azerbaijan. As a result, a significant part of the territory of Azerbaijan was seized and remained under occupation for almost thirty years.

Over the course of the conflict, Armenia has engaged in numerous violations of the prohibitions on attacks directed at or causing indiscriminate or disproportionate harm to civilians and civilian objects. The war claimed the lives of tens of thousands of people; all captured areas were ethnically cleansed of more than 700,000 Azerbaijanis; and most of the occupied cities, towns and villages were razed to the ground. Furthermore, the large-scale destruction of and irreversible damage on the natural environment by Armenia has been characterized by the international community as a form of environmental aggression.

From 2015, there has been a re-escalation in and around the occupied territories of Azerbaijan. In April 2016 and July 2020, Armenia provoked large-scale hostilities, along the frontline and the border between Armenia and Azerbaijan. The UNHCR reported in May 2016 of the damage caused to civilian property by artillery bombardments and unexploded ordnances in Azerbaijani villages close to the conflict zone. In July 2020, cross-border attacks by the armed forces of Armenia posed a threat to the strategic international oil and gas pipelines and the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway on the territory of Azerbaijan.

Another act of aggression by Armenia at the end of September 2020 and the subsequent combat actions have caused numerous casualties among Azerbaijani civilians. Extensive damage was inflicted upon the civilian infrastructure in the several major cities of Azerbaijan outside the conflict zone. The armed forces of Armenia also targeted the energy infrastructure in Azerbaijan. The ballistic missile fired on the city of Mingachevir fell in the close vicinity of the building of the Azerbaijan thermal power plant, which is located in the Mingachevir hydropower complex, the largest water reservoir in the South Caucasus.

As a result of the counteroffensive operation undertaken and successfully accomplished by the armed forces of Azerbaijan, some 10,000 km<sup>2</sup> of the territory of Azerbaijan, with more than 300 cities, towns and villages, were liberated from occupation. The scale of destruction, vandalism, plunder and looting evidenced in those territories after their liberation is shocking and unprecedented. Most parts of these areas have literally been turned into a ghost land, as all the civilian infrastructure were plundered and destructed. Moreover, the retreating Armenian forces and Armenian illegal settlers vacating these territories were disassembling and then burning houses, schools and other civilian infrastructure, severing electric cables and poles, destroying gas stations, chopping down trees and setting forests on fire in an attempt to leave nothing behind.

The destruction of civilian infrastructure and vast minefields in the liberated areas represent major challenges to the safe return of internally displaced persons to their homes and properties. The Government of Azerbaijan has prioritized the rehabilitation and reconstruction of these territories and the restoration of housing, essential services and transportation and communication facilities there to ensure speedy socioeconomic recovery and post-conflict peacebuilding. In the meantime, master plans of all cities are being prepared and a number of projects are being implemented, with the participation of international partners.

At the same time, accountability for serious violations of international law must be an inevitable consequence of the offences committed. The fight against impunity is also an important preventive tool and an essential prerequisite on the path to lasting peace and genuine reconciliation.

Thank you.