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**Statement by H.E. Mr. Yashar Aliyev  
Permanent Representative of the Republic of Azerbaijan to the United Nations  
at the 9228<sup>th</sup> meeting of the U.N. Security Council, 20 December 2022**

Madam President,

Azerbaijan expresses its profound regret over the exploitation by Armenia of the Council for the State-led campaign of manipulation, distortion and falsification. This august body was established as a guardian of the Charter of the United Nations and international law. The respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of States and non-interference in their domestic affairs are the cornerstones in this regard. Yet, it is utterly unacceptable that this body continues to be abused by certain forces to encroach on the sovereignty and territorial integrity of my country.

I would like to start with some important clarifications with regard to the terminology, as its accurate use is essential for ensuring proper respect for the sovereign rights and responsibilities of States under the Charter of the United Nations and international law.

First, it is undeniable that only geographical names established by legitimate and competent national authorities in relation to their sovereign territory must be recognized and used in the United Nations. Therefore, it is pertinent to remind that what Armenia and some Council members erroneously called "Nagorno-Karabakh" is the internationally recognized sovereign territory of Azerbaijan, which was under unlawful Armenian occupation for nearly thirty years. This was consistently reaffirmed in Security Council resolutions 822, 853, 874 and 884. The legal title of this area of Azerbaijan is now the Karabakh economic region or, in a short equivalent, the Karabakh region.

Second, as it comes to the situation around the Lachin road, Azerbaijan resolutely rejects all Armenia's claims as completely false, null and void.

The Lachin road is situated entirely in Azerbaijan within its Lachin district. This district was invaded and occupied by the armed forces of Armenia in May 1992. The population of Lachin, over 77,000 residents, was forced to leave their homes and properties, and the town and its surrounding villages were looted and burned by the Armenian troops.

Following the 44-day war two years ago, in accordance with paragraph 6 of the Trilateral Statement of 10 November 2020, the Lachin district was returned to Azerbaijan, while Azerbaijan committed to guarantee the security of persons, vehicles and cargo moving along the Lachin road.

Neither the Government of Azerbaijan nor the protesting activists have blocked the Lachin road. The regime for the movement of citizens, goods and vehicles along the road remains unchanged, with the peacekeepers continuing to perform their duties to protect the route. Video clips shared on social media show unimpeded passage of the various types of vehicles, including ambulances and humanitarian convoys.

The claims regarding alleged humanitarian consequences of the situation are equally false. This is nothing other than another manifestation of reckless manipulation by Armenia of the situation for obvious malign political purposes. There is no impediment whatsoever as to the supply of goods for the use of local residents or in terms of delivery of essential medical services.

Madam President,

Since the matter was brought to the attention of the Council, I would like to take this opportunity to inform its member States about the course of events that eventually led to a group of civil society to hold demonstration on the Lachin road.

Thus, in violation of paragraph 4 of the 10 November 2020 Trilateral Statement, over more than two years, Armenia has been refusing to fully withdraw its armed forces and illegal armed formations from and continuing illegal military activities in the territory of Azerbaijan, where the Russian peacekeeping contingent is temporarily deployed.

While speculating on humanitarian importance of the Lachin road, Armenia, at the same time, has actively used it for military purposes, including for the rotation of personnel of the armed forces and the transfer of weapons to this territory, in clear violation of international law and paragraph 6 of the Trilateral Statement.

Apart from that, in violation of paragraph 1 of the Trilateral Statement, which committed the sides to terminate all hostilities, Armenia not only refuses to share the complete set of maps of hundreds of thousands of mines it indiscriminately laid on the territories of Azerbaijan during their occupation, but has planted new mines on the territory of my country in the post-conflict period.

Thus, since August this year, more than 2700 mines produced in Armenia in 2021 have been detected in the sovereign territories of Azerbaijan. Evidently, these mines were transferred from Armenia via the Lachin road.

Last Wednesday, seven people were injured and one killed by a mine explosion in the Kalbajar district of Azerbaijan. The area where the incident took place was far from the former line of contact and the mines were planted there during the withdrawal of the armed forces of Armenia from the Kalbajar district under the terms of paragraph 6 of the Trilateral Statement.

In total, after the signing of the Trilateral Statement, 276 citizens of Azerbaijan have become mine victims. 46 of them were killed, including 35 civilians.

The conclusion is clear – Armenia tries to inflict as maximum human losses as possible in order to impede Azerbaijan's reconstruction projects and the return of hundreds of thousands of internally displaced persons to their homes.

Furthermore, the Lachin road has also been misused for illicit trafficking of minerals and other resources from the territories of Azerbaijan, where the Russian peacekeeping contingent is deployed.

This problem is not new. Azerbaijan has repeatedly brought to the attention of the international community irrefutable well-documented evidence attesting to large-scale unlawful economic activities in the formerly occupied territories of Azerbaijan, in flagrant violation of international law.

As a matter of fact, out of the 151 mineral deposits identified in these territories prior to the occupation, 52 sites were exploited for the first time in the period between 1993 and 2020. Furthermore, several of the pre-conflict mining operations were expanded and intensified.

Besides being an illegal act of exploitation of natural resources of a sovereign State, mining and quarrying operations were conducted with inadequate environmental oversight and supervision, including a lack of effluent treatment and site rehabilitation, in gross disregard for the environment-related technical standards. This has created environmental impacts, such as i) deforestation and land degradation; ii) suspended sediment pollution (turbidity) in rivers; and iii) chemical pollution of water, soil, and biota.

Thus, for the entire Azerbaijani public, the pillage and plundering of our sovereign natural wealth as well as harsh environmental consequences are the legitimate source of serious concern.

Since November 2020, illegal exploitation of mineral deposits in the area of temporary deployment of peacekeepers, especially in the Gyzybulag gold and Demirli copper – molybdenum deposits has not stopped, on the contrary, has even further expanded. In addition to being illegal *per se*, these activities cause serious damage to the environment, polluting the area and destroying the fragile ecosystem.

Unfortunately, despite the fact that the roadmap was agreed with the command of the peacekeeping contingent, ten days ago, a group of unidentified persons prevented the officials of the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of Azerbaijan, the State Service for Real Estate Affairs under the Ministry of Economy of Azerbaijan and the "AzerGold" Closed Joint Stock Company from conducting on-site inspection of the mineral deposits of concern and assess the potential environmental damage and risks, including the impact on underground and surface water resources.

This incident caused justified indignation among the public and led to peaceful protests by eco-activists on the Lachin–Shusha road, which continue to date, as the relevant State organs of Azerbaijan are still denied access to the sites in question.

Madam President,

Under the Trilateral Statement, the Lachin road is envisaged to be used exclusively for humanitarian purposes. The abuse of the road for any other purposes, not least, for illegal military activities, such as the planting of mines or illegal trafficking of natural resources of Azerbaijan, constitutes a material breach of the Trilateral Statement and cannot be tolerated.

Azerbaijan will continue defending its sovereignty and territorial integrity and the rights and safety of its citizens by all available means, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and international law.

On a particular note, Azerbaijan is keen to guarantee to its citizens of Armenian origin the rights and freedoms enjoyed by all the citizens of Azerbaijan on an equal and non-discriminatory basis, in accordance with its Constitution, legislation and international obligations. This is a domestic matter, in which Azerbaijan will not allow external interference.

Azerbaijan has taken consistent steps towards fostering dialogue with local Armenian residents, as it was the case during the construction of a new Lachin road and in relation to the exploitation of the Sarsang water reservoir. Such contacts need to be further supported and encouraged.

However, apparently Armenia and some third countries are becoming increasingly uncomfortable with the positive developments on the ground and resort to all kinds of provocations to raise tensions and undermine the fragile normalization process.

The recent implantation of a notorious businessman Ruben Vardanyan to the Karabakh region of Azerbaijan, who has no connection to the region and is directly involved in the illegal exploitation of natural resources of Azerbaijan, along with intensified destabilizing actions by some external actors, is a clear manifestation of this.

Madam President,

Azerbaijan is committed to regional peace, stability and development. The establishment of good-neighborly relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan is a key for building secure, stable and prosperous South Caucasus through full-fledged regional normalization.

Azerbaijan's position in this regard is clear, principled and consistent, and is based on international law and established international practice. It is Azerbaijan that right after the end of the conflict initiated the process of normalization of inter-State relations with Armenia based on mutual recognition and respect for each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity within their internationally recognized borders, including through the signing of a peace treaty based on these principles.

We reiterate our call on the international community to persuade Armenia to reciprocate the offer of Azerbaijan, abide by its international obligations, put an end to its illegal activities, cease territorial claims and political and military provocations, abandon its aggressive rhetoric and actions, redress the harm caused to Azerbaijan and engage in good faith in direct negotiations to find peaceful diplomatic solutions to all issues pertaining to inter-State relations between Azerbaijan and Armenia.

We once again urge the third parties to refrain from one-sided actions and statements emboldening revanchism in Armenia to the detriment of emerging perspectives of regional normalization.

Thank you.