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**Statement by Mr. Tofiq F. Musayev  
Deputy Permanent Representative of the Republic of Azerbaijan to the United Nations  
at the Security Council open debate in connection with the item  
“Protection of civilians in armed conflict”**

***25 May 2022***

At the outset, I would like to thank the United States presidency for having convened this important meeting.

In his report on the protection of civilians (S/2022/381), the Secretary-General observed that armed conflicts continued to be characterized by high levels of civilian death, forced displacement, destroyed civilian objects and the damaged natural environment.

Azerbaijan reiterates its strong condemnation of all violations of international humanitarian law.

During its aggression against my country since the early 1990s, Armenia committed multiple war crimes, resulting in the deaths of tens of thousands of civilians, massive ethnic cleansing, the extensive destruction and cultural erasure of populated areas.

The scale of the brutalities is evidenced also by almost 4,000 citizens of Azerbaijan went missing in connection with the conflict, including 719 civilians. Armenia fails to clarify the whereabouts of the missing persons, who fell into its hands but have not been seen since.

This year marks the thirtieth anniversary of the horrific massacre committed in the town of Khojaly, where in February 1992 hundreds of Azerbaijani civilians were brutally killed by invading Armenia forces. This tragedy, which independent experts recognized as the largest and worst single atrocity of the war, was condemned internationally as a crime against humanity or an act of genocide.

The deliberate tactic of targeting the civilian population was used again by Armenian forces in the course of hostilities in the fall of 2020. Direct and indiscriminate missile attacks that struck Azerbaijani cities and districts, including with the use of internationally banned cluster bombs, killed and wounded hundreds of civilians and destroyed numerous civilian objects.

The frequency and timing of the attacks, including in particular a series of ruthless night-time missile strikes on the residential areas in the cities of Ganja and Barda, testify to the clear intent and purpose to cause the greatest possible civilian casualties.

Moreover, since the end of the war, many civilians have been killed or injured by mine explosions, as Armenia fails to share accurate and comprehensive information about the hundreds of thousands of landmines it laid on Azerbaijan's territory.

Accountability and broader transitional justice are undeniable and must be an inevitable consequence of the offences committed. They are also essential tools to prevent recurrence of violations and an important constituent on the path to building, strengthening and sustaining peace and promoting reconciliation and development.

In conclusion, in regard to humanitarian activities, the reasons leading to the erosion of trust and jeopardizing relief efforts, as highlighted in the report of the Secretary-General, are often rooted also in attempts to advance hostile political narratives, including under the guise of feigned care for people in need and by recourse to extensive disinformation.

It is imperative that the engagement of humanitarian actors in both conflict and post-conflict situations be exclusively humanitarian in nature, not misused for political purposes and carried out in conformity with the principles of neutrality, impartiality and consent of the affected country, while fully respecting the sovereignty, territorial integrity and national unity of States in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations.

As the Secretary-General underlined in his report, the effective protection of civilians requires much greater political will and commitment to respect international law and implement good policies and practices. This definitely must be the key objective.

Thank you.