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**Statement by Mr. Tofiq F. Musayev
Deputy Permanent Representative of the Republic of Azerbaijan to the United Nations
at the 86th plenary meeting of the General Assembly on agenda item 134 “The responsibility
to protect and the prevention of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against
humanity”**

23 June 2022

Mr. President,

At the outset, I would like to thank you for convening this meeting and the Secretary-General for presenting the report (A/76/844–S/2022/428).

The report recalls the commitments made and repeatedly reaffirmed by States to ensure the protection, advance the prevention agenda and develop the normative and institutional frameworks. As the Secretary-General has noted, the responsibility to protect is in essence a restatement of commitments already enshrined in international law.

We take note of the priorities identified in the report to protect children and youth from atrocity crimes and provide guidance for the international community in supporting national governments to meet their responsibility to protect.

As civilians, including children and youth, continue to be targeted by and caught up in atrocity crimes, effective prevention and protection remains a constant global challenge and an ongoing imperative.

Hate propaganda, coupled with policies aimed at sowing dissension on religious and racial grounds, building mono-ethnic societies and promoting the ideas of ethnic incompatibility and supremacy, fuel identity-based intolerance, destabilize societies and increase the risk of atrocity crimes.

It is critical that the United Nations continue promoting a culture of tolerance and respect, mobilizing the world against racism and confronting hatred of all kinds and the incitement to discrimination and violence.

Mr. President,

The topic under discussion is of particular importance for my country and for our region as a whole.

In the late 1980s, all Azerbaijanis – more than 200,000 people – were expelled from their historical homeland in Armenia. Hundreds were brutally killed; the property of those expelled was seized; they were not allowed to return; and the Azerbaijani historical and cultural heritage was consistently and deliberately eradicated.

These actions were followed by a full-scale war unleashed by Armenia against Azerbaijan in the early 1990s, at the core of which were the aggressor's ultra-nationalist ideology, fabricated historical narratives and misinterpretation of international law.

As a consequence, a significant part of my country's territory was seized and remained under unlawful occupation for nearly thirty years, notwithstanding the relevant Security Council resolutions.

The aggression was accompanied by multiple war crimes, resulting in the deaths of tens of thousands of civilians and massive ethnic cleansing and cultural erasure of the occupied areas.

Thousands of Azerbaijani civilians were executed in acts of mass murder. In February 1992, the horrific massacre was committed in the town of Khojaly, where hundreds of Azerbaijani civilians, including children, were brutally killed within few hours by invading Armenian 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 scale, frequency and timing of violations demonstrate that they were not isolated acts but were part of a widespread and systematic policy of atrocities aimed at terrorizing, killing and expelling Azerbaijanis based on ethnic animus.

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 44-day war put an end to thirty years of aggression, occupation and ethnic cleansing. The liberated territories provided compelling evidence as to the range, variety and consistency of violations of international law. During the years of occupation, most of the cities, towns and villages of Azerbaijan were razed to the ground. Thousands of cultural objects and religious sites were looted, vandalized and destroyed.

Mass graves were found in the liberated territories. However, the fate of almost 4,000 citizens of Azerbaijan went missing in connection with the conflict remains unknown. Among them are 719 civilians, including 71 children. Armenia refrains from clarifying the whereabouts of the missing persons, who fell into its hands but have not been seen since.

Moreover, despite the end of the conflict, many civilians have been killed or injured by mine explosions. Armenia refuses to share accurate and comprehensive information about the hundreds of thousands of landmines it laid on Azerbaijan's territory, thus continuing to deliberately and indiscriminately target civilian lives.

With the exception of a few individuals brought to justice by Azerbaijan for war crimes and terrorist and mercenary activities, most of the perpetrators continue to enjoy impunity, as Armenia fails to prosecute and punish them and to redress for its breaches.

Furthermore, Armenia has taken no action to prevent anti-Azerbaijani hatred and disinformation and to prohibit and punish racist hate groups formed for the specific purpose of inciting and committing violence to operate openly and notoriously on its territory, instead defending and supporting them, in violation of international law and apparent disregard for the order on provisional measures adopted by the International Court of Justice on 7 December 2021.

Mr. President,

Accountability is undeniable and must be an inevitable consequence of the offences committed to ensure justice and prevent the resurgence of conflicts and the commission of new offences.

It is critically important that the international community insist on accountability for atrocity crimes, as required under the international law of State responsibility, international humanitarian law, international human rights law and international criminal law.

Azerbaijan is determined to continue efforts towards advancing post-conflict peacebuilding, reconciliation, reintegration, peaceful coexistence and development in the region, as well as ensuring justice and preventing and eliminating by all legitimate means any threats to the safety and well-being of its people and the State's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Thank you.