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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 open debate on the theme “Ensuring the security and dignity of civilians in
conflict: addressing food insecurity and protecting essential services”, under the agenda item
“Protection of civilians in armed conflict”**

23 May 2023

Mr. President,

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

As the Secretary-General underlined in his report, the strengthened protection of civilians requires far greater political will and commitment to respect international humanitarian and human rights law. This definitely must be the key objective.

Mr. President,

During its almost thirty years of 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.

The frequency and timing of the attacks, their deliberate targeting of the civilian population and civilian objects, including homes, schools and hospitals, the use of heavy explosive weapons and cluster bombs against densely populated areas and the resulting scale of destructions testify to the clear intent and purpose to terrorize, kill or expel Azerbaijani civilians and prevent the displaced population from returning to their homes.

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, whose fate Armenia refrains to clarify. Most of the Azerbaijani captives were subjected to severe torture, including beatings, mutilation, starvation, and humiliation. The perpetrators of numerous atrocities committed against the Azerbaijani civilians and other protected persons remain unpunished, in clear disregard for international law.

Furthermore, despite the end of the conflict, Armenia refuses to share accurate and comprehensive information about the hundreds of thousands of landmines it laid on the territory of Azerbaijan, which continue to kill and maim civilians.

Essential civilian infrastructure was also targeted. Thus, Mingachevir, an Azerbaijani city hosting a key water reservoir and electricity plant, was subjected to repeated missile attacks during the hostilities in the fall of 2020. Had missiles succeeded in hitting the facilities, they would have caused devastating floods stretching over 240 kilometers and deprived the population of access to drinking water and electricity.

The aggression also caused long-term and severe damage to the environment of Azerbaijan, with widespread deforestation, land degradation, pillaged and destroyed water infrastructure and polluted water resources.

In particular, the neglect and mismanagement of the Sarsang water reservoir, dam and irrigation canal in the formerly occupied territories of Azerbaijan provoked a humanitarian crisis, as 400,000 Azerbaijanis living in the downstream regions were deprived of water for both vital domestic and agricultural purposes, as well as caused severe environmental impacts such as soil erosion, dehydration, and desertification.

Those negative impacts remain ongoing to date, along with the continued pollution of transboundary rivers flowing from Armenia into Azerbaijan.

In its resolution of 26 January 2016, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe described Armenia's actions as environmental aggression aimed at creating humanitarian and environmental problems for the citizens of Azerbaijan.

Earlier this year, Azerbaijan commenced the inter-State arbitration under the Bern Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats to hold Armenia accountable for its extensive destruction of Azerbaijan's environment and biodiversity.

Mr. President, in conclusion, I would like to respond to the statement made at this meeting by the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Armenia. The allegations in that statement about the so-called "blockade" of the Lachin-Khankandi road, the disruption of electricity and natural gas by Azerbaijan in its Garabagh Economic Region and the "genocidal intent" of ethnic cleansing are patently false and provocative. Azerbaijan has never created impediments for the freedom of movement on the road by the residents and its use for the supply of food, medicine and other humanitarian purposes, as well as for access by the International Committee of the Red Cross. This is supported by numerous documented evidence that expose Armenia's fabrications.

As to the establishment of the border checkpoint, it is an undeniable sovereign right of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the same as the right of any other State to secure and protect its borders and establish border control. This right is grounded in the foundational principles of territorial sovereignty and integrity and the duty of Azerbaijan to guarantee the security of persons, vehicles and cargo moving along the road. The Security Council has repeatedly reaffirmed that securing their borders is the sovereign prerogative of Member States. Armenia must understand that misinformation and disinformation are detrimental to the objectives of peace, stability and reconciliation.

Thank you.