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**Statement by Mr. Tofiq F. Musayev
Deputy Permanent Representative of the Republic of Azerbaijan to the United Nations**

**at the plenary meeting of the General Assembly on agenda item 132:
“The responsibility to protect and the prevention of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing
and crimes against humanity”**

26 June 2023

Mr. President,

At the outset, I would like to thank you for convening this meeting and the Secretary-General for presenting the report on the topic (A/77/910–S/2023/409).

The report examines the relationship between the challenges to sustainable development and the risks, causes and drivers of atrocity crimes.

While the world is becoming more divided, uncompromising and intolerant, peoples throughout the planet continue to suffer from conflicts, forced displacements, terrorism, separatism, violent extremism, inequality, insecurity, poverty and climate change.

Hate propaganda, disinformation and the policies aimed at building mono-ethnic societies and advocating the ideas of ethnic incompatibility, dehumanization and racial superiority continue to fuel identity-based intolerance, destabilize societies, undermine peaceful coexistence and significantly increase the risk of atrocity crimes.

The lack of accountability for serious violations of international law undermines the rule of law and is also among the conditions conducive to the protraction, expansion or resurgence of conflicts and violence. As the Secretary-General emphasized in his report, the propensity for a State or other actor to carry out large-scale offences does not occur spontaneously but arises from pre-existing patterns of systematic violations and impunity.

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.

Furthermore, providing support to States affected by conflict and engaged in post-conflict peacebuilding, reconstruction, rehabilitation and reintegration and taking measures to secure their borders from illegal cross-border activities that could be used to commit atrocities must remain a critical commitment of the entire United Nations system.

Mr. President,

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

Azerbaijan's experience of nearly thirty years of occupation of its sovereign territories by neighboring Armenia, in blatant violation of the Charter of the United Nations, international law and the relevant Security Council resolutions, is an illustration and reminder of the need to do much more to prevent and resolve conflicts, ensure respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of States, fight against impunity for serious crimes, confront hatred and build and sustain peace.

The consequences of the aggression against my country, at the core of which was a long-standing ultra-nationalist ideology, speak for themselves:

- thousands of Azerbaijani civilians were executed in acts of mass murder, while many captives were subjected to severe torture;
- more than 200,000 Azerbaijanis were expelled from and are still prevented from returning to their historical homeland in Armenia;
- additionally, all occupied territories were ethnically cleansed of more than 700,000 Azerbaijanis;
- hundreds of cities, towns and villages in my country were razed to the ground; and
- Azerbaijani cultural heritage was looted, vandalized, desecrated and destroyed both throughout Armenia and in the formerly occupied territories.

Following the long-awaited end of the war in the fall of 2020, along with large-scale restoration and reconstruction works in the liberated territories to ensure the safe return of the displaced population and high standard of living, Azerbaijan genuinely initiated the normalization of inter-State relations based on mutual recognition and respect for each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity within their internationally recognized borders. However, despite the ongoing dialogue and progress towards such normalization, serious challenges remain.

Armenia refuses to completely withdraw the remnants of its armed forces from the territory of Azerbaijan, regularly violates the ceasefire, maintains its territorial claims, continues hate propaganda and defies the order of the International Court of Justice of 7 December 2021 by allowing racist paramilitary organizations to operate on its territory, raise funds, openly spread hate speech and recruit and train civilians, including children, for war and mass violence.

Furthermore, Armenia refuses to disclose the locations of the hundreds of thousands of landmines it laid on the territory of Azerbaijan. As a result, in the post-conflict period, since November 2020, 57 citizens of Azerbaijan were killed and 247 injured by mine explosions. Armenia must share accurate and comprehensive information about all minefields and cease and desist from mine terrorism. In addition, more international support to further develop and strengthen national mine action efforts in Azerbaijan are critically important to save lives and ensure the safe return of internally displaced persons to their homes.

In addition, 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 is unwilling to prosecute and punish them and to redress for its breaches.

The fate of almost 4,000 citizens of Azerbaijan went missing in connection with the conflict, including 719 civilians, remains unknown. Although several mass graves were discovered in the liberated territories shedding light on the wilful killing of Azerbaijani civilians and other persons protected under international humanitarian law, Armenia refrains from clarifying the whereabouts of the missing persons.

Mr. President,

We categorically reject the statement made by Armenia earlier at this meeting.

I have to remind that so-called “Nagorno-Karabakh”, to which Armenia stubbornly refers, long ceased to exist as an administrative and territorial unit. This area is an integral part of Azerbaijan, which was under Armenia’s unlawful occupation for nearly three decades. The legal name of this area is the Garabagh Economic Region. Armenia must memorize this title and never forget it.

It is ironic that mono-ethnic Armenia, whose central message continues to be that Azerbaijanis and Armenians are fundamentally incompatible and in which international terrorists, war criminals and racist ideologues are national heroes, talks profusely about human rights and minorities in other countries.

Armenia’s allegations about the so-called “blockade” of the Lachin-Khankandi road are false and provocative. Azerbaijan has never created impediments for the freedom of movement on the road by the residents and its use for humanitarian purposes. This is supported by numerous documented evidence that expose Armenia’s fabrications.

Armenia has neither legal, nor political or moral grounds to make any statements or comments concerning the sovereign territory of Azerbaijan or the matters falling within my country’s exclusive rights, competence and responsibilities. Instead, Armenia must take serious care of its own international obligations and strictly comply with the Charter of the United Nations and international 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 investing in national capabilities for early detection, early warning, prevention and response to any threats to the safety and well-being of its people and the State's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Thank you.