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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 “Famine and Conflict-induced food insecurity”
3 August 2023**

I would like to start by thanking the USA Presidency for convening this important meeting on the topic, to which Azerbaijan attaches particular importance.

Back in 2021, Azerbaijan contributed to the Council’s open debate on “Conflict and hunger”, by submitting a written statement of the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

The Security Council’s relevant resolution 2417 (2018) recognized that conflict can impact food security both directly and indirectly, *inter alia* by displacing people from land, livestock grazing areas, and fishing grounds, or by destruction of agricultural assets and disruptions to food systems.

Azerbaijan experienced first-hand conflict-driven threats to its food security during nearly 30 years of occupation of some 20% of its territory by Armenia. The aggression caused long-term and severe damage to the food production capacity, with widespread land degradation, pillaged and destroyed water infrastructure and polluted water resources.

In particular, the mismanagement by Armenia of the Sarsang water reservoir, the centerpiece of the water supply network in the Karabakh region of Azerbaijan, provoked a humanitarian crisis, as 400,000 Azerbaijanis living in the downstream regions were deprived of water for both 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 severe pollution of transboundary rivers, in particular Okchuchay and Araz, flowing from Armenia into Azerbaijan.

Substantial areas of Azerbaijan’s farmland were spoiled and fragmented by the construction of trenches, tunnels and other defensive fortifications by Armenia.

The decades-long military engineering activities of Armenia have caused significant land disturbance impacting vegetation cover, water infiltration, and surface water flows.

Most disturbingly, Armenia planted over 1.5 million landmines on our territories, contaminating over 3000 sq miles of Azerbaijan’s land, half of which are previously arable territories.

The refusal by Armenia to disclose the exact location of landmines has already claimed 57 innocent lives and severely injured 247 persons. In addition, this obstructs reconstruction, re-integration, and rehabilitation of those areas, delaying the safe reclamation of the highly fertile agricultural lands vital for food security.

In her message to the Second International Conference on Mine Action held this May in Azerbaijan, UNMAS Director qualified Azerbaijan “as one of the countries most densely contaminated by landmines and explosive remnants of war”.

As in its resolution 2417, today's Security Council Presidential Statement particularly expressed "its deep concern over the serious humanitarian threat posed to civilians by landmines, explosive remnants of war and improvised explosive devices in affected countries, which has serious and lasting social and economic consequences, including regarding food security for the populations of such countries".

Therefore, Armenia must provide, without any delay, the precise and complete information on the minefields.

With regard to the allegations made by representative of Armenia earlier today, Azerbaijan condemns Armenia's consistent efforts to abuse the issue of humanitarian assistance for its malign purposes.

The establishment of the Lachin border checkpoint is an undeniable sovereign right of Azerbaijan, the same as the right of any other State to secure and protect its borders and to guarantee the security of persons, vehicles and cargo movement along the road.

In fact, on 6 July 2023, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) has unanimously rejected Armenia's request for provisional measures with respect to the checkpoint, essentially ruling that Armenia's claims are groundless.

Since the checkpoint began its operation, civilian traffic between the Karabakh Region of Azerbaijan and Armenia in both directions increased significantly. Armenia consistently resorted to provocations to disrupt the functioning of the road and on 15 June opened sniper shooting, as a result of which Azerbaijani border officer was wounded.

Moreover, Armenia has recklessly exploited ICRC-hired vehicles for smuggling of goods, such as electronic devices, micro-chips and other dual-use technologies to supply its illegally deployed armed forces in the sovereign territory of Azerbaijan. This is a blatant violation of international humanitarian law and a serious blow on humanitarian mandate and reputation of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

Azerbaijan's consistent calls on Armenia for cooperation through the border and customs entities to ensure smooth functioning of the road for the movement of persons, cargo and services have remained unanswered.

Azerbaijan has also proposed the ICRC to use the Aghdam-Khankendi route for its humanitarian activities. This proposal was reiterated by Azerbaijan at the meeting between the leaders of Azerbaijan and Armenia in Brussels organized by the President of the European Council, who in his public remarks encouraged the use of the Aghdam-Khankendi route as an important part of ensuring that the needs of the Karabakh residents are met. The issue was also discussed between the foreign ministers of Azerbaijan and Armenia in Moscow at the end of July.

However, the road is currently closed with concrete blocks installed by Armenian side not allowing cargo and vehicles, including the ICRC's, to pass.

Such arbitrary denial of humanitarian assistance reveals Armenia's sinister intention to create a false narrative of so-called "humanitarian crises" in the region.

Instead, Armenia has to abide by its international obligations, completely withdraw its armed forces from the territory of Azerbaijan, cease and desist from territorial claims, illegal activities and disinformation, put an end to mine terrorism, shed light on the fate of some 4000 Azerbaijanis who went missing during the conflict, redress the harm caused to Azerbaijan, including to its food security systems and engage faithfully in negotiations on a peace treaty and the delimitation of the border between the two States.

Azerbaijan is firm in its determination to protect its people, sovereignty, and territorial integrity, and is fully committed to the objectives of a peaceful, secure, stable and prosperous region.