

Annex to the letter dated 19 December 2022 from the Permanent Representative of Azerbaijan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Letter dated 19 December 2022 from the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan addressed to the Secretary-General

I am writing to you concerning the latest developments on the Lachin road and ongoing attempts by Armenia to politicize the situation by presenting it as a “humanitarian crisis that deserves the attention of the international community, including the Security Council”.

Over the past few months, there had been series of formal and informal exchanges through the peacekeeping contingent regarding the illegal exploitation of natural resources in territories of Azerbaijan where the Russian peacekeeping contingent has been temporarily deployed.

Specifically, on 3 December, upon the request of relevant State structures of Azerbaijan, consultations started with the peacekeeping contingent related to modalities of on-site visit and monitoring of mineral deposits that are being illegally exploited. The consultations were also attended by representatives of local Armenians.

On 10 December, following the agreement reached through the peacekeepers, a group of Azerbaijani experts in company of peacekeepers attempted to visit the mineral deposits of concern. Yet, the group was obstructed by pre-planned, orchestrated so-called “protests”. It was clearly observed that almost the same persons were staging such protests at two different sites where the visit of Azerbaijani experts was envisaged. Consequently, the delegation failed to implement its legitimate functions, namely to monitor the situation in the mineral deposits and assess the ecological impact.

The obstruction of the visit and monitoring of Azerbaijan’s experts has legitimately caused deep resentment among the Azerbaijani society and forced a group of eco-activists to launch demonstrations. This exercise by a group of Azerbaijani citizens of their right to peaceful assembly in response to plundering of natural resources of Azerbaijan has since been presented by Armenia as a blockage to the passage through the Lachin road.

As has been stated several times by official representatives of the Republic of Azerbaijan, including through the statements of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Azerbaijan has not put any restriction on the traffic along the Lachin road. The regime for the movement along the road continues to be the same as it was before. The Russian peacekeeping contingent temporarily deployed in the area is in charge of organization of the movement of citizens, goods and vehicles along the road.

The protesters declared no intention to block the traffic along the road. On the contrary, in response to manipulations, they publicly expressed readiness to facilitate the movement of civilian vehicles, especially emergency vehicles, and the videos disseminated through social media testify to the unhindered passage of the various kinds of vehicles along the road.

Azerbaijan has taken consistent steps towards fostering dialogue with local Armenian residents as was the case during the construction of the new Lachin road and in terms of exploitation of the Sarsang water reservoir. This time Azerbaijan also relied on the dialogue to address the concerns over the illegal exploitation of natural

resources in the area of temporary deployment of the Russian peacekeeping contingent.

Azerbaijan still remains committed to engage in dialogue and call for facilitation of national experts' visit to the mineral deposits as was previously agreed. It is not the Azerbaijani Government that refused dialogue, but our consistent efforts for dialogue are effectively sabotaged. Increased dialogue over the past months between central Azerbaijani authorities and local ethnic Armenians, and their tangible results apparently do not serve the interests of certain forces.

Ongoing illegal exploitation of natural resources of Azerbaijan is a source of legitimate concern for the entire Azerbaijani society. With the illegal implantation into the territories of Azerbaijan of a person named Ruben Vardanyan, who is known for his dirty business schemes and affiliation with companies that previously engaged in plundering of Azerbaijan's natural resources in then-occupied territories, these concerns only further increased.

Illegal exploitation of natural resources and its harsh ecological impact are not something hypothetical for Azerbaijani society. We have seen countless such cases during the occupation of our territories. The impact is now crystal clear in areas liberated from occupation and reflected by reports of the competent international organization. As a matter of fact, out of the 151 mineral deposits identified in these territories prior to the occupation, 52 sites were exploited for the first time in the period from 1993 to 2020. Furthermore, several of the pre-conflict mining operations were expanded and intensified.

Besides being an illegal act of exploitation of natural resources of a sovereign State, mining and quarrying operations were conducted with inadequate environmental oversight and supervision, including a lack of effluent treatment and site rehabilitation in gross disregard of environment-related technical standards. This has created environmental impacts such as (i) deforestation and land degradation; (ii) suspended sediment pollution (turbidity) in rivers; and (iii) chemical pollution of water, soil and biota.

As for another element of misinformation promoted by Armenia, namely the accusation against Azerbaijan of imposing a blockade on local Armenians, and the so-called humanitarian catastrophe it has caused, I would like to draw your attention to the following.

As is explained above, there is no blockade. The alleged humanitarian catastrophe is an overexaggeration with the purpose of misleading the international community. Those who claim to be representatives of the local Armenians themselves through their public statements over the past few days confirmed that there was no shortage of food, medicaments or any other supply. Nevertheless, the Government of Azerbaijan has taken seriously the possible negative impact of the situation, and on several occasions over the past days we have declared our readiness to address any humanitarian concern of our citizens of Armenian origin on the ground. Along with that, the protesters declared their openness to dialogue and contact with local Armenian residents. Their representatives have even shared their personal contact details for this purpose.

Another falsified allegation promoted by Armenia is natural gas disruption by Azerbaijan. This claim has been officially refuted by Azerigaz – the national authority in charge of natural gas supply across the territory of Azerbaijan. If gas supply has indeed been disrupted in the area, it might have been related to technical reasons, including bad weather conditions currently observed in certain mountainous regions of Azerbaijan. As a matter of fact, a temporary disruption in gas supply was also observed in other regions of Azerbaijan as well, thus, allegations of intentional

disruption by Azerbaijan of gas supply for the ethnic Armenian residents are false and unsubstantiated.

On the contrary, due to immediate steps taken by Azerbaijani authorities, technical problems have now been fixed and, as of now, gas supply in the area is resumed, which is confirmed also by the Armenian side.

We observe calls for Azerbaijan to comply with the trilateral statement in view of the recent situation. It must be noted that the protests by a group of civilian activists have nothing to do with the implementation by Azerbaijan of its commitment under the trilateral statement. Specifically, on the secure movement of citizens, goods and vehicles along the Lachin road, regulations remain intact; Azerbaijan has not put any restriction in this regard.

Azerbaijan has not only consistently implemented all its commitments, including those under the trilateral statement, but it has also consistently drawn the attention of the international community to gross and blatant violations of this very document by Armenia, including in terms of the use of the Lachin road.

The road has been widely exploited for military purposes. Evidence in this respect, including by third independent sources, Western journalists, is all publicly available and has been presented widely by Azerbaijan to all those international partners. It has also been communicated to you through my letter of 1 March 2021.

Azerbaijan provided countless evidence on the abuse of the Lachin road for transfer of landmines to the territory of Azerbaijan. I have informed you in my letters of 23 August 2022 ([A/76/930-S/2022/642](#)) and 28 November 2022 ([A/77/611-S/2022/885](#)).

Armenia took a commitment to cease hostilities against Azerbaijan, yet Azerbaijanis, most importantly civilians, continue to suffer from mines freshly planted by Armenia after it signed the statement and took the commitment to cease military hostilities. In total, 2,728 Armenian-produced landmines were discovered in sovereign territories of Azerbaijan since August of this year.

Most recently, 350 landmines of 2021 Armenia production had been detected. The area where this minefield of newly planted landmines was detected has not been the theatre of military operation during the 44-day war and has been within the area of deployment of the Russian peacekeeping contingent until recently.

On 14 December 2022, eight more Azerbaijanis fell victim to mine explosion in Kalbajar district, one killed, two seriously injured. The area where the incident took place was far from the former line of contact and had been in use by Armenia until its handover under the trilateral statement. These cases, far from being isolated cases, are indicative of Armenia's deliberate attempt to cause as much damage as possible, to prevent Azerbaijan's reconstruction efforts, and eventually to prevent Azerbaijani internally displaced persons from returning. Azerbaijan has provided extensive evidence in this regard to the entire international community.

In total, after the signing of the trilateral statement in November 2020, 276 persons have become mine victims; 46 persons, including 35 civilians, were killed.

In this fragile situation, and in view of possible discussions within the United Nations on the matter, I wanted you to be informed of the ongoing developments from the first-hand source.

(Signed) Jeyhun **Bayramov**