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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 meeting in connection with the large-scale military provocation
committed by the armed forces of Armenia along the State border with Azerbaijan**

15 September 2022

Mr. President,

This meeting of the Security Council takes place in the aftermath of serious military escalation along the undelimited State border between Armenia and Azerbaijan recklessly provoked by Armenia to torpedo the fragile post-conflict normalization process being pursued with active engagement of relevant international actors, including the members of this august body.

As such, it is our expectation that today's deliberations will send appropriate message confirming the support of the international community for the search for negotiated diplomatic solutions to all issues pertaining to the normalization of inter-State relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Unfortunately, the statement that we have just heard from the representative of Armenia demonstrates the quite opposite intention of this Member State to abuse the Security Council to cover-up its continuous and systematic efforts, both in rhetoric and actions, with the aim to evade the implementation of its commitments.

We categorically reject the allegations made by the representative of Armenia. These allegations, full of a standard set of fabrications, distortions and deceptions, demonstrate how Armenia is far from complying with its international obligations and promoting peace, stability and cooperation in our region.

It is ironic that, Armenia – the country which unleashed aggression against Azerbaijan, held the sovereign territories of my country under occupation for almost 30 years, carried out ethnic cleansing on a massive scale and committed other heinous crimes during the war – enthusiastically talks now on the norms and principles that it has consistently violated and appeals to the Security Council whose resolutions it has refused to implement in the hope of endless impunity.

In fact, the lack of adequate attention and targeted measures to implement the demands of the Security Council encouraged Armenia to consolidate the results of the unlawful use of force against Azerbaijan. Thus, the consequences of the aggression remained unaddressed and further aggravated. It is the occupation of the part of the State border for nearly 30 years that made delimitation and demarcation impossible, which once happened in time would have prevented the latest escalation.

Therefore, attempts by Armenia to portray itself as an ardent defender of the commonly agreed principles, norms and values are not capable of whitewashing the well-known real image of this country as a persistent violator of international law and human rights.

That Armenia is yet to comply with its international obligations and commit itself genuinely to peace and stability in the region is evidenced by its continued use of obsolete or fake names for the localities in Azerbaijan. The references in the statement of the representative of Armenia to such names, which have neither historical nor legal grounds whatsoever, are testament to his Government's continued territorial claims against Azerbaijan and apparent disregard for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of my country.

I have to emphasize that Armenia has neither legal, nor a political or moral ground to make any statements concerning the internationally recognized territory of Azerbaijan or the matters falling within my country's exclusive sovereign rights, competence and responsibilities.

Mr. President,

On the night of 12 to 13 September 2022, the armed forces of Armenia committed a large-scale military provocation in the direction of the Dashkasan, Kalbajar and Lachin districts of the Azerbaijan-Armenia state border, attempting to plant mines on the roads between the military positions of Azerbaijan, taking advantage of night time and difficult terrain.

Further, the positions of the armed forces of Azerbaijan were subjected to intensive fire with different types of weapons, including mortars and artillery. As a result, that night forty two servicemen of the Azerbaijani Army and eight border guards were killed, and significant damage was inflicted on the military infrastructure.

Azerbaijan took adequate and proportionate measures to neutralize the threat against its sovereignty and territorial integrity, ensure the safety of its military personnel and civilians who were involved in ongoing rehabilitation and reconstruction works in close vicinity of the State border.

The countermeasures taken in response to Armenia's provocations were limited and targeted at legitimate military objects.

Contrary to allegations we have just heard from the representative of Armenia, the Ministry of Health of his country reported no casualties or injuries among civilians.

It is worth mentioning that Armenian social media are full of photographs depicting the destruction of civilian objects allegedly on the territory of Armenia. In fact, these are the photographs after the missile strikes on the cities in Azerbaijan by the armed forces of Armenia during the war in the fall of 2020, in particular the city centre of Barda, which came under massive rocket fire on 28 October, causing the death of 21 and injuring more than 70 civilians.

Taking into account the appeals of our international partners, an agreement on ceasefire was reached, starting from 13 September, 9 a.m. Baku time.

However, in a reckless attempt for further escalation of the crisis for political manipulation with the attention of the international community, the armed forces of Armenia continued attacks and provocations in the border areas using artillery and other heavy weapons. As a result of violation by Armenia of the established ceasefire, Azerbaijan suffered further losses and casualties among the military personnel. In addition, two civilians were seriously wounded.

In total, 71 servicemen of the armed forces of Azerbaijan perished.

Of particular concern is that Armenia resorted to yet another gross violation of international humanitarian law by locating its armed forces and heavy equipment within the residential areas in the vicinity of the border line. Needless to say that it aimed at substantiating groundless accusations against Azerbaijan of shelling civilian infrastructure, which Armenia had been trying to impose through its propaganda channels since the early minutes of the escalation. Yet, the armed forces of Azerbaijan demonstrated utmost restraint and professionalism and limited to targeting exclusively fire points of Armenia with high precision weapons to suppress its attacks on the positions of Azerbaijan.

In view of Armenia's overt attempt for further escalation, Azerbaijan took several steps, including through contacts with relevant international partners, and demonstrated good faith and genuine will to restore the ceasefire that already agreed upon a day before. Among others, the Azerbaijani side declared its willingness to return to Armenia the remains of its deceased military personnel on a unilateral basis and informed the ICRC, accordingly.

Eventually, ceasefire was restored effective of 8pm local time, which is 12 noon US eastern time, on September 14 through direct communication channels between Armenia and Azerbaijan, and since then it is now being maintained as confirmed by both sides. But now we have heard the absolutely provocative statement on the part of the Armenian representative.

Both Azerbaijan and Armenia are now engaged in dealing with humanitarian consequences, including the retrieval of dead bodies. Azerbaijan reiterated to Armenia and the relevant humanitarian actors present on the ground its readiness to return the deceased Armenian soldiers unilaterally.

Moreover, as a result of escalation, several Armenian soldiers fell under the control of Azerbaijan. They are treated fully in line with the norms and principles of international humanitarian law, necessary first medical aid was provided to those injured. Both sides are in contact with a view to facilitate their soonest repatriation.

Thus, there is a ground for cautious optimism that common sense will finally prevail and yet another military adventure irresponsibly resorted to by Armenia will be overcome without further undermining the shaky normalization process between the two countries after almost 30-year-long bloody conflict.

In this context, it is important more than ever for the entire international community to contribute to this process, and thus, refrain from one-sided actions and statements that would complicate the already delicate situation.

Mr. President,

The escalation at the State border was not an isolated incident, but another link in the chain of destabilizing actions by Armenia over the past months. Suffice it to mention just a few.

Last month, on 3 August, Armenia resorted to military provocations in the direction of the Lachin district of Azerbaijan, which we reported to the Security Council in our letter S/2022/638.

From 2 September onwards, after the fourth trilateral meeting between the leaders of Azerbaijan and Armenia mediated by the President of the European Council Mr. Charles Michel, which was held on 31 August in Brussels, the armed forces of Armenia intensified fire against the positions of the armed forces of Azerbaijan along the border in the direction of the Kalbajar and Lachin districts.

Following the Brussels meeting, the Prime Minister and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Armenia made provocative statements in connection with the anniversary of the so-called "independence" of the unlawful regime that Armenia established and maintained on the territories of Azerbaijan in the years of their occupation, while the Secretary of the Security Council of Armenia illegally visited the city of Khankendi in Azerbaijan.

Furthermore, in breach of the provisions of the trilateral statement regarding the cessation of all military activities, as well as of its other international obligations, Armenia continued to plant mines at a massive scale on the territory of Azerbaijan.

Since 15 August 2022, more than 1300 anti-personnel mines have been found in the Lachin district alone. It was established that these mines were manufactured in Armenia in 2021 and, accordingly, laid on the territory of Azerbaijan after the signing of the Trilateral Statement on 10 November 2020.

Massive mine planting by Armenia on the territory of Azerbaijan continues along with Armenia's consistent failure to share accurate and comprehensive information about the hundreds of thousands of landmines it indiscriminately laid on Azerbaijan's territory during the conflict.

As a result, after the signing of the Trilateral Statement, more than 240 citizens of Azerbaijan were killed or injured by mine explosions. Out of these mine explosions, 134, in other words, more than fifty per cent took place in areas not covered by the minefield records shared by Armenia. This is indicative of indiscriminate nature of mine planting by Armenia in gross violation of the relevant international norms, and demonstrates the true scale and gravity of the humanitarian threat facing Azerbaijani civilians.

Further, in violation of Article 4 of the Trilateral Statement, Armenia has not completely withdrawn the remnants of its armed forces and illegal armed formations from the territory of Azerbaijan where the peacekeepers of the Russian Federation are temporarily deployed.

There are also almost 4,000 citizens of Azerbaijan, both civilians and military, remaining missing in connection with the conflict. Armenia fails to clarify the whereabouts of these persons, who fell into its hands but have not been seen since.

Even after the end of the conflict, Armenia continues to allow racist hate groups formed for the specific purpose of inciting and committing violence against Azerbaijanis to operate openly and notoriously on its territory, 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 in the case on the *Application of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (Azerbaijan v. Armenia)*.

This is the overall context in the run-up to the recent large-scale military provocations on the border.

Mr. President,

Domestically, our Government prioritized the rehabilitation and reconstruction of the liberated territories and their reintegration into the country's economy to ensure the safe return of the displaced population and high standard of living.

Impressive large-scale post-conflict investment, rehabilitation and reconstruction projects are underway in close proximity of the areas where the armed hostilities recently erupted.

After almost three decades of occupation and denial of their basic human rights, the first group of Azerbaijani IDPs recently returned to the newly reconstructed Aghali village in the liberated Zangilan district. Further, Azerbaijan is about to complete the construction of a new airport in Zangilan close to the State border with Armenia.

The Government of Azerbaijan also takes consistent and successful efforts towards building interaction with local Armenian residents, including most recently in addressing important water and energy supply issues in the region.

Consequently, Azerbaijan cannot be interested in any military activity in these areas that put under danger such a large-scale, multi-million rehabilitation and reconstruction projects being implemented with foreign investors.

On the contrary, escalation in the vicinity of newly liberated territories aims at preventing the restoration of the demographic situation in the conflict-affected territories by enabling safe return of several hundreds of thousands Azerbaijani IDPs to their places of origin. In this regard, it is not coincidence that Armenia continues at full swing the militarization of the borderline areas in preparation for military provocations.

Furthermore, a few days ago, as a good-will gesture, Azerbaijan released and handed over to Armenia five Armenian servicemen who were previously charged and imprisoned for criminal offences. This step was taken with a view to strengthening trust and improving the atmosphere for peace talks.

Mr. President,

It is evident that, by resorting to political and military provocations, Armenia tried to backtrack from the implementation of the agreements reached between the two countries, undermine the process of normalization of inter-State relations, involve third parties into bilateral issues and expand the geography of tensions for sustaining its territorial claims and revanchist objectives.

Against this background, it is important that the international community resolutely condemn Armenia's policy and actions, which run counter to the Charter of United Nations and international law, demand that Armenia strictly comply with its international obligations, focus on their implementation and engage, in good faith, in the result-oriented process of normalizing inter-State relations.

Ensuring lasting peace, development, progress and good neighbourliness is the basis of Azerbaijan's vision for the future.

Azerbaijan is firm in its determination to continue efforts towards advancing rehabilitation, reconstruction and reintegration of its conflict-affected territories, 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.

Azerbaijan is committed to regional peace, stability and development. Establishment of good neighborly relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan is a key for building secure, stable and prosperous South Caucasus through full-fledged regional normalization. Border delimitation and demarcation through bilateral commissions and opening of transport communications are the two tracks of inter-State normalization complementing negotiations on a bilateral peace treaty.

Azerbaijan's position in this regard is clear, principled and consistent, and is based on international law and established international practice. It is Azerbaijan that right after the end of the conflict initiated the process of normalizing inter-State relations with Armenia based on mutual recognition and respect for each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity within their internationally recognized borders, including through the signing of a peace treaty based on these principles.

Azerbaijan counts on the support of the international community in its efforts both domestically in terms of eliminating consequences of almost 30-year-lasting occupation of its territories, and in the inter-State track aimed at building good-neighborly relations with Armenia.

Taking this opportunity, we reiterate our call on the international community to persuade Armenia to reciprocate the offer of Azerbaijan, cease its political and military provocations, abandon its aggressive rhetoric and actions, and engage in good faith in direct negotiations to find peaceful diplomatic solutions to all issues pertaining to inter-State relations between Azerbaijan and Armenia.

Thank you.