

STATEMENT OF THE DEPUTY MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE
REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA MR. VAHE GEVORGYAN
AT THE UNHCR 74TH ExCom
Plenary session
Geneva, October 9, 2023

Distinguished High Commissioner,
Excellences,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Armenia is currently facing a massive influx of refugees from Nagorno-Karabakh. In just a few days, the entire population of Nagorno-Karabakh was uprooted and forced to leave their ancestral homeland due to the large-scale military offensive of Azerbaijan, unleashed on 19 September 2023.

This pre-planned aggression claimed more than 200 lives, with more than 500 wounded, according to preliminary reports. Another 170 people perished in the tragic explosion of the gas station in the outskirts of Stepanakert in the immediate aftermath of this aggression.

Azerbaijan's military aggression was the culmination of its long-standing policy aimed at achieving complete extermination and destruction of the indigenous Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh. It was preceded by the 10 months-long siege of Nagorno-Karabakh, which caused a critical shortage of food, medicine, fuel, electricity and other critical goods, creating a full-fledged humanitarian crisis and starvation.

These actions pursue one main objective to create conditions unbearable for life and provoke forced displacement. On the eve of forced displacement in the statement of 22 September 2023, the UN Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide expressed her alarm over the military escalation by Azerbaijan, stressing that it can put the civilian population in the area at risk of violence, including risk of genocide and related atrocity crimes.

Throughout this period Azerbaijan has been denying the deployment of the UN interagency fact-finding mission to Nagorno-Karabakh to assess the needs of the affected population and provide humanitarian assistance. Only after achieving

complete ethnic cleansing of Nagorno-Karabakh, Azerbaijan did allow a limited and curtailed mission led by the UN resident-coordinator in Baku in an attempt to make UN part of its new realities created by destruction of right holders.

Excellencies,

Armenia has received more than 100.000 refugees from Nagorno-Karabakh, among them 30000 children. Many of them are vulnerable, including older people, pregnant women and children, people with disabilities and chronic health conditions.

This number adds to more than 36000 refugees which were forcibly deported from the territories of Nagorno-Karabakh which fell under the control of Azerbaijan as a result of 2020 war. Up until now Azerbaijan has refused to ensure their right to return to their homes, in utter disregard to its obligations under the Trilateral Statement of 9 November of 2020.

Many of the refugees have become victims of multiple displacement, since they had to flee from atrocities and ethnic cleansings perpetrated by Azerbaijan in the late 1980s and early 1990s, causing hundreds of deaths and resulting in forcible displacement of more than 400 thousand Armenians.

Mr. Chairman,

People came to Armenia injured, traumatized, hungry without essential belongings. In this context the solidarity and support of the international community is crucial to address the life-saving, early recovery and long-term protection needs of the forcibly displaced population

Armenia commends the UNHCR for its early engagement on the ground in provision of international protection to refugees.

We welcome the Joint Appeal issued by the UNHCR to respond to the urgent humanitarian needs of the refugees from Nagorno-Karabakh and their host communities in support of the Government's efforts. We hope that the Armenia Refugee Response Plan will serve to mobilize the capacities of the international community and the UN system in ensuring a comprehensive and coherent response to the needs of refugees and protect their fundamental human rights.

As the Global Refugee Forum approaches this December and participating States will evaluate their commitments and voluntary pledges, I would like to reaffirm Armenia's unwavering commitment to undertake all efforts to provide a decent life

for the refugees and promote durable solutions, including their inalienable right for safe, voluntary and dignified return to their homes under international protection.

Thank you for your attention.