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by a Group of Civil Society Organizations of Nagorno-Karabakh¹

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*(For security reasons we request not to publish annex 1 with the names and contact information of submitting organizations and persons)

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I. Introduction

1. This report is submitted to the UN Human Rights Council (hereinafter the Council) by a group of NGOs (see Appendix 1) from Nagorno-Karabakh (hereinafter mentioned also as NK or Artsakh)ⁱ for the 4th cycle of Universal Periodic Review of Azerbaijan.
2. This report focuses on human rights violations by Azerbaijan as well as on its policy of racial discrimination against Armenians, as applied to the Armenian-populated NK within the last four years.
3. The policy of hatred and ethnic cleansing of Azerbaijan towards Armenians was enforced by a series of measures, first launched with a large-scale military attack on NK on September 27, 2020 and 44-days of brutal war, that was stopped by a ceasefire statement on November 9, 2020, brokered by Russia.ⁱⁱ Aggressive pursuit of this policy, however, continued after the war, as Azerbaijan undertook several short-term attacks, cleansing 6 more towns/villages from Armenians, in spite of the presence of Russian peacekeeping contingent. In parallel, Azerbaijan used intimidation tactics and psychological terror towards Armenians, to create unbearable conditions for life. Culmination of this is the blockade of the only lifeline road – “Lachin Corridor“ for already 4 months, since December 12, 2022, putting NK on the verge of humanitarian disaster.
4. The report has focus on freedom from racial discrimination and freedom of movement, right to life, liberty and security, right to an adequate standard of living, women and child rights, as well as protection of cultural heritage.

II. Freedom from Racial Discrimination

5. There is a widespread state sponsored practice and common scheme of racial discrimination employed by Azerbaijani authorities against ethnic Armenians. Those are being continuously and consistently fueled by hate speech of public officials. President Aliyev in his speeches often makes references to Armenians as “barbarians”, “vandals”, and “fascists”.ⁱⁱⁱ
6. During the 44-day war in 2020, Aliyev referred to Armenians as “animals”, including claiming that “We are now driving them out as if we were chasing dogs”^{iv}, an insult which subsequently gained popularity “showing the degree of hostility and hate speech within Azeri society”.^v
7. Azerbaijan launched production of unmanned aerial vehicles (hereinafter – UAV) named “Iti Qovan”, “dog chaser” in Azerbaijani.^{vi} Those UAVs were exhibited at Azerbaijan’s 2021 International Defence Industry Fair.^{vii}
8. After the war, the Ministry of Transport, Communications and High Technologies of Azerbaijan released stamps, which depicted a medical orderly “disinfecting” the NK area on the map, visually depicting the act of cleansing of the territory.^{viii}

9. In April 2021, Azerbaijan opened a “Military Trophy Park” in Baku, which exhibited equipment captured during 44-day war. The exhibition also displayed disgraceful and ugly mannequins, depicting Armenian soldiers, which specifically attracted children to play with.^{ix} The Park was widely advertised in tourism guides and by travel companies.^x Only following a complaint by Armenia at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) Azerbaijan removed the mannequins.^{xi}
10. Hatred towards Armenians is injected into the Azerbaijani population since the early childhood – through kindergarten education^{xii} and textbooks in schools.^{xiii}

III. Right to Life

11. During the 44-day war in 2020, the Azerbaijani armed forces indiscriminately shelled the civilian population and civilian infrastructure using cluster munitions, as well as directly targeting civilians by UAVs. In October 2020, Amnesty International has independently verified and publicly condemned the use of cluster munitions targeting civilians in Stepanakert that appeared to have been fired by Azerbaijani forces.^{xiv} The use of cluster munitions against civilian population has been confirmed also by the Human Rights Watch.^{xv}
12. Systemic and indiscriminate shelling and direct strikes from UAVs resulted in significant human loss and people suffering life-changing injuries. At least 81 civilians were killed by Azerbaijani armed forces, including 42 civilians - in missile and UAV strikes, while the remaining 39 were murdered after being captured by the Azerbaijani servicemen,^{xvi} as the hatred towards Armenians was enforced in a form of beheadings of civilians, torture of PoWs, etc. There is no Armenian left on the territories appeared under Azerbaijani control after the war of 2020 and further invasions, as those who stayed, were brutally murdered, whereas the process of killings were videotaped and proudly disseminated via Azerbaijani social media by perpetrators themselves.
13. A video from October 2020 depicted residents of Hadrut district Benik Hakobyan, 73, and Yuri Adamyan, 25, who were surrendered to a group of Azerbaijani servicemen,^{xvii} and later killed with hands tied behind their backs and wrapped up in the flags of the Republic of Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh, respectively.^{xviii} Upon a command, they are shot multiple times. Before shots are fired, someone orders in Azerbaijani: “Aim at their heads.”^{xix} The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights also referred to this case, stating “in-depth investigations by media organizations into videos that appeared to show Azerbaijani troops summarily executing two captured Armenians in military uniforms uncovered compelling and deeply disturbing information”.^{xx}
14. Another video from November 2020 shows brutal decapitation of a resident of Matadashen village of Askeran District Genadi Petrosyan, 69, where his severed head was placed on a dead pig. “See the pigs next to each other!”, a voice says off camera in Azerbaijani.^{xxi} In an earlier video, published in December 2020, a group of servicemen in Azerbaijani military uniform, with the flag of Azerbaijan on the right shoulder, are seen holding a struggling Genadi Petrosyan, while another serviceman cuts off his head, and one of his comrades helps him putting his hand on the body of the victim.^{xxii}

15. In the third video from December 2020, resident of Azokh village of Hadrut District Yuri Asryan, 82, is seen asking not to be beheaded in the name of “Allah,” but a serviceman with a uniform of the Azerbaijani armed forces beheads him in cold blood, and the other servicemen present there cheer.^{xxiii}
16. The fourth video shows that civilian resident of town of Hadrut Arsen Gharakhanyan, 44, who was killed while in Azerbaijani custody in January 2021, 2 months after the conclusion of ceasefire. The last time his family spoke to him on October 9, 2020. His body was found during search operations, buried within 2-3 km away from Hadrut, with his head left above ground. Forensic experts concluded that he had been killed on January 15, 2021.^{xxiv}
17. On October 10, 2020, members of a subversive group that invaded Hadrut killed at least four civilians, who have stayed in the town. Among them was a person with a disability and his elderly mother,^{xxv} who were shot to death in cold blood in their house. The pictures of the dead body of the disabled person revealed signs of violence on his body - his chest and abdomen. ^{xxvi}
18. On October 30, 2020, an 84-year-old man, Misha Melkumyan, was reported dead while under the control of Azerbaijani authorities, the death having resulted from brain trauma. ^{xxvii}
19. Azerbaijan has not stopped posing danger and threats to the NK population after conclusion of ceasefire. Killings of civilians continued also after the 44-day war. On October 9, 2021, Aram Tepnunts, 55, was killed in the town of Martakert, while he was cultivating farmland, sitting next to a Russian peacekeeper on a tractor.^{xxviii} On November 8, 2021, Martik Yeremyan, 22, was killed near the city of Shushi. Together with a group of specialists, he was carrying out construction work on water supply pipes near a road intersection in the vicinity of Shushi, in order to provide water to Russian peacekeepers. The Azerbaijani military approached the workers and set fire to them. Yeremyan was killed and three others were injured^{xxix}. On December 3, 2022, a resident of Chartar in the Martuni District Seyran Sargsyan, while engaged in cattle breeding, got lost, was captured by Azerbaijani units and killed.^{xxx}

IV. Right to Liberty and Security

20. Torture and ill-treatment of POWs was a widespread practice during the armed conflict including upon capture, during the transfer as well as in premises of the Azerbaijani Military Police, the Ministry of National Security and in Kurdakhani Prison in Azerbaijan. The interviewed repatriated POWs stated that they were severely beaten just because of “being Armenian”.^{xxxi}
21. In the beginning of February 2022, the Azerbaijani armed forces used loudspeakers in the immediate vicinity of Armenian populated NK villages, on a daily basis calling the residents to leave their communities “as they are living in the territory of Azerbaijan and have to obey the Azerbaijani instructions.” Their demands to Armenians to abandon their homes are accompanied by threats of using force in the case of disobedience to those “orders.”^{xxxii} Such actions of the Azerbaijani armed forces were reported in villages Khramort, Parukh, Nakhijevanik, Nor Shen, and Taghavard. Apart from those calls, as another method of intimidation, the members of Azerbaijani armed forces played

on loudspeakers the call for Muslim prayer, signifying their religious domination over the Christian Armenian communities.^{xxxiii}

22. On March 10, 2022, Suren Baghdasaryan, the resident of Khamort village, was injured while working in his garden as a result of one of the mortar attacks.^{xxxiv} Due to the intense shelling and real threat, children were evacuated from Khamort village on the same day.^{xxxv}
23. Regular shooting from different caliber weapons, including mortars, were reported in villages along the line of contact, including, but not limited to Khamort, Khnapat, Nakhijevanik, Nor Shen, Karmir Shuka, Khnushinak, and Parukh.^{xxxvi} The shootings have been recorded from Shushi in the direction of the NK capital city Stepanakert.^{xxxvii} Due to shooting with large and small caliber weapons by the Azerbaijani armed forces, agricultural work of villagers has been hindered up periodically - until now, when few days ago, on March 22, March 27 and March 30^{xxxviii} 2023, while doing their agricultural works, residents of Martuni and Martakert regions were subjected to shootings and were stopped from doing their work.
24. On August 1-3, 2022, Azerbaijan launched another armed attack against NK, using weapons of various calibers, grenade launchers, and UAVs.^{xxxix} On August 2, Azerbaijan put a sudden demand to organize the connection of NK with Armenia through an alternative route earlier than planned,^{xl} which left all communications – gas pipeline, high voltage electricity transmission lines and fiber optic cables – under Azerbaijani control. On August 3 the Azerbaijani forces employed grenades and striking UAVs against the defence army because of which two Armenian servicemen died and 19 wounded.^{xli}
25. On August 12, 2022, president Aliyev called on the Armenians living in Berdzor (Lachin) city, Aghavno and Sus villages, to leave within the deadline set by the end of August^{xlii} and threatened with the use of force in case they do not leave their homes. As a result, the Armenians were deported from those villages to avoid the atrocities by the Azerbaijani forces.^{xliii}
26. Episodes of terror by Azerbaijan have been happening on a regular basis and reached the point, where the Lachin corridor, the only road linking NK to outside world became blocked by so-called eco-activists, supported by the leadership of Azerbaijan, since December 12, 2022. Video recordings and photographs from the area reveal that the alleged “eco-protestors” in fact pursue other goals. Those “eco-protestors” have been photographed displaying the hand gesture of the Grey Wolves, an ultranationalist organization widely known and condemned for anti-Armenian violence and hate speech. They have been responsible for acts of violence, including murder, targeting leftists, communists, Kurds, Armenians and other minority groups in Turkey. Some killings by Grey Wolves members were later revealed to have taken place in cooperation with the National Intelligence Organisation (Turkish: MIT).^{xliv}
27. On March 5, 2023, as a result of the ambush by Azerbaijani Armed Forces in NK three servicemen of the Passport and Visa Department of the NK Police were killed, and one was injured. The video that NK Police has at its disposal proves that the Azerbaijani military attacked the "UAZ" microbus that carried four employees, who were on their way from Stepanakert to Hin Shen and Mets Shen villages of NK. Videos prove that there was nothing in the microbus except the official documents

and a service pistol.^{xlv}

28. On March 25, 2023, a unit of the Azerbaijani armed forces, in violation of paragraph 1 of the ceasefire statement from November 9, 2020, crossed the line of contact in the Shushi-Lisagor part of Shushi region, occupied a strategic height and started the fortification of the post^{xlvi}, whereas the residents of adjacent areas also report about mining/engineering activities. On March 27, 2023 the Azerbaijani armed forces attempted to advance even further towards another height adjacent to the Stepanakert- Lisagor dirt road.^{xlvii} Thus, in addition to blocking the only highway connecting NK to the outside world, Azerbaijan took the control of the dirt road, the only pathway connecting NK with its villages in Shushi region that are on the other side of the blockaded road.

V. Freedom of Movement

29. On March 25, 2021, Armenians cars passing through a joint-use Karmir Shuka-Stepanakert road had stones thrown at them by Azerbaijanis.^{xlviii}
30. During April 28 - July 8, 2021, the Azerbaijani military blocked access to the Dadivank Monastery, creating obstacles for Armenian pilgrims. They continuously try to portray the monastery as Azerbaijani (Caucasus Albanian), signaling that they intend to permanently block access for Armenians when the peacekeepers leave the territory.^{xlix}
31. On January 2, 2022, on the Stepanakert-Shushi road, Azerbaijani armed servicemen aimed a gun and threw a large stone at the car of a citizen of Armenia, with his wife and a 3-year-old child in the car^l.
32. Aside from terrorizing the people of NK in their homeland, the Azerbaijani leadership exerts effort to deepen the isolation of NK through creating obstacles for visitors, including accessibility for high-ranking Armenian officials as well as international actors.
33. The issue of NK's isolation has been reflected in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) report on "Humanitarian Consequences of the Conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan.", calling on all involved States to ensure unimpeded access of representatives of international independent humanitarian organizations and mass-media to the Nagorno-Karabakh.^{li}
34. On December 3, a group of Azerbaijanis under an environmental pretext blocked Lachin Corridor^{lii}. The road was opened the same day, but on December 12, 2022 at around 10:30 am, Azerbaijani "eco-activists" blocked it again, erected tents along the road^{liii} preventing anyone and anything from entering or exiting. The "eco-protest" is fully orchestrated by the Azerbaijani government, as Azerbaijani citizens do not actually have any civil or political liberties.
35. As an additional proof of the actions of "eco-activists" are sponsored by the leadership of Azerbaijan with an aim of ethnic cleansing is the statement of President Aliyev on January 10, 2023 that: "Whoever does not want to become a citizen of our country, the road is not closed, they can leave. Nobody will interfere. They can leave in the cargo compartment of peacekeepers' trucks, on buses. The road is open".^{liv}

36. The blockade has physically obstructed the sole road of life of NK for almost 4 months now, leaving its entire population, 120,000 people, including 30,000 children, in a state of total isolation, facing massive violations of individual and collective human rights, as well as existential security threats.
37. Before the blockade, an average of 2,450 people were passing through the corridor in both directions on a daily basis. Meanwhile, during the past 100 days, only 1,386 persons (858- members of separated families, 518- patients and accompanying persons) were transferred on both directions with the help of ICRC and Russian Peacekeepers.
38. In result of the blockade, about 3,500 people were not able to travel home and unify with their families.^{lv} Commuting inside NK was also restricted due to the lack of gas^{lvi}. A limited number of vehicles of International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the Russian peacekeeping contingent have been able to move through the area blocked by the “eco-activists”.
39. Before the blockade on average 920 vehicles were passing through corridor in both directions daily. While during the mentioned period, no vehicles belonging to the residents of Nagorno-Karabakh passed through the Corridor, but only the ICRC and Russian peacekeepers could (2,154 entries and departures to NK).
40. The international community and international organizations urged Azerbaijan to open the road and restore movement throughout Lachin corridor. Moreover, ICJ as a provisional measure on February 22 concluded that Azerbaijan shall, pending the final decision in the case Armenia v. Azerbaijan (Application of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD)) and in accordance with its obligations under CERD, take all measures at its disposal to ensure unimpeded movement of persons, vehicles and cargo along the Lachin Corridor in both directions.^{lvii} Yet, we do not see relevant steps by the Azerbaijani government. Instead, the aggression towards Armenians is growing.

VI. Right to an Adequate Standard of Living

41. In the aftermath of the war and up until now the residents of NK are deprived of the opportunity to enjoy the basic conditions of living being constantly under the threat of another offensive and experiencing constant attacks from the Azerbaijani side when doing simple agricultural works.
42. The mentioned right has been even more gravely violated during the blockade. Azerbaijan deprived the population of NK of the following basic conditions of life:

43. **Gas supply.** Gas supplied by Armenia through the Lachin Corridor has been cut by Azerbaijan completely or partially multiple times, in total for 47 days as of April 4, 2023 (December 13-16, January 17-29, January 29- February 6 (intermittently), February 8-13, February 13-16, March 10-13, March 22-April 4). Most of the population (80%) uses gas for heating purposes, hot water supplies, as well as for their private as well as public vehicles to move within and outside the city or for commuting to educational institutions, when using private and public vehicles for reach workplaces.
44. Preparation for discretionary gas supply and a test for despair of the Armenian people of NK have been undertaken by Azerbaijan still in March 2022. On March 8, 2022, the pipeline from Armenia to NK was damaged in the area under Azerbaijani control. The Azerbaijani side did not allow Armenians or Russian peacekeepers to take part in fixing the pipeline, doing its private “repairs “, and ensuring its own control over the pipeline. Then it restored the gas supply on March 18, but only for few days. Between March 21- 28 March, 2022, the entire population of NK was deprived of gas and heating. In March 2022, the weather conditions in NK were harsh, the temperature was below 0 degrees of Celsius.
45. **Electricity supplies.** On January 9, the high voltage line was damaged in the area under control of Azerbaijan in Lachin corridor under unknown circumstances. Up until now, Azerbaijani side refuses to let Armenians to do repair works and restore regular electricity coming from Armenia. NK currently relies only on local hydropower resources which is 57 % of the total power used by population. Therefore, 6 hours of daily rolling blackouts were introduced by the authorities to deal with the scarcity of electricity from January 21, as the local hydro-power stations are exhausting their capacity. Hence, in addition to the current problems, there is a serious risk for water shortage over the summer time, given the emptying reservoirs.
46. **Internet connection.** On January 12, the internet connection was lost in NK, because of damage to the internet cable. According to the local internet provider, “Karabakh Telecom” CJSC^{lviii}, the damage of the cable was exactly at the location where the “eco-activists” have blocked the Lachin corridor. The cable internet was cut for 24 hours. The technical specialists managed to go to the place of the accident and carry out restoration works only after the mediation of Russian peacekeeping forces.
47. **Deliberately jamming mobile communication and Internet.** Since after the war in 2020, the Azerbaijani side constantly disrupts the mobile connection trying to cause problems with communication both inside and outside NK.^{lix}
48. **Right to adequate food.** NK in majority of instances relies on the supply of foodstuffs from Armenia to satisfy its local demand. Daily 400 tons of food items and other commodities used to be delivered to NK, which now are not received.
49. To coordinate the situation, the authorities introduced a coupon system for basic food items, entered into force on January 20, 2023. The coupon/voucher system applies to the most basic foodstuffs such as pasta, rice, buckwheat, sugar, sunflower oil, eggs, vegetables and fruits. Residents will be allowed

to purchase only 1 kilogram of each of these dry products and 1 litre of sunflower oil per month.^{lx}

50. The scarcity of available flour led to the situation when bakeries are struggling with the production of bread to supply the market.^{lxi} The domestic production of dairy products is at minimum level, since the imports of feed and other necessities for small and large cattle has been stopped because of the blockade.^{lxii}
51. **Critical situation in private sector.** Throughout the blockade 782 business entities (18.3%) have ceased their activities leading to 1,170 employees being unemployed, while 342 business entities (8%), which continued their activities, were forced to cut their staff, leaving 1,699 employees jobless.^{lxiii}
52. **Scarcity of cash.** Since the first days of the blockade, the population was suffering because of the lack of cash, as the ATMs were not working on a regular basis. On 11 January, the authorities had to restrict the withdrawal amount of cash to 50.000 AMDs (around 127 USD) daily.

VII. Right to Health

53. Right to health of the residents of NK has been violated on multiple occasions. On October 28, 2020, Azerbaijan launched heavy rocket strikes towards the Medical Center, the Main Hospital, and the maternity ward of Stepanakert, located at the center of the capital city of NK. There were no military objects nearby, and the intent of the strikes was to kill civilians in the mentioned locations.^{lxiv} Other incidents of hitting the hospitals in NK have been documented by Human Rights Watch.^{lxv}
54. Right to health is at stake during the blockade, as there were difficulties in transferring patients with severe and special health problems to Armenia, especially during the first phase of the blockade. Only on the 8th day of the blockade ICRC was able to carry out the first transfer of a person in a critical medical condition to a medical facility in Yerevan. Another patient died in a hospital in Stepanakert given the impossibility of his timely transfer to Armenia.^{lxvi}
55. 900 residents of NK were deprived of the opportunity to undergo surgeries to solve their health problems due to the suspension of the planned operations in all medical institutions of NK. Since January 31, planned operations have been partially resumed. Within the first 100 days of blockade only 33 planned surgeries have been carried out.
56. The absence or shortage of medicines and medical supplies is regularly recorded both in medical institutions and pharmacies.
57. Hygiene items are in short supply- household chemicals, soaps and toiletries, toilet paper, dental items, diapers, women hygiene items, which will increasingly lead to serious health problems and diseases.
58. There were 67 cases of gas poisoning due to the series of complete disruptions of the gas supply to NK from Armenia and its partial recovery.^{lxvii}

VIII. Right to Education

59. Densely populated areas, including schools and kindergartens, have been indiscriminately targeted during the 44-day war initiated by Azerbaijan. The armed forces of Azerbaijan have been acting with clear intention to damage lives and health of the civilian population, including children. Based on the available data, 71 schools and 14 kindergartens in Stepanakert, Martuni, Hadrut, Shushi, Aygestan, Mataghis have suffered material damages from the shelling, rocket and air strikes by the Azerbaijani armed forces. As a result of the Azerbaijani attacks, all the 220 schools and 58 kindergartens were closed. Consequently, all the 23,978 children in NK were deprived of the right to education, the opportunity to attend school and 4,036 children of getting preschool education.^{lxviii}
60. Violations of the right to education continued after war making the education system of NK vulnerable. The education process was systematically disrupted throughout 2022 and beginning of 2023. The first episode of disruption after the war occurred when in March 2022, during the harsh weather conditions, Azerbaijan cut the gas flow coming from Armenia to NK and providing, among others, the heating for the schools and other education establishments.
61. The same happened few days after the blockade of December 12, 2022. All 118 schools of NK were suspended from January 18-30, depriving 20,000 children of the right to education. Because of the shortage of food under the blockade, all 41 kindergartens and 56 pre-school groups were closed since January 9, and 20 long-day educational institutions were working only partially. It resulted in inability of 6,828 children to attend educational institutions at all or partially, as they were deprived of opportunity to receive appropriate care and nutrition. Only on February 23 due to some temporary solutions of food shortages in pre-schools, the mentioned establishments resumed their work.^{lxix}

IX. Child Rights

62. During the war in 2020, children were the first ones to suffer from direct consequences. On September 27, 9-years-old Victoria Gevorgyan was killed from shelling in the Martuni region in the yard of her house. Her mother and younger brother were wounded. The latter, two-year-old Artsvik Gevorgyan, received shrapnel wounds in the process of evacuation. Their mother stated that strikes from Azerbaijani UAVs continued even as they fled the area by bus.^{lxx}
63. On the same day 13-year-old Robert Gevorgyan was heavily wounded by Azerbaijani shelling while fleeing the house with his family. By the same shelling and in the same car, his cousin 15-year-old Narek Gevorgyan was also wounded.
64. Six other children have also been wounded because of Azerbaijani attacks in 2020, namely, 1-year-old Lana Melkumyan and Tigran Avanesyan, 2-year-old Marianna Kamalyan, 14-year-old Elina Mayilyan, 15-year-old Vanik Muradyan, 17-year-old Tigran Gabrielyan.
65. Because of the current blockade and infrastructure disruptions, 30,000 children of NK suffer from different difficulties. First, there was lack or sharp shortage of infant formula leading to serious nutritional problems for hundreds of toddlers and newborns. Due to the efforts of ICRC and Russian

peacekeeping force, a limited amount of child formula was imported temporarily solving the problem. Children's stable physical and mental development is also hindered by the lack of vitamin-rich foodstuffs, such as vegetables and fruits.

66. The psychological pressure caused by the closed road, infrastructure cuts, including rolling blackouts, leaving the children in harsh winter conditions without light and heating, increased the number of visits to child neurologists and psychologists by 47%.^{lxxi}
67. At the beginning of the blockade 570 children were deprived of the opportunity to return home. Moreover, 83 of the children were left without both parents, while the rest of them with only one parent. Only more than a month after, the first group of children were able to return to NK.
68. On 17 January, 19 children returned home via blocked Goris-Stepanakert Road. Other children staying in Goris and their accompaniers staying in Goris refused to join Russian peacekeepers to pass through the Lachin corridor, as were scared for their lives^{lxxii}. During the passage through the corridor, the two cars were stopped by Azerbaijanis twice. Once it was in Isabulagh area for one hour, where the Azerbaijani side refused to let the children and they were able to pass that part only after negotiations of peacekeepers. For the second time – the cars were stopped in the blocked part of the road, where 10-15 Azerbaijanis with face masks on, cameras in hand, and in civilian clothes approached one of the cars. Some of them rushed into the vehicle and filmed the children in the car.^{lxxiii} As a result of the provocative actions of the Azerbaijanis and the atmosphere of fear, one of the children fainted.
69. More than 2,100 children are still unable to see one of their parents, because the latter is on the other side of the blockaded road.^{lxxiv}

X. Protection of Cultural Heritage

70. Azerbaijan implements an aggressive policy of removing traces of Armenian culture from the region.^{lxxv}
71. During the war, the Azerbaijani Air Force deliberately and twice shelled Holy Savior Ghazanchetsots Cathedral in Shushi, the religious center for Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians.^{lxxvi} Immediately after the war, the church was openly desecrated by Azerbaijani servicemen.^{lxxvii} In 2021, Azerbaijan launched a “renovation” of the church to “return it to its original form,” by removing the steeple.^{lxxviii}
72. Immediately after the war, Azerbaijanis damaged the 18th century St. John the Baptist Church (Kanach Zham - Green Church) in Shushi.^{lxxix} The domes of Saint John the Baptist (Kanach Zham), another church in Shushi, were immediately destroyed and the church was continuously damaged by February 2021. In July 2021, Azerbaijani sources presented this church as a Russian Orthodox announcing that its ‘restoration’ was underway’.^{lxxx} As of January 2022, the transept of Kanach Zham church was converted into a café called “Secret”.^{lxxxi} In June 2022, photos were circulated on social media demonstrating the dome was destroyed, the holy throne and the holy altar were damaged, the candlesticks for lighting candles were broken, and the sacred stones of the temple were turned into a pile of garbage.^{lxxxii}

73. During the war, the Holy Mother of God church in Jabrail region (Mekhakavan) was desecrated by Azerbaijani servicemen.^{lxxxiii} Later, in March 2021, BBC alerted the complete disappearance of the church and the clearing of the area (see the photo).^{lxxxiv}
74. The Park of Royal Springs of the ancient city of Tigranakert was turned into a barbeque area.^{lxxxv} The barbeque grill was placed on the edge of a pool excavated by the archaeological expedition.^{lxxxvi}
75. The Azerbaijani military vandalized the 19th century St. Yeghishe Church in Mataghis. Again, by performing namaz in the church, they symbolized its conquest.^{lxxxvii}
76. The Azerbaijani Armed Forces broke the cross-stone in Arakel village, near Hadrut.^{lxxxviii} In Mets Tagher village, the entire cemetery has been destroyed and disappeared as seen on the satellite image.^{lxxxix}
77. By December 2021, Caucasus Heritage Watch – a research initiative by archaeologists from Cornell and Purdue universities - through satellite imagery, observed the impact on 21 cultural sites in the territories occupied by Azerbaijan, of which 6 were destroyed (the Fine Arts Museum Sculpture Garden, Makun Bridge, Aygek Mosque, Ghazanchetsots Inscribed Stone, Sghnakh Cemetery, Mets Tagher Cemetery), 8 were threatened, and 7 were damaged.^{xc}
78. From April 28 through July 8, 2021, the Azerbaijani military blocked access to Dadivank Monastery to Armenian worshippers^{xc1} - intending to affirm the monument's Azerbaijani-Albanian ownership and attempting to establish control over access to the monument.
79. On February 3, 2022, Azerbaijani Minister of Culture said during a press briefing that a working group of both local and international experts had been established, which would be responsible for removing “the fictitious traces written by Armenians on Albanian religious temples.”^{xc2}
80. Following the news on the establishment of a working group by the Azerbaijani Minister of Culture, on February 8, 2022, the Chair of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, Nadine Maenza, made a statement on the federal government agency's Twitter page. She wrote “We are deeply concerned by Azerbaijan's plans to remove Armenian Apostolic inscriptions from churches.”^{xc3}
81. The issue of the elimination of Armenian heritage has been reflected in the PACE Report on “Humanitarian Consequences of the Conflict Between Armenia and Azerbaijan,” issued in September 2021. The rapporteur, Paul Gavan, expressed his concerns: “about the current narrative being developed in Azerbaijan promoting a “Caucasian Albanian” cultural narrative while seeking to negate an “Armenian” cultural narrative.”^{xc4}
82. On December 7, 2021, ICJ indicated provisional measures in the case of Armenia v. Azerbaijan, ruling that Azerbaijan must “take all necessary measures to prevent and punish acts of vandalism and desecration affecting Armenian cultural heritage, including but not limited to churches and other places of worship, monuments, landmarks, cemeteries and artifacts.”^{xc5}

Recommendations

The Civil Society Organizations of NK recommend the UN Human Rights Council to:

1. **Urge Azerbaijan to instantly open the Lachin corridor** - for the free and safe passage of people and vehicles, in compliance with ICJ's Provisional Measures order of February 22, 2023;
2. **Facilitate immediate repatriation of all the Armenian prisoners of war and civilians** detained in Azerbaijan;
3. **Ensure that Azerbaijani leadership ceases their hate and aggressive rhetoric** on both - internal and international platforms;
4. **Ensure effective response to war crimes and other grave violations of international law**, accountability of perpetrators of aggression, restoration of the infringed rights of the suffered people;
5. **Remove the isolation of the NK people** and ensure free access of international organizations and diplomatic missions to be able to monitor the threats to the human rights and human security;
6. **Elaborate measures to ensure long term safety, durable peace, self-determination, and self-governance** of NK people in our ancestral homeland;
7. **Ensure the safety and protection of the Armenian cultural heritage** appeared under Azerbaijani control, in compliance with ICJ's Provisional Measures order of December 7, 2021.

ENDNOTES

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