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Agenda items 9, 14, 19, 31, 68, 69 and 70

Report of the Economic and Social Council

Integrated and coordinated implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits in the economic, social and related fields

Sustainable development

Prevention of armed conflict

Elimination of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance

Right of peoples to self-determination

Promotion and protection of human rights

Economic and Social Council**2020 session**

Agenda items 5 (a) and 6

High-level segment: ministerial meeting of the high-level political forum on sustainable development, convened under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council

High-level political forum on sustainable development, convened under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council

Letter dated 27 July 2020 from the Permanent Representative of Armenia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I am writing in relation to the letter from the Permanent Representative of Azerbaijan addressed to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, dated 10 July 2020 regarding the voluntary national review presented by Armenia at the high-level political forum for sustainable development under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council.

Armenia views the high-level political forum as a central platform for sharing best practices and identifying new solutions and partnerships for the sustainable development goals. The voluntary national review process is instrumental in assessing progress made in achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the pledge to leave no one behind. It is in the spirit of effective multilateral cooperation for sustainable development that Armenia conducted its second voluntary national review, which provided a detailed analysis of the progress achieved since 2018, as well as of the challenges that remain. Armenia's voluntary national review was conducted in full compliance with the reporting and submission guidelines and was made available on the 2020 high-level political forum web page three weeks prior to its presentation.



The information note on the arrangements for the 2020 high-level political forum and the high-level segment of the 2020 session of the Economic and Social Council dated 22 June distributed by the Secretariat, specified that there would be the opportunity for a limited number of questions and comments during the voluntary national review sessions and that all Member States and other stakeholders were invited to submit questions and comments on the voluntary national reviews ahead of the presentations, based on the countries' written reports. Member States were also encouraged to participate in the Group of Friends of the Voluntary National Reviews and to prepare discussions on each voluntary national review in coordination with the focal point of the Group of Friends of the voluntary national reviews. Due to the time constraints, the list of speakers for the interactive session on Armenia's voluntary national review was established on the basis of the order in which the interested delegations had submitted their questions through the recommended procedures, mindful of the possibility to ask questions and to receive written responses following the high-level political forum session. The delegation of Azerbaijan is advised to follow the recommended procedures rather than engage in irrelevant and pointless accusations blaming the Chair of the session.

Armenia deeply regrets Azerbaijan's systematic attempts to abuse thematic platforms of multilateral cooperation, including the highly important process of national reviews and the high-level political forum. While we dismiss the method applied by Azerbaijan to invoke the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in a process of an entirely different nature, we would like to reiterate that Nagorno-Karabakh has never been part of independent Azerbaijan and that the people of Nagorno-Karabakh are entitled to freely enjoy their inalienable rights, including the right to determine their political status and to pursue their economic, social and cultural development. Genuine efforts on the part of Azerbaijan to engage in meaningful negotiations for the peaceful resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict within the only internationally mandated format of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Minsk Group Co-chairmanship would certainly represent a more reasonable course of action rather than abusing United Nations platforms and offering biased and manipulative interpretations of the causes and consequences of the conflict. Yet, time and again, in order to conceal the monumental failures in delivering on its own commitments, the leadership of Azerbaijan, in the face of internal political, economic and social setbacks, displays remarkable consistency in propagating inflammatory rhetoric towards the Armenians in an apparent image of a "useful enemy", rather than investing in peace.

Azerbaijan regularly resorts to hate speech, warmongering and territorial claims, with its recent provocations in the north-east Armenia-Azerbaijan border clearly demonstrating why this particular Member State has chosen not to support the Secretary-General's appeal for a global ceasefire launched at the outbreak of the pandemic caused by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), in sharp contrast with the unequivocal support expressed by Armenia and Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh) to the Secretary-General's peaceful initiative.

The open threats of missile strikes against the nuclear power plant in Armenia, which were voiced at the level of the Ministry of Defence of Azerbaijan on 16 July, make it abundantly clear that the sustainable development of the region is the last thing on the not-so-stable mind of the political-military leadership of Azerbaijan, whose reckless and irresponsible behaviour is absolutely incompatible with international law and the core values of humanity, and represents a serious challenge to regional peace.

In the context of the delusional attacks on the sustainable development policies of the Government of Armenia in the letter of the Permanent Representative of Azerbaijan, I am compelled to recall, that, for many years now, the authorities of

Azerbaijan have securely placed their country into the vicious cycle of a failed petrostate, setting the stage for the growth of a corrupt, dictatorial and racist regime rather than to promote genuine sustainable development policies for its population. Pages of this letter would not suffice to elaborate on the dismal record of Azerbaijan vis-à-vis its progress on democracy and human rights.

Against the backdrop of Azerbaijan's appalling record of massive crackdowns on civil society, systemic corruption and dysfunctional judiciary – all well-known and extensively documented¹ – the bizarre fantasies, including those involving imaginary “violent upheavals” invoked in relation to the political developments in the neighbouring Armenia can only raise eyebrows.

Upholding human rights and human dignity has been at the centre of the fundamental democratic transformation in Armenia, as manifested by the peaceful Velvet Revolution in 2018, earning Armenia the title “Country of the Year” by one of the most reputable international publications.² In what has been identified by the Secretary-General as a fantastic example of peaceful transfer of power,³ the youth and women in Armenia stood at the forefront of the non-violent, democratic process, in full exercise of their human rights and fundamental freedoms, as acknowledged also in the observations by the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and association.⁴ The early parliamentary elections, held following the peaceful Velvet Revolution in 2018 in Armenia, “were held with respect for fundamental freedoms and enjoyed broad public trust”, as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe/Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights Election Observation Mission concludes in its final report released on 7 March 2019.

The ridiculous confabulations on Armenia's democratic or human rights record are coming from a country, where, for many years, elections have been marred by fraud and violence. On 17 July, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe/Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights Election Observation Mission released its final report on the early parliamentary elections in Azerbaijan, concluding that “the restrictive legislation and political environment prevented genuine competition in the 9 February 2020 early parliamentary elections in Azerbaijan, despite a high number of candidates”. According to the report, “instances of pressure on voters, candidates and their representatives were observed” and “significant procedural violations⁵ during counting and the tabulation raised concerns whether the results were established honestly”.

Equally bizarre are the accusations of being “unsightly” monoethnic, especially in light of Azerbaijan's continued racist, anti-Armenian policies, including Armenophobic hatred and propaganda, the glorification of hate criminals, as well as gross violations of the rights of ethnic Armenians, including citizens of third countries travelling to Azerbaijan, who are either detained on the basis of their ethnic origin or denied entry by the authorities of Azerbaijan. Political leaders, educational

¹ See: <https://www.occrp.org/en/azerbaijanilaundromat/>.

² See: <https://www.economist.com/leaders/2018/12/22/the-economists-country-of-the-year-2018>.

³ Secretary-General's address to the General Assembly, 25 September 2018, see <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/speeches/2018-09-25/address-73rd-general-assembly>.

⁴ Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association at the conclusion of his visit to the Republic of Armenia, 16 November 2018, see: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=23882&LangID=E>.

⁵ Final report of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe/Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights Election Observation Mission on the early parliamentary elections in the Republic of Azerbaijan on 9 February 2020, see: <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/7/e/457585.pdf>.

institutions and media continue promulgating hate speech against Armenians, with an entire generation of Azerbaijanis having grown up listening to such hateful rhetoric.⁶

For Armenia, the protection of ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities and other vulnerable groups, including children, refugees and people with disabilities, are undisputable priorities, both domestically and internationally. National minorities are part of the vibrant political and civil life in Armenia, including in Armenia's parliament and in local communities' leadership. The policies towards protection of the rights of minorities in Armenia are elaborated at length in the fifth report of the Republic of Armenia on the implementation of the Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, submitted in June 2020.⁷

Armenia is committed to upholding the values of democracy and human rights, promoting equal and fair conditions for participation in political, economic and social life and striving to translate these priorities into actions in our domestic agenda as well as internationally. The promotion of all human rights and fundamental freedoms, gender equality and inclusion, as well as consolidation of democratic values are key priorities for Armenia, predicated on the idea that human rights are universal for all peoples and individuals in all parts of the world, regardless of geography or status.

We are ready to share experience, listen to and learn from best international practice, in line with our demonstrated commitment to advance responsible intergovernmental collaboration and multilateralism. I would like to once again reiterate the need to refrain from abusing the thematic United Nations platforms for promoting incendiary rhetoric and recall the importance of upholding the principles of effective multilateral cooperation for peace, development and human rights.

I kindly request that this letter be circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda items 9, 14, 19, 31, 68, 69 and 70, and of the Economic and Social Council.

(Signed) Mher **Margaryan**
Ambassador, Permanent Representative

⁶ Fourth report of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance on Azerbaijan, adopted on 17 March 2016, see <https://rm.coe.int/fourth-report-on-azerbaijan/16808b5581>.

⁷ Fifth report of the Republic of Armenia on the implementation of the Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, see: <https://rm.coe.int/5th-sr-armenia-en/16809eb7b3>.