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**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**

**Responsibility of States for internationally wrongful acts**

**The rule of law at the national and international levels**

**The responsibility to protect and the prevention of  
genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes  
against humanity**

**Security Council  
Seventy-eighth year**

## **Letter dated 21 April 2023 from the Permanent Representative of Armenia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General**

Further to my letter dated 27 February 2023 ([A/77/776-S/2023/150](#)), I am writing to you in relation to Azerbaijan's continued attempts to deny responsibility for the well-documented fact of the systematic, massive violence perpetrated against the Armenian population in Sumgait, as demonstrated in the letter from the Permanent Representative of Azerbaijan dated 16 March 2023 ([A/77/807-S/2023/204](#)).

The Sumgait massacre was the first in a series of violent crimes organized against the Armenian population by Azerbaijan. Eyewitnesses and local and international media reported extensively on gangs roaming around the city in search of ethnic Armenians to attack. The well-documented, detailed accounts of the atrocities include reports of Armenian victims "who were so badly mutilated by axes that their bodies could not be identified", of women "stripped naked and set on fire, several raped repeatedly", and of other despicable crimes committed against the Armenian residents of the city.<sup>1</sup> The Deputy Prosecutor General of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics reported that gangs of youths hunting Armenians had

<sup>1</sup> Thomas de Waal, "Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan through Peace and War", 2003.



committed “terrible crimes” and that “there were massive disorders, accompanied by pogroms, arson and other outrages”.<sup>2</sup>

Due to the criminal inaction of the local law enforcement bodies, unchecked barbaric violence against the Armenian population in Sumgait continued for three days, during which violent mobs attacked innocent civilians on the streets and in their apartments, targeting them exclusively on the grounds of ethnicity. No amount of deceptive, intentionally manipulative narrative can alter the truth that the Sumgait massacre was planned and executed with the encouragement and deliberate inaction of the Soviet Azerbaijani authorities.

The Armenian residents of Sumgait became the first target of Azerbaijan’s systematic anti-Armenian policy. The second wave of violence in November–December 1988 included massacres of Armenians in Kirovabad, Shamakhi, Shamkhor and Mingechaur, followed by the large-scale pogroms perpetrated against the Armenian residents of Baku in January 1990, which resulted in the mass killings and final displacement of 250,000 Armenians of the city.

On 7 July 1988, the European Parliament adopted a resolution<sup>3</sup> condemning the massacres in Sumgait and the serious acts of violence in Baku and indicating that such events indeed constituted a threat to the safety of the Armenians living in Azerbaijan.

The pogroms against the Armenians had an aim of forcibly suppressing the democratic expression of the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh, heavily preceded by a wave of anti-Armenian statements and rallies that swept over Azerbaijan in February 1988.

The Sumgait massacre and the large-scale anti-Armenian pogroms that ensued in other areas of Soviet Azerbaijan resulted in complete eradication of the Armenian community from Azerbaijan, with more than 400,000 people becoming refugees. In 2003, the former Prosecutor of the Azerbaijani Soviet Socialist Republic, Ilias Ismayilov, was on record as saying that “those responsible for inciting the pogroms [in Sumgait] now sit in Milli Majlis [Azerbaijani Parliament] with parliamentary mandates in their pockets”.<sup>4</sup> The pogroms were followed by the instigation of an armed conflict against the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh, including the military operation “Koltso” (“Ring”) performed in 1991, as a result of which the Armenian population was ethnically cleansed from 22 villages; the systematic massacre of civilians, including the elderly, women and children, perpetrated in Maragha village in Nagorno-Karabakh in 1992; and the ethnic cleansing of the Shahumyan region and part of the Martakert region in 1992.

Whatever distortions Azerbaijan may diligently fabricate while referring to the chronology of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the fact of the matter is that no anti-Azerbaijani massacre took place in Armenia. Unlike the Armenian population in Azerbaijan, who became victims of massive, barbaric atrocities, there are no verified reports of any form of atrocity or State-sponsored mass killings against ethnic Azerbaijanis in Armenia.

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<sup>2</sup> “Soviet tells of ‘pogroms’ by rioters in Azerbaijan”, *The Washington Post*, 15 March 1988.

<sup>3</sup> Joint resolution replacing docs. B2-538 and 587/88: resolution on the situation in Soviet Armenia, No. C 235/106, [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:JOC\\_1988\\_235\\_R\\_0080\\_01&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:JOC_1988_235_R_0080_01&from=EN).

<sup>4</sup> “Zerkalo” newspaper, Azerbaijan, 21 February 2003.

According to the 2003 report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees,<sup>5</sup> the Azerbaijanis in Armenia fled out of fear following the anti-Armenian pogroms in Sumgait and Baku in 1988–1989. The unaccountable assertions of “forcible deportation of Azerbaijanis from their historical homeland”, which allegedly predate the anti-Armenian massacre in Sumgait, thus render all efforts to verify any such allegation quite unavailing, not least because most of the localities to which Azerbaijan’s letter refers while making such assertions appear to be either misspelled or misconstrued and, therefore, impossible to identify.

Azerbaijan’s narratives continue to be conceived and formulated from the perspective of hate and discrimination, at the core of which is the brazen denial of the atrocities committed against the Armenian people. It is, for example, quite an indication that, in his letter dated 16 March, the Representative of Azerbaijan finds it “especially noteworthy” to highlight the identity of one particular individual, who was reportedly part of the group of “more than 90 perpetrators and accomplices” responsible for the Sumgait violence – exclusively on the basis of the aforementioned individual’s ethnicity. In his letter addressed to the Secretary-General, the Representative of Azerbaijan finds it appropriate to single out one particular criminal out of as many as over 90, simply because that person reportedly happens to be of Armenian descent. Such ethnically motivated selectivity is indeed symptomatic of deep-rooted racism and Armenophobia, including at the level of officials and public institutions – a policy from which Azerbaijan has been asked to refrain by the International Court of Justice.<sup>6</sup>

Evidently, the lack of accountability for the past crimes has created fertile ground for elevating the instigation of anti-Armenian sentiments to the level of State policy in Azerbaijan. Over the years, the prominent historic, cultural and religious heritage of the Armenian communities in territories that were under the control of Azerbaijani authorities came to be razed to the ground. The barbaric destruction of over 5,000 medieval Christian Armenian cross-stones, which was carried out in 1998–2005 in Nakhijevan, is a stark indicator of the policy of cultural genocide<sup>7</sup> by the country positioning itself as a “model of tolerance and multiculturalism”. Notably, Azerbaijan has rejected all requests for international fact-finding missions to research the extent to which the valuable objects of medieval culture came under destruction in Nakhijevan.

The cultivation of racism and anti-Armenian hatred, along with the continued incitement of violence on ethnic and religious grounds, have long come to be well documented in numerous reports of international organizations, including the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination<sup>8</sup> and the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance,<sup>9</sup> revealing the systemic nature of racial profiling, hateful and incendiary rhetoric, the prevailing sense of impunity and the glorification of hate crime perpetrators in Azerbaijan. To this date, Azerbaijan has not undertaken

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<sup>5</sup> “International Protection Considerations Regarding Armenian Asylum-Seekers and Refugees”, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Geneva, September 2003. Available at [www.refworld.org/docid/3f5f27d14.html](http://www.refworld.org/docid/3f5f27d14.html).

<sup>6</sup> Order on the request for the indication of provisional measures made by the Republic of Armenia in the case concerning *Application of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (Armenia v. Azerbaijan)*, 7 December 2021. Available at [www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/180/180-20211207-PRE-01-00-EN.pdf](http://www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/180/180-20211207-PRE-01-00-EN.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> “Monumental loss: Azerbaijan and ‘the worst cultural genocide of the 21st century’”, [www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2019/mar/01/monumental-loss-azerbaijan-cultural-genocide-khachkars](http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2019/mar/01/monumental-loss-azerbaijan-cultural-genocide-khachkars).

<sup>8</sup> Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, “Concluding observations on the combined tenth to twelfth periodic reports of Azerbaijan”, [www.undocs.org/CERD/C/AZE/CO/10-12](http://www.undocs.org/CERD/C/AZE/CO/10-12).

<sup>9</sup> European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (fifth monitoring cycle), <https://rm.coe.int/fourth-report-on-azerbaijan/16808b5581>.

any measures to bring those responsible for anti-Armenian hate crimes to justice and has, instead, adopted legislation prohibiting entry to the country for any person of Armenian origin, regardless of their citizenship,<sup>10</sup> “because the authorities would be unable to provide them with security since they are ethnic Armenians”.<sup>11</sup>

In September 2020, Azerbaijan initiated a new wave of deadly violence in the region, launching massive military attacks amid an unprecedented global pandemic in an attempt to resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict by force. Despite Azerbaijan’s efforts to offer justifications for its large-scale military aggression in September–November 2020, it was in reality the product of an intentional decision to walk away from negotiations and to begin a war, exposing the lives of thousands of people to imminent existential danger.

Azerbaijan’s large-scale military attacks against the territorial integrity of Armenia in September 2022 targeted densely populated areas and civilian infrastructure. The Azerbaijani military captured, tortured and executed female members of the Armenian military personnel, while videos of such despicable war crimes continue to be cheered and extensively celebrated over Azerbaijani social networks.

The destabilizing actions of Azerbaijan and the ongoing blockade of the Lachin corridor – the only humanitarian lifeline connecting Nagorno-Karabakh to the outer world – accompanied by territorial claims, military threats and incendiary rhetoric against Armenia and the Armenian people, only serve to undermine the efforts aimed at de-escalating the situation and at finding solutions to sustainable peace in the region.

Strengthening adherence to the norms and principles of international law is vital for the promotion of justice, accountability and the rule of law. It is long overdue for Azerbaijan to reject the aggressive, violent conduct in the region and commit, instead, to the full and unconditional implementation of the existing legal obligations, including those stemming from the legally binding orders issued by the International Court of Justice at the request of Armenia in 2021<sup>12</sup> and 2023,<sup>13</sup> respectively.

I kindly ask that the present letter be circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda items 30, 66, 67, 68, 73, 84 and 132, and of the Security Council.

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

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<sup>10</sup> Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, “Baseline study on cross-border mobility in the region”, [www.osce.org/files/f/documents/c/d/118506.pdf](http://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/c/d/118506.pdf).

<sup>11</sup> Committee to Protect Journalists, “Citing ethnicity, Azerbaijan bars photojournalist”, <https://cpj.org/2011/07/citing-ethnicity-azerbaijan-bars-photojournalist/>.

<sup>12</sup> Order on the request for the indication of provisional measures made by the Republic of Armenia in the case concerning *Application of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (Armenia v. Azerbaijan)*, 7 December 2021. Available at [www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/180/180-20211207-PRE-01-00-EN.pdf](http://www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/180/180-20211207-PRE-01-00-EN.pdf).

<sup>13</sup> Order on the request for the indication of provisional measures made by the Republic of Armenia in the case concerning *Application of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (Armenia v. Azerbaijan)*, 22 February 2023. Available at [www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/180/180-20230222-ORD-01-00-EN.pdf](http://www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/180/180-20230222-ORD-01-00-EN.pdf).