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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

Report of the International Court of Justice

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 27 July 2023 from the Permanent Representative of Armenia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to enclose herewith the letter from Arayik Harutyunyan, President of Nagorno-Karabakh, on the continued blockade of the Lachin corridor and the grave risks of humanitarian catastrophe for the people of Nagorno-Karabakh (see annex).

I kindly ask that the present letter and its annex be circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda items 30, 66, 67, 68, 70, 84 and 132, and of the Security Council.

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



Annex to the letter dated 27 July 2023 from the Permanent Representative of Armenia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I am writing to urgently bring your attention to the alarming humanitarian crisis unfolding in the Republic of Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh). The situation has reached a critical stage due to the total blockade of the Lachin corridor by Azerbaijan for more than a month and the deliberate and full obstruction of vital humanitarian supplies for the 120,000 people residing in Artsakh.

Since 12 December 2022, the Lachin corridor, the only road connecting Artsakh with Armenia and the rest of the world, has been effectively blocked by Azerbaijan. Consequently, essential foodstuffs and life-saving medicines, necessary for the survival of the population, have been provided in limited quantities from the state reserves. Additionally, humanitarian shipments facilitated by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and Russian peacekeepers have been instrumental in supplying crucial aid from Armenia.

The situation with the Azerbaijani imposed blockade of the corridor was brought to the attention of both the European Court of Human Rights and the International Court of Justice. On 21 December 2022, the European Court of Human Rights indicated interim measures under rule 39 of the Rules of Court, obliging Azerbaijan to “take all measures that are within their jurisdiction to ensure safe passage through the ‘Lachin Corridor’ of seriously ill persons in need of medical treatment in Armenia and others who were stranded on the road without shelter or means of subsistence”.¹

On 22 February 2023, the International Court of Justice delivered an 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)*, indicating to the Republic of Azerbaijan to “take all measures at its disposal to ensure unimpeded movement of persons, vehicles and cargo along the Lachin Corridor in both directions”.² The International Court of Justice reaffirmed its order on 6 July, and the European Court of Human Rights did the same on 12 July.

However, none of these legally binding decisions has been implemented by Azerbaijan. On the contrary, on 23 April 2023, Azerbaijan installed an illegal checkpoint in the Lachin corridor, posing additional impediments to the movements of not only the people of Artsakh, but even ICRC and Russian peacekeepers. Moreover, on 15 June, Azerbaijan further escalated the situation by deliberately provoking a small incident on the border with Armenia and completely sealing off the lifeline of Artsakh. This has resulted in the total blocking of humanitarian supplies, including food, medicine and fuel, to the already vulnerable population. The entire population of Artsakh, including 30,000 children, is now left with meagre and rapidly depleting state reserves, making them highly susceptible to starvation and further untold suffering.

Prior to the blockade, approximately 90 per cent of the food consumed in Artsakh was imported from the Republic of Armenia and other countries. Moreover, an average of 400 tons of various essential goods were imported daily to Artsakh to fulfil the vital needs of its people. Regrettably, none of the food and essential goods

¹ See “European Court decides to indicate interim measures in the ‘Lachin Corridor’”, press release ECHR 401 (2022), 21 December 2022, available at [https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng-press/{%22itemid%22:\[%22003-7528728-10337270%22\]}](https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng-press/{%22itemid%22:[%22003-7528728-10337270%22]}).

² See *Armenia v. Azerbaijan*, ICJ Order of 22 February 2023, available at www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/180/180-20230222-ORD-01-00-EN.pdf.

that were previously imported can currently reach the republic due to the imposed restrictions.

The people of Artsakh are currently facing dire circumstances due to food shortages caused by the Azerbaijani blockade and limited supplies from government reserves. As a result, individuals are forced to spend hours in long lines in order to purchase meagre amounts of food, barely enough to stave off starvation. The scarcity is particularly acute for fruits, vegetables, cooking oil, sugar, as well as fuel and hygiene products. Since these items were primarily imported from Armenia, the blockade has caused them to vanish from store shelves. Consequently, the residents of Artsakh, especially children and pregnant women, are suffering from malnutrition and hidden hunger, lacking essential vitamins and minerals in their diets. For example, the level of anaemia among pregnant women has reached over 90 per cent, mostly due to chronic malnutrition.

The health-care system in Artsakh is also in a distressing state. People with chronic diseases, including 4,687 individuals with diabetes and 8,450 individuals with circulatory diseases, are at risk of running out of the state-provided free medicines. Additionally, pharmacies are unable to stock the necessary medications for these individuals, whether they are required regularly or on an as-needed basis. Planned examinations for pregnant women and other patients have been suspended due to the lack of medical supplies, leaving doctors and hospitals to only handle emergency cases. As a consequence of continuous stress, malnutrition and various challenges within the health-care system, the rates of almost all health complications have sharply increased. For instance, the rate of perinatal mortality has doubled.

Furthermore, Azerbaijan has interrupted the supplies of electricity and gas from Armenia to Artsakh, leaving our people without any gas and with limited volume of local electricity production. This has led to a 48 per cent decline in electricity consumption, daily rolling blackouts, emergency shutdowns and the closure or downsizing of numerous businesses. Gas supply has been entirely halted since 21 March, and electricity has been cut off since 9 January.

Residents in certain regions of Nagorno-Karabakh also face significant challenges when it comes to accessing clean drinking water due to their reliance on artesian wells operated by fuel-powered pumps. However, when fuel supplies run low, these pumps are unable to operate at their maximum capacity, leading to insufficient water availability for the local population.

An acute lack of fuel has caused almost complete interruptions in internal public transportation, agricultural and other economic activities, as well as supplies of locally produced food. We are unable to fully implement even the grain harvest activities to address the challenges of starvation. This deepening scarcity of fuel and other essentials has significantly impacted all areas of life. Consequently, the levels of unemployment and poverty have drastically increased, leading to further suffering primarily among vulnerable groups.

The blockade of Artsakh and the denial of humanitarian access to civilians in need flagrantly violate international humanitarian law and breach the Geneva Conventions. Specifically, the Fourth Geneva Convention mandates that States must “allow the free passage of all consignments of medical and hospital stores” intended only for civilians and “the free passage of all consignments of essential foodstuffs, clothing and tonics intended for children under fifteen, expectant mothers and maternity cases”.³

³ Fourth Geneva Convention, article 23.

International law requires that parties involved in a conflict must refrain from deliberately obstructing the delivery of relief supplies to civilians in need within areas under their control. Such actions contradict the elementary considerations of humanity and carry grave consequences and may even amount to war crimes. According to the Statute of the International Criminal Court, “intentionally using starvation of civilians as a method of warfare by depriving them of objects indispensable to their survival, including wilfully impeding relief supplies as provided for under the Geneva Conventions” constitutes a serious violation of the laws and customs applicable in international armed conflict, within the established framework of international law.⁴

It is evident that Azerbaijan is employing the denial of access to food and impeding relief supplies as a weapon against the Republic of Artsakh and its people. These practices have long been outlawed and must be strongly condemned by the international community. If humanitarian access continues to be denied, the 120,000-strong population of Artsakh faces the imminent risk of hunger and malnutrition.

When people are in danger, as is manifest in Artsakh, the United Nations has a duty to act. On behalf of the people of Artsakh, I strongly deplore the inaction of the United Nations, veiled in the notion of the primacy of its Member States and the failure to insist on and ensure United Nations presence on the ground in Artsakh. The fact of the presence of the Russian peacekeepers is not absolving the United Nations system of its duty to react to deepening humanitarian crisis and human tragedy. The moral, political and legal imperatives of the United Nations are flouted in Artsakh. The entire construct of international law, manifest in the absence and incapacity to enforce decisions of the International Court of Justice and tolerance of flagrant violations of international humanitarian law, is fracturing with its failures in Artsakh.

The existential threats to the people of Nagorno Karabakh have been at the root of its struggles for survival in the past. Today they remain as acute as ever. With its history of failures and procrastinations in former Yugoslavia, in Rwanda and elsewhere, the United Nations is once again staking its reputation and its worth. The warning signs of worsening humanitarian situation and human security at risk in Artsakh have been abundant in the preceding years and months. Now the situation is fast sliding to catastrophe. The United Nations tacit acquiescence to the blatant coercion and the use of brute force by Azerbaijan, toleration of their pretence to respect the rights of the people of Artsakh, when the extreme opposite is happening on the ground in Artsakh, must stop now. The United Nations must address the lessons of its past failures. The plight of the people of Artsakh is the testing ground for this.

The present letter intends to once again urge the attention of the international community, of the United Nations, of its system, of its agencies mandated specifically to act in situations of humanitarian crises, to the plight of my people. I forcefully urge the Secretary-General of the United Nations to demonstrate a moral and political responsibility and leadership in alerting the international community to the plight of the people of Artsakh. I urge you without delay and without hesitation to put in action the United Nations system to address this crisis. I urge the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to rise to the challenge and implement his mandate in acting to prevent a looming disaster. I urge the Under-Secretaries-General for Humanitarian Affairs and for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs to act now in raising awareness of the crisis in Artsakh and insisting on immediate efforts of the international community to mandate the United Nations action in Artsakh. I urge the Executive Directors of the United Nations Children’s Fund, the World Food Programme and the United Nations Population Fund and the Director General of the

⁴ International Criminal Court Statute, article 8 (2) (b) (xxv).

World Health Organization to live up to their mandates and responsibilities, break through the silence and inaction and deliver relief and presence on the ground.

Failing to respond now, your subsequent deep regrets for and reflections on your inaction, condolences and indignations about the loss of human lives or belated condemnation of atrocities will have absolutely no meaning or value to my people. The time to act is now.

(Signed) Arayik **Harutyunyan**
