

**THE STATEMENT
OF THE COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS
(OMBUDSMAN)
OF THE REPUBLIC OF AZERBAIJAN
REGARDING THE 25TH ANNIVERSARY
OF THE OCCUPATION OF SHUSHA**

The purpose of genocide, ethnic cleansing and deportation policy of the Armenian nationalists and their supporters against the Azerbaijanis, lasted over two centuries, was banishing them from their historical native lands and establishing “Great Armenia” state on those territories. From the beginning of XIX c., thousands of the Armenian families were moved from Iran and Turkey to historical territories of Azerbaijan such as Karabakh, Nakhchivan, Zengezur, also Iravan and other provinces.

As a result of the next aggression policy started since 1988, Armenia occupied Nagorno-Karabakh which is an integral part of Azerbaijan, as well as seven surrounding rayons. Thus 20 percent of the country territories were occupied, more than 20 thousands Azerbaijanis were killed, 50 thousands of persons were injured, thousands of persons went missing, women, the elderly, children, were taken hostages and captives and subjected to severe tortures, one million of the Azerbaijanis became refugees and IDPs, their rights were grossly violated. In the course of this occupation, the Armenian nationalists and terrorists committed genocides in Khojaly city, Karkichahan, Malibeyli, Gushchular, Garadagli, Agdaban villages and in other settlements of Azerbaijan.

Twenty five years have passed since the occupation of Shusha city-the historical cradle of culture of Azerbaijan, which was rich with historical monuments, and presented numerous well-known persons, writers, poets, musicians who introduced cultural heritage of our nation to the world, that was a part of the aggression policy of Armenia against Azerbaijan and resulted in gross violation of the norms and principles of the international law and human rights.

The Armenian armed forces occupied Shusha city on May 8, 1992. In the battles for the defense of Shusha, 195 Azerbaijanis were killed, more than 165 were injured, and 68 were taken captives and hostages. The Armenian vandals plundered museums that had thousands exponents during the occupation, destroyed hundreds of historical-cultural monuments, outraged holy mosques and temples, ruined numerous manuscripts, destroyed education and health facilities.

It should be noted that 24.9000 persons living in Shusha city with an area of 300 square km became internally displaced persons after the occupation. However, the tragic results of this aggression are not limited only to occupation of the Azerbaijani lands. Shusha Historical Museum having five thousands of exhibits, the local branch of State Museum of carpets and national fine arts, State Historical, National Applied Art, the Ethnography Museums of Karabakh, as well as Palace of well-known Azerbaijani poetess Khurshudbanu Natavan, castle of Aghabeyim Aga, Complex of Garabakh khanligi, Madrasa of Ibrahim Khalil khan, Juma mosque, the Azikh cave –

an archeological monument of a world-wide importance, expositions of other cultural centers and art galleries were destroyed, plundered, libraries were burnt.

It is noteworthy that yet in 1977 upon the initiative of national leader Heydar Aliyev, ancient Shusha was announced historical and architectural reserve. Construction work was carried out in the city that had charming nature, was known as the tourism center, in home museums of Uzeyir bey Hajibeyli, Khurshudbani Natavan and Bulbul, tomb of M.F. Vagif was opened, monuments of these virtuosos were built.

However, as a result of occupation the Armenian nationalists, who plotted not only against people but also monuments, didn't only expose persons to the gross moral – psychological trauma, shot at them, but also fired and destroyed the monuments that are the pearls, samples of the world culture as well as the monuments of the worldwide known Azerbaijani artists in Shusha.

At the same time, after several days of occupation of Shusha city, the Armenian armed forces attacking from Turshsu area of this city and Gorus rayon of Armenia occupied Lachin rayon, and as a result seized Lachin corridor which they were planning to usurp for many years. It should be noted as a result of the occupation, alongside with the city, villages, industry, agriculture, health, cultural and educational facilities, as well as schools, more than 200 historical monument, Agoglan temple, as well as the national theater, local history museum were looted and destroyed.

The Armenian nationalists benefiting from the existing impunity, change numerous toponymies, conduct archaeological excavation in hundreds of caves, related to the Bronze Age around Shusha, violate the norms of international law and thus, demonstrate once again irrespective attitude. They destroy the graves; even plunder the marble stones and tombstones in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan. The forests and natural reservations are being plundered.

The Republic of Armenia continues to loot and destroy Azerbaijan's cultural heritage that is witnessed by the world. Thus, 927 libraries, 464 monuments and museums, more than 100 cultural monuments and 6 state theatre and concert halls were destroyed. In the plundered museums, more than 40 thousands valuable and rare exhibits were stolen. A number of historical ethnography museums were destroyed. Gold and silver jewelries, carpets knitted in past century were carried to Armenia. The destiny of the famous historical museum in Shusha was the same.

Thus, the Republic of Armenia plunders the cultural properties of Azerbaijan, violating the provisions of Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and Paris Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property.

Besides the material cultural monuments, the Armenian nationalists regularly and systematically misappropriate the Azerbaijani folklore, music, samples of literature, thus, extend the occupation policy up to the level of cultural values. They also misappropriate the compositions of Azerbaijani composers, our national music and dances. The International Organization of Intellectual Property was urged several times regarding these unlawful actions.

Unfortunately, the policy of aggression and terrorism conducted by the Armenian nationalists is being witnessed by the international community for years. Whereas, according to the norms of international law, inviolability of state borders should be respected, and violation of territorial integrity and sovereignty is inadmissible.

Territorial integrity of Azerbaijan and its jurisdiction over the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh was approved many times by the UN, OSCE, the Council of Europe, as well as other influential international organizations and all states. However, the Republic of Armenia ignores the norms of the international law and the views expressed by the international community.

In spite of adoption of well known four UN Security Council Resolutions on unconditional withdrawal of the Armenian armed forces from the occupied territories of Azerbaijan, as well as the UN General Assembly Resolution on “The situation in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan” dated March 14, 2008, the Resolution No. 1416 and Recommendation No.1690 of the Parliamentary Assembly of Council of Europe (PACE) confirmed the occupation of the Azerbaijani territories by the Armenian military forces, and governing of Nagorno-Karabakh by separatists, Armenia does not leave the occupied territories.

Armenia, being accepted as a member to the Council of Europe, has undertaken several international obligations according to the Opinion No. 221 of the Parliamentary Assembly, such as to pursue efforts to settle the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict by only peaceful means; according to the principles of international law to settle international and local disputes also by peaceful means by resolutely rejecting any use of force and threatening against its neighbors. However, those obligations have not been fulfilled; the Armenian side regularly violates the ceasefire regime and creates obstacles to the peace in the region demonstrating unconstructive position.

Thus, in the first days of April, 2016, the groups of Armenian armed forces abruptly started intensive shootings from the occupied Azerbaijani territories, as well as from the territory of the Republic of Armenia on the territories of the Republic of Azerbaijan, numerous dwellings, where civilians lived, schools and other social objects, also the positions of the Azerbaijani Armed Forces troops along the frontline, by heavy artillery and big caliber weapons. As a result, civilians, including women and children were killed and severely injured. Thus, the provisions of international legal documents, including the Geneva Conventions were grossly violated as a result of this provocation, which was observed by the representatives of international organizations and international journalists visiting our country.

All these happen in XXI c. before the eyes of world community that has the high level of cultural development. We state with confidence that, as long as legal-political assessment is not given to acts of vandalism, separatism, nationalism and terrorism, all the humanity will be in danger.

In recent years, the world community provides more support for the just position of Azerbaijan and it is interested in peaceful settlement to this conflict within the international legal norms. It is noteworthy that the Parliaments of fourteen States have already recognized Khojaly genocide committed by the Armenians on February 26, 1992, from the perspective of the international legal norms. Moreover, legislative bodies of twenty one States of the USA have passed relevant Resolutions.

Considering all the above mentioned facts, as the Commissioner for Human Rights (Ombudsman) of the Republic of Azerbaijan, I declare, that violation of the Azerbaijan's territorial integrity, occupation of its historical lands, destruction and misappropriation of architectural monuments that are the pearls of world culture and perfect samples of civilization mass violation of human rights, as well as cultural rights by the Republic of Armenia fully contradicts with the universal norms and principles of the international law.

We call international organizations to support the just position of Azerbaijan for the sake of restoration of justice, return of occupied lands, including Shusha, restoration of territorial integrity of Azerbaijan and violated rights of one million refugees and IDPs, release of captives and hostages and punishment of perpetrators.

We hope all well-known international organizations and peacemakers will join efforts for the restoration of peace and security in Azerbaijan which is a land of tolerance, long lasting occupation policy against Azerbaijan will be stopped, the necessary condition will be achieved for sustainable development in our country and cooperation in the region. Real opportunities will be created for ensuring the universally recognized fundamental human rights and freedoms of each person without discrimination on any ground.

Prof. Elmira Suleymanova
The Commissioner for Human Rights
(Ombudsman)
of the Republic of Azerbaijan

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The Statement is addressed to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, United Nations Security Council, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, UNESCO, Organization of Islamic Cooperation European Commission, Council of Europe, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, International and European Ombudsman Institutes, Asian Ombudsman Association, Ombudspersons of different countries, Embassies of Azerbaijan abroad, as well as the foreign Embassies in Azerbaijan and Azerbaijani Diaspora.