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Yerevan / Armenia

**STATEMENT ON THE RECENT AGRESSION OF AZERBAIJAN
AGAISNT NAGORNO-KARABAKH**

We express our serious concern regarding the Azerbaijani large-scale armed attack, which has continued since 27 September along the entire line of contact between Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh) and Azerbaijan. Armenia's eastern city of Vardenis is also under the fire of the Azerbaijani forces.

Moreover, on October 1 Azerbaijani armed forces used artillery in the direction of Shatvan village of the Gegharkunik region of Armenia, as well as launched a missile attack from a combat UAVs at Mets Masrik settlement. Later, the Azerbaijani UAVs invaded the airspace of the Republic of Armenia and carried out surveillance flights near Yerevan, the capital city of Armenia. All the UAVs were destroyed by the air defense forces of Armenia.

This aggression is accompanied by serious violations of the laws and customs applicable in armed conflicts. In particular, Azerbaijani armed forces are intentionally targeting civilian settlements, infrastructures, and schools, including in the capital city of Stepanakert, and in the cities of Hadrut and Berdadzor.

Azerbaijan has never made secret of its strategic goal to resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict by using force and, thus, has been maintaining the tension high across both the line of contact and the Armenian-Azerbaijani state border. In April 2016 and in July 2020, these aggressive acts of Azerbaijan resulted in major escalations.

On a number of occasions, Azerbaijani president has publicly denounced the efforts of the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs aimed at the peaceful resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, thus openly resorting to war. To this end, Azerbaijan also engages outside forces, and has the unfailing support of Turkey. According to credible sources, Turkey is recruiting foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) from the parts of Syria presently under the control of the Turkish military to Azerbaijan, which are being used in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

As the world is fighting the pandemic, Azerbaijan initiates a new aggression which poses existential threat for the people of Nagorno-Karabakh, since Azerbaijan has demonstrated again its intent to ethnically cleanse that territory from Armenians.

A country, that positions itself as a model of tolerance and multiculturalism, has already achieved complete annihilation of every trace of the civilizational presence of Armenians in the territories currently under its jurisdiction by conducting a policy of eradication of Armenian rich cultural heritage throughout the 20th century.

This December will mark the 15th anniversary of the most recent and notorious of the acts of cultural vandalism committed in Nakhijevan. Several thousands of giant engraved cross-stones and tombstones of the medieval Armenian cemetery of Old Jugha in Nakhijevan were bulldozed by the Azerbaijani army during peacetime. There is ample evidence, including photos and videos, showing the destruction of the Armenian cultural heritage. In total 89 medieval churches, 5.840 ornate cross-stones and 22,000 historical tombstones were demolished only in Nakhijevan between 1997 and 2006.

The 16th General Assembly of the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) adopted in October 2008 a resolution expressing the international community's concern with regard to these acts of vandalism and regretfully stating: "this heritage that once enjoyed its worthy place among the treasures of the world's heritage can no longer be transmitted today to future generations."

Deliberate destruction of cultural heritage sites amounts to war crimes. The history shows that any form of intolerance towards the values of civilization belonging to others, intentionally damaging or destroying cultural or religious heritage, must be condemned with strong determination in order to protect the heritage. By keeping silence, we are paving the way to the new cultural atrocities to be committed in the different parts of the world.

UNESCO International Conference "Cultural Policy, Policy for Culture: The Role of Culture in Post-2015 Development Agenda", held in Armenia in 2015, adopted a Declaration, which in the strongest terms condemned cultural cleansing, barbaric destruction, violence, looting and other crimes committed against humanity's cultural heritage.

In sharp contrast to the decades-long policy of destruction and cultural vandalism of the Azerbaijani authorities, Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh have always been committed to the idea

of promoting peace and solidarity through culture and safeguarding the cultural heritage within their territory irrespective of their ethnic and religious origin.

Today, the Armenian cultural heritage of Nagorno-Karabakh is under attack, as indiscriminate bombardment and shelling with use of heavy weapons is being conducted in flagrant violation of the international law including the international humanitarian law. The leadership of Azerbaijan bears full responsibility for the consequences of their pre-planned aggression and de-stabilization of the regional security.

Museums and collections located in the zone of current fire are under huge risk of destruction. We museum professionals are committed to promote and to call the international and national societies to protect and preserve cultural heritage, that is a mean to achieve a global well-being. We strongly believe in the ideology promoted by ICOM, that museums and culture are for peace, mutual understanding and protecting human memory.

We strongly condemn the Azerbaijani aggression, and being committed to the peaceful settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict we call on the international community to resolutely deplore such hostile actions of Azerbaijan thus also preventing further destruction of the Armenian cultural heritage.

Sincerely,

Chair of ICOM Armenia

Ani Avagyan

