



**Statement by the Delegation of the Republic of Azerbaijan
1128th Meeting of the Permanent Council,
19 January 2017**

*Abduction of two Azerbaijani civilians by Armenia
in occupied territories of the Republic of Azerbaijan*

Mr. Chairperson,

The Delegation of the Republic of Azerbaijan would like to draw the attention of the Permanent Council to continued abduction by Armenia of two Azerbaijani civilians in the occupied Azerbaijani territories.

As it was stated on numerous occasions by our Delegation, Mr. Dilgam Askerov and Mr. Shahbaz Guliyev were taken hostage by occupying forces in the Kelbajar region of Azerbaijan in July 2014 while attempting to visit the graveyards of their natives. Since then Armenia makes attempts to use the captured persons to propagate the illegal regime established on the occupied territories. The Armenian side has fabricated silly claims against them and imitated a so-called “court” over the hostages.

Illegal capture of the Azerbaijani civilians once again testifies to Armenia’s current regime’s notorious practice of ethnic intolerance. This has manifested itself in total ethnic cleansing conducted against the Azerbaijani population of Armenia *per se* and the occupied Azerbaijani territories. As a result, no single Azerbaijani was left in neither Armenia nor in the occupied territories. Inhumane actions by Armenia with regard to the said Azerbaijani civilians are not isolated cases, yet demonstrate its long-standing policy to eliminate the two-community character of the occupied Nagorno-Karabakh region with a view to consolidating the results of its aggression and policy of ethnic cleansing.

In light of continued refusal by Armenia to release the Azerbaijani hostages, we once again remind the obligations of the states under international humanitarian law to respect the rights of civilians during the armed conflicts. We reiterate that taking hostages, as well as torture, cruel, inhumane and other degrading behavior against the civilian population of the territories under occupation is prohibited under international humanitarian law.

Mr. Chairperson,

It is not the first time that the Delegation of Azerbaijan raises concerns on this issue. Regrettably, we don’t see any action or condemnation of Armenian violations either by the representatives of the OSCE structures or OSCE participating States. Lack of adequate reaction by the Organization to continued violation of basic human rights and fundamental freedoms of the Azerbaijani civilians is a sign of discrimination *vis-a-vis* shared OSCE commitments and thus, is totally unacceptable. Further continuation of such situation raises serious doubts on sincerity of efforts by some OSCE Delegations to defend and promote OSCE *acquis* in the field of human rights.

In light of the above-mentioned, we urge the OSCE Participating States, including the Austrian Chairmanship and the members of the OSCE Minsk Group to reconsider their position on the matter and raise their voices in calling on the Armenian side to immediately release the abducted and illegally captured Azerbaijani civilians.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.