



## Blockade of the Lachin-Khankandi road

**FAKE NEWS**

Debunking Armenia's allegations of obstruction of the movement along the Lachin-Khankandi road



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## **I. Armenia's allegations of "blockade" contradict Azerbaijan's vision for peace in the region and practical steps to this end**

Claims that Azerbaijan somehow impedes transport movement along the Lachin-Khankandi road or imposes so-called "blockade" are false and do not correspond to the facts on the ground and Azerbaijan's vision for peace in the region (see Part VII).

The trilateral statement signed on 10 November 2020 between Azerbaijan, Armenia and Russia has put an end to the conflict and set agreed parameters for establishing durable peace in the region. Now that the war is over and the conflict has been resolved, the priorities of Azerbaijan at the current post-conflict stage have been stated unambiguously, including at the highest political level.

With the end of almost 30 years-long armed conflict with Armenia, Azerbaijan has embarked on elimination of its negative consequences. Enabling hundreds of thousands of former IDPs to return to their homes in safety and dignity, and ensuring peaceful life in the liberated territories as well as consolidating peace in the region are the absolute priority for the Government of Azerbaijan.

Along with large-scale post-conflict recovery, reconstruction and reintegration works, Azerbaijan has also initiated the process of normalizing inter-State relations with Armenia. Despite devastating consequences and unhealed wounds of war and occupation, Azerbaijan offered Armenia peace based on mutual recognition and respect for each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity within their state borders. For the past two years Azerbaijan has been demonstrating strong political will to promote the peace agenda. At meetings held in 2022 in Brussels, Prague and Sochi at the highest level both sides confirmed their mutual recognition of each other's sovereignty, territorial integrity and inviolability of borders. This can be basis for and can lead to signing of the peace treaty between the two States.

Azerbaijan's approach in this regard is clear, consistent, and based on international law. After almost thirty years of no formal relations, the urgent necessity for the sides is to agree on a legally binding document setting the foundation for their inter-State relations. This document shall guarantee their rights as two equal sovereign States and provide a basis for addressing all issues of common interest or concern falling into the realm of inter-State relations.

## **II. Reconstruction works and building quality transport infrastructure is a testament to Azerbaijan's commitment to opening of all regional communications**

The Government of Azerbaijan has already initiated a large-scale reconstruction work in the liberated territories that includes building quality transport infrastructure with the **aim to foster regional communications, not to obstruct it.**

Article 6 of the trilateral statement of 10 November 2020 envisaged construction of a new road bypassing the city of Lachin. The new road was



Construction of Ahmadbayli-Fuzuli-Shusha road is in full swing.  
Source: <<http://www.aayda.gov.az/>>, February 2023.

to bypass towns formerly populated by Azerbaijanis, to allow displaced Azerbaijanis to begin their return to those areas. In just 21 months since the signing of the statement, Azerbaijan completed the construction of the new 32 km-long road to the border with Armenia for the movement of citizens, vehicles and goods.

During construction of the new road there were contacts of Azerbaijani side with local Armenian residents of Azerbaijan. A large part of the construction process was carried out without presence of the temporarily deployed Russian peacekeeping contingent. This demonstrates that contrary to Armenia's allegations direct people-to-people contacts and common activities between Azerbaijanis and Armenians living in Azerbaijan are possible and must be viewed also as an essential post-conflict normalization and confidence-building measure. Furthermore, after the appeals of local Armenian



The new section of the Lachin-Khankandi road was built just in 21 months. Source: <<http://www.aayda.gov.az>>, August 2022.

residents of Azerbaijan, Azerbaijani authorities agreed to build for temporarily use a 4,7 km-long road until the construction of the new road passing on the territory of Armenia is completed. This was done in order to enable the use of the new route without any hindrance by local Armenian residents of Azerbaijan. Local Armenians agreed to the start of operation of the new road, while it was the Government of Armenia that attempted to postpone the operation of the road. This demonstrates that, on the one hand, **it is Azerbaijan, and not Armenia, that comes up with and delivers solutions for addressing security and day-to-day life of local Armenian residents of Azerbaijan.** On the other hand, it exposes the approach of Armenia towards its obligations and its indifference towards daily livelihood of local Armenian residents in Azerbaijan.

Azerbaijan immediately after the signing of trilateral statement of November 2020 took a number of unilateral steps, including in humanitarian sphere to demonstrate its true intentions to normalize relations.

### III. Armenia impedes unblocking of regional transport routes between the two States

Essential element of post-conflict normalization process is unblocking of all regional transport and communication routes between the two States, including railways and highways, which is envisaged by Article 9 of 10 November 2020 trilateral statement and another trilateral statement of 11 January 2021. Implementation of the relevant provisions of these statements will ensure



Construction of railway in Azerbaijan's Zangilan district towards the border with Armenia. Source: Azertac News Agency, May 2022.

unimpeded international transport between the two States. Opening of all regional transport links is one of the areas that can serve the cause of making peace irreversible and fostering mutually beneficial cooperation in the region. In this context, the Zangazur corridor connecting mainland Azerbaijan with its Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic and Turkey will create new opportunities for the whole region.

Outcry in Armenia about so-called "blockade" also does not withstand any scrutiny, given **refusal of Armenia to open all regional transport and communication routes between the two States**. Armenia delays the process of providing coordinates for the construction of the highway that will ensure unimpeded movement between the mainland Azerbaijan and its Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic, thus undermining the prospects of mutually beneficial regional cooperation and connectivity. Azerbaijan's recent constructive offer to move forward on the railway connection in an effort to break the impasse also was not reciprocated in Armenia, which is indicative that this country is not conducting discussions in good faith and refuses to implement its obligations under the trilateral statement of 10 November 2020 to restore all economic and transport links in the region and to guarantee the security of transport links between the Western districts of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic of Azerbaijan in order to organize unimpeded movement of citizens, vehicles and goods in both directions.

### IV. Armenia in words and in deeds fails to deliver on its other commitments under the trilateral statements and undermines the prospects for peace

**Armenia sticks to the past practice of imitation rather than engaging genuinely into the normalization process.** Armenia's speculations about the situation on the Lachin-Khankandi road are nothing but another futile attempt to divert attention of the international community from non-fulfillment of its commitments under the trilateral statement and, to create wrong impression of the real situation on the ground. Obviously, the ultimate goal of Armenia's smear campaign against Azerbaijan is to hijack the normalization agenda.

**Armenia is yet to fully withdraw the remains of its armed forces and illegal armed formations from the territory of Azerbaijan**, where the Russian peacekeepers are temporarily deployed, as envisaged by Article 4 of the trilateral statement. Armenia refuses to implement this provision under various pretexts, and continues to engage in planting of new landmines, carrying out military build-up, rotation of its forces and military-fortification activities in the territory of Azerbaijan. This confirms the urgent necessity for the soonest withdrawal of all Armenian armed forces, whose illegal presence in the territory of Azerbaijan remains the biggest threat to peace, security and stability in the region.

**Presence of Armenia’s armed forces and illegal Armenian armed detachments in the territory of Azerbaijan was also acknowledged by the Armenian officials.** Thus, on 29 June 2022, Deputy Chief of the General Staff of the Armenian armed forces Sahak Sahakyan stated that: "Armenian conscripts in the Karabakh region will be replaced by servicemen of active military service." The Secretary of the Security Council of Armenia Armen Grigoryan in an interview on 19 July 2022 is quoted to have said that "[d]ue to the [2020] war, a number of units of Armenia’s Armed Forces entered Nagorno-Karabakh to help its Defense Army." "They have been returning to the Republic of Armenia since the ceasefire took effect [in November 2020.]" "This process is close to completion and will end in September".<sup>1</sup>

Contrary to the provisions of the trilateral statement, **Armenia refuses to withdraw its forces, and has not ceased military activities against Azerbaijan**, which was also witnessed in the wake of the large-scale military provocation committed by Armenia on the night of 12-13 September 2022 at the State border with Azerbaijan, when sabotage groups of the Armenia’s armed forces using the complicated mountainous terrain of the area and existing valley gaps attempted to plant landmines at the supply roads and between the positions of the units of Azerbaijan’s armed forces.



One of the recent discoveries in the liberated Aghdam district in Azerbaijan. Improvised trap mine containing one 240 mm 9M24F turbo jet rocket and more than thirty 120 mm mortar ammunitions (each containing 3 kg of explosives) placed together to maximize lethal power. Source: ANAMA, January 2023.

**Contamination of liberated territories with mines laid by Armenia on a massive scale is the major impediment for the reconstruction efforts and return of IDPs.** After the signing of the trilateral

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<sup>1</sup> "Yerevan Reassures Baku Over Troop Withdrawal From Karabakh", 19 July 2022, <<https://www.azatutyun.am/a/31950607.html>>.

statement in November 2020, 282 persons have become mine victims. 46 persons, including 35 civilians, were killed. In total, the number of mine victims in Azerbaijan during the last 30 years of conflict, stands at 3,361 persons.

**Armenia, in violation of its obligations under customary international law, refuses to provide Azerbaijan with accurate mine maps of all liberated territories.** After the signing of the 10 November 2020 trilateral statement and the end of the armed conflict, Armenia rejected having any mine maps altogether. Armenia ultimately had to provide these records in a piecemeal fashion under the pressure from Azerbaijan and international community. However, provided records were incomplete and covered only part of the liberated territories. A significant part of mine maps was unreliable, while others contained no information pertinent to demining. The practical utility and reliability of minefield records providing information about 390,709 anti-tank and antipersonnel landmines, as well as other explosive devices is only 25 percent. These records cover around 5 percent of all liberated territories and less than third of confirmed high threat areas reflected in Mine Action Assessment Mission to Azerbaijan conducted by UNMAS/UNDP. Only around 1,25 percent of the liberated territories of Azerbaijan have minefield records with reliable data.

**Failure by Armenia to cooperate and to provide Azerbaijan with full and accurate mine maps of all liberated territories increases death toll and injuries.** Around 55 per cent of all mine incidents took place in areas, with respect to which no minefield record was shared by Armenia. Since November 2020, 160 incidents of landmine explosion took place in Azerbaijan, 118 of which occurred beyond high threat areas as a result of which 140 persons became landmine victims.



Antipersonnel landmines PMN-Э produced in Armenia in 2021 discovered in Lachin district, 23 November 2022.  
Source: <<https://mod.gov.az>>.

Furthermore, after the end of the armed conflict, in violation of the provisions of 10 November 2020 trilateral statement, as well as obligations under customary international law, **Armenia continued intensive planting of mines in the territories of Azerbaijan.** Since August 2022, some 3,166 pieces of mines, a significant part of which was anti-personnel mines were found and removed. It was established that these landmines were produced in Armenia in 2021, which represents clear evidence that they were laid in the territory of Azerbaijan after the signing of the trilateral statement of November 2020. These discovered mines were transferred to the territory of Azerbaijan through the Lachin-Khankandi road, which under the trilateral statement was envisaged to be used solely for humanitarian purposes.

The amount and type of discovered landmines demonstrates that Armenia, instead of embracing the process of post-conflict normalization and supporting the efforts to establish long-term peace in the region, is still interested in continuing its destructive policy, hampering the return to normal life in the liberated territories and putting innocent civilians under threat. It also demonstrates that Armenia misleads the international community by previously falsely claiming that “Armenia last used antipersonnel mines in April 1994” and that “it has never produced or exported antipersonnel mines”.<sup>2</sup>

**Armenia is yet to implement its obligations with regard to identifying the whereabouts of around 4000 Azerbaijanis**, who went missing as a result of Armenia’s armed aggression at the beginning of 1990s. As a result of search operation and investigation a number of mass graves already have been unearthed in the liberated territories of Azerbaijan. It is of urgent necessity to ensure that fates of the missing persons are finally established and all those who committed war crimes against the Azerbaijanis are brought to justice.

#### **V. Armenia misuses the Lachin-Khankandi road for military purposes and for other malign activity in contravention of the provisions of the trilateral statement**

In accordance with Article 6 of the trilateral statement of 10 November 2020, the Republic of Azerbaijan undertook to guarantee the security of movement of citizens, vehicles and goods along the Lachin road in both directions. This provision makes it clear that the road through the **Lachin district of Azerbaijan can be used only for movement of citizens, vehicles and goods, thus exclusively for humanitarian purposes, excluding any military or other unauthorized activity.** Azerbaijan’s role is defined as guaranteeing security of their movement. Azerbaijan remains faithful to its commitments under this trilateral statement.

Armenia is misusing the Lachin-Khankandi road for military and other malign purposes in violation of the provisions of the trilateral statement. This includes transfer of military equipment, weapons, ammunition and anti-personnel mines for illegal military build-up, rotation of its armed forces, military provocations as well as illegal entry of the nationals of third countries to the territory of Azerbaijan.

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<sup>2</sup> Report by Landmine and Cluster Munition Monitor on Armenia, <<http://www.the-monitor.org/en-gb/reports/2020/armenia/mine-ban-policy.aspx#ftn10>>.



Satellite imagery of the Armenian military installations built in 2022 in the territories of Azerbaijan where Russian peacekeeping contingent is temporarily deployed. Source: Maxar/Airbus via @DataQarabag, 11 January 2023.



Armenia continues to supply via the Lachin-Khankandi road military equipment, ammunitions and personnel for illegal military build-up in the territories of Azerbaijan. Source: @DataQarabag, January 2023.



Of particular concern is that the Lachin-Khankandi road has been used not only for unlawful military activities, but also for trafficking of minerals and other wealth from the formerly occupied territories of Azerbaijan to Armenia and elsewhere. This is a blatant abuse of the Lachin road envisaged for exclusively humanitarian purposes.



In 2013, Base Metals CJSC, subsidiary of Armenia's Vallex Group launched illegal exploitation of Demirli open-pit copper and molybdenum mine. Source: <<https://hetq.am/en/article/151351>>.

Illegal exploitation of natural resources and its environmental damage during Armenia's aggression and 30-year occupation are not something hypothetical for the Azerbaijani society. This had been a source of legitimate concern for Azerbaijan for almost three decades.

Azerbaijan had presented to the international community irrefutable well-documented evidence attesting to the direct involvement of Armenia in unlawful economic and other activities in the formerly occupied territories of Azerbaijan for its own economic gain in flagrant violation of international law. Armenia's unlawful actions included, *inter alia*, implantation of settlers from Armenia and abroad, destruction and misappropriation of historical and cultural heritage, permanent infrastructure changes, exploitation and pillage of natural resources and other forms of wealth, accompanied by substantial and systematic interference with the public and private property rights.

During the years of occupation, Armenia-registered companies and entities, including Base Metals CJSC, which is a wholly owned subsidiary of Armenia's Vallex Group CJSC, have been heavily engaged in mining of precious minerals and metals, which was one of the main enterprises in the formerly occupied territories. There had been illegal trafficking of natural resources across the formerly occupied section of the international border between Azerbaijan and Armenia. From 2009 to 2017, Vallex Group and Base Metals made a declared profit of 177.5 million USD from illegal exploitation

of natural resources of the occupied territories.<sup>3</sup> In 2019 alone Base Metals transferred 38.5 million USD from its profit gained through illegal exploitation of natural resources to the illegal entity that Armenia established in the formerly occupied territories of Azerbaijan.<sup>4</sup> Armenia was essentially turned into a transport base for trafficking of minerals and other wealth from the formerly occupied territories of Azerbaijan to international markets.<sup>5</sup>



CCTV surveillance footage shows the Lachin-Khankandi road used by Armenian companies to remove truck-loads of Azerbaijan's resources to Armenia. Source: CaliberAz, December 2022, <[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1T\\_Y2iRWLfc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1T_Y2iRWLfc)>.

According to the information obtained by the relevant Azerbaijani authorities, some of which is available publicly, illegal exploitation and pillage of natural resources in Azerbaijan not only continued after the end of the conflict, but expanded, especially in the Gyzybulag gold and Demirli copper-molybdenum deposits.

Depredatory exploitation and depletion of the natural resources in the formerly occupied territories by Armenia and its companies over the past three decades severely damaged the environment. Thousands of hectares of forests were cut due to exploitation of new mines. Millions of tons of tailings were stored in tailing dumps across the formerly occupied territories, as a result of extensive mining activities. Hazardous leaks from tailing dumps and ponds at the mining sites are polluting these territories and destroying the fragile ecosystems there.

Lack of adequate reaction to these unlawful activities caused deep resentment in the public of Azerbaijan.

<sup>3</sup> "ANALYSIS - Unscrupulous profiteers of Armenia's Nagorno Karabakh occupation", <<https://www.aa.com.tr/en/analysis/analysis-unscrupulous-profiteers-of-armenia-s-nagorno-karabakh-occupation-/2041427#>>.

<sup>4</sup> "Following war with Armenia, Azerbaijan gains control of lucrative gold mines", <<https://eurasianet.org/following-war-with-armenia-azerbaijan-gains-control-of-lucrative-gold-mines>>, <<https://hetq.am/en/article/125270>>.

<sup>5</sup> "Improving Prospects for Peace after the Nagorno-Karabakh War", <<https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/caucasus/nagorno-karabakh-conflict/b91-improving-prospects-peace-after-nagorno-karabakh-war>>.

Unlawful exploitation of natural resources in the formerly occupied territories of Azerbaijan and environmental damage reached such a fast and unobstructed pace that even Armenian environmental organizations, including the Pan-Armenian Environmental Front raised concerns.<sup>6</sup>



Satellite image of the tailing dump in Gyzybulag underground mine near Heyvaly village of Kalbajar district.  
Source: Azercosmos CJSC.

In September 2017, Armenian journalist Joseph Dagdigian, who visited several mining-polluted sites in the then occupied territories of Azerbaijan, observed that “[d]uring my first visit to that area a decade or two ago, the water of the Sarsang reservoir seemed normal. During a subsequent visit a few years ago, with the Base Metals plant operating above the reservoir, the water had a greenish tint to it. Upstream from the plant, on the Trtu (Tartar) river, which feeds the reservoir, the water was clear and appeared normal. The plant obviously was the reason for the green color of the water”.<sup>7</sup>

## **VI. Events unfolding prior to the peaceful protests along the Lachin-Khankandi road**

For well over a year, since November 2021, Azerbaijan has raised the issue of illegal mining and landmines formally and informally with the Russian peacekeeping forces temporarily deployed in the territories of Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan sought to address its concerns through negotiations and engaged in dialogue in good faith.

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<sup>6</sup> “Pan-Armenian Environmental Front Presenting Environmental Problems of Armenia in USA”, <<https://www.ecolur.org/en/news/electionspoliticsecology/panarmenian-environmental-front-presenting-environmental-problems-of-armenia-in-usa/5429/>>, 22 October 2013; Civil Society, Development and Environmental Activism in Armenia, Dr. Armine Ishkanian Department of Social Policy, London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), October 2013, < [https://moj.am/storage/uploads/001\\_aktivizm.pdf](https://moj.am/storage/uploads/001_aktivizm.pdf) >.

<sup>7</sup> “Destruction for Profit: A Nonexpert’s Observation of Mining in Armenia”, 15 September, 2017, <<https://www.miningsee.eu/destruction-profit-nonexperts-observation-mining-armenia/>>.

Then on 3 December 2022, the officials of the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the State Service for Real Estate Affairs under the Ministry of Economy of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the “AzerGold” Closed Joint Stock Company held discussions with the command of the Russian peacekeeping forces. It should be underlined that the consultations were also attended by representatives of local Armenians. During the meeting, the representatives of the relevant Government agencies requested on-site inspection of mineral deposits, especially Gyzybulag and Demirli mines, monitoring, organization of natural resources inventory and cadastral accounting of property, assessment of potential environmental damage and risks, including impact on underground and surface water sources. As a follow up to this meeting a road map was prepared by the Azerbaijani authorities.

On 10 December 2022, the representatives of Azerbaijani government agencies and environmental civil society organizations while trying to visit the above-mentioned deposits in accordance with the agreement reached, were confronted by unidentified persons and were prevented from accessing the sites. This caused justified indignation of the public which led to peaceful protests.

Azerbaijan urged the Russian peacekeeping contingent’s command to honour the agreements reached and to ensure unhindered access to the above-mentioned sites. It was emphasized that it is unacceptable to obstruct such an expert visit or to impose any conditions.

Two days later, on 12 December 2022, peaceful protests started on a small section of the Lachin-Khankandi road next to Shusha.

## **VII. Allegations that Azerbaijan allegedly imposed “blockade” on the Lachin-Khankandi road are false**

Azerbaijan strongly rejects the baseless allegations of Armenia, trying to shift the blame on Azerbaijan for the situation on the Lachin-Khankandi road. Claims that Azerbaijan allegedly imposed “blockade” on the Lachin-Khankandi road are groundless. Azerbaijan has not put any restriction along the road. The regime that applies to the road is the same today as it was before the protests started.

On the contrary, representatives of the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the State Service for Real Estate Affairs under the Ministry of Economy of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the “AzerGold” Closed Joint Stock Company want to use this road to visit the areas of Azerbaijan to conduct on-site monitoring and assessment of environmental situation.



ICRC vehicles continue free movement along the Lachin-Khankandi road. January 2023. Source: Azertac

The peaceful protesters also do not interfere with the movement of the civilian vehicles. They have declared publicly and repeatedly that they had and continue to have no intention of blocking traffic. There are no impediments to the supply of goods or the provision of necessary medical services for the use of local residents. Indeed, every day, dozens of cars and trucks of the Russian peacekeeping contingent as well as those of the ICRC pass by the protest site on Lachin road in both directions. CNN reported in January 2023 that “[s]ocial media video showed the Azerbaijani crowds making way for ICRC vehicles as well as Russian peacekeeping troops, who also have reportedly brought in some



humanitarian supplies.”<sup>8</sup> The ICRC also confirmed it facilitated safe passage along the Lachin-Khankandi road of civilians in need of medical care as well as deliveries of medicine, baby formula and food supplies to health facilities.<sup>9</sup>

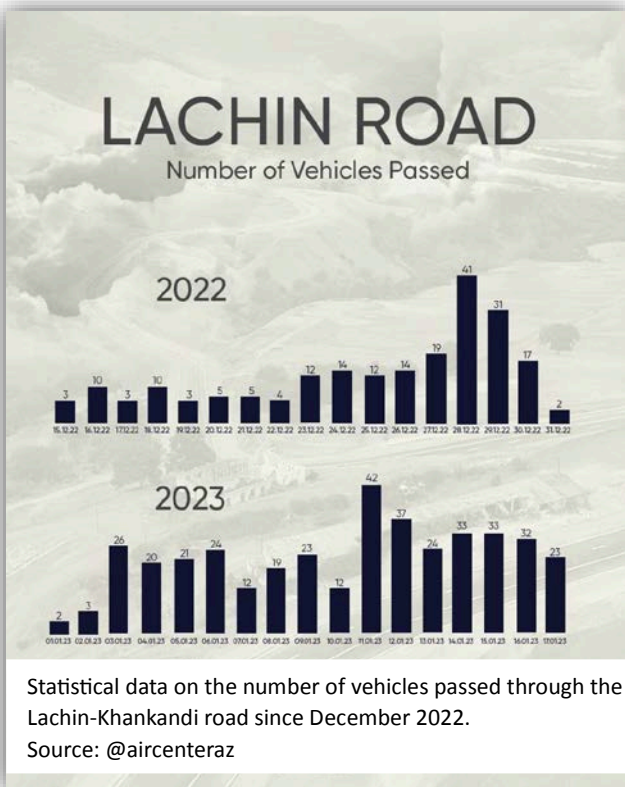
Eco-activists protesting along the Lachin-Khankandi road since December 2022. Source: Report News Agency, January 2023.

<sup>8</sup> Tamara Qiblawi, CNN, January 12, 2023, <<https://edition.cnn.com/2023/01/12/europe/armenia-azerbaijan-nagorno-karabakh-lachin-intl/index.html>>

<sup>9</sup> <<https://www.icrc.org/en/document/operational-update-situation-along-lachin-corridor>>, 01 February 2023.



Vehicles of Russian peacekeepers and ICRC pass through the protest area on the Lachin-Khankandi road without hindrance. Source: Azertac, January 2023.



As of 12 February 2023, some 2198 vehicles have passed through this road since 12 December 2022. Some 403 vehicles passed through the road between 05-12 February. An average 58 vehicles used the road daily during this week. This means the traffic is increasing, not decreasing as alluded by Armenia. Moreover, some 275 or 68% of 402 vehicles passed through the road between 05-12 February were heavy duty vehicles carrying foodstuff, child food and medical supplies to the city of Khankandi, Azerbaijan.

Claims of imminent “humanitarian catastrophe” are not supported by the facts on the ground. Alleged humanitarian catastrophe is over-exaggeration with the purpose of misleading the international community. Local Armenian residents themselves through their public social media accounts confirm that there is no shortage of food, medicaments or any other supply.



ICRC convoys with foodstuff and other supplies freely pass through the Lachin-Khankandi road on a daily basis.  
Source: Trend News Agency, 2 February 2023.

At the same time, Azerbaijan receives reports of attempts by the Armenian side to obstruct the use of the road by the local Armenian residents in order to exploit the present situation for its narrow political agenda and to fabricate the situation of “humanitarian crisis”.

Armenia has notorious track record of manipulating with public opinion. The level of the Armenian State propaganda and the fake news reached such a staggering scale that social networks such as *Twitter* had to take down the State-linked accounts to stop spreading fake news and false narratives by the Government of Armenia. Thus, *Twitter* in February 2021 released a press release disclosing networks of state-linked information operations in which it, *inter alia*, informed that “[u]nder our platform manipulation policy, we investigated and removed 35 accounts that had ties to the Government of Armenia. These accounts were created in order to advance narratives that were targeting Azerbaijan and were geostrategically favorable to the Armenian government.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Twitter Safety, “Disclosing networks of state-linked information operations”, 23 February 2021, <[https://blog.twitter.com/en\\_us/topics/company/2021/disclosing-networks-of-state-linked-information-operations-](https://blog.twitter.com/en_us/topics/company/2021/disclosing-networks-of-state-linked-information-operations-)>.



This is only one example of attempts through social media to present allegedly “empty shelves in groceries” in Khankandi. Qualiko frozen chicken is visible on the floor of the grocery store on this image, apparently removed from the shelves for more convincing photo.

Nevertheless, the Government of Azerbaijan has taken seriously possible negative impact of the situation and on several occasions confirmed its readiness to provide every assistance to the local residents either directly or through the ICRC.

### **VIII. Armenia’s claims of “ethnic cleansing” policy by Azerbaijan are false and hypocritical, given this country’s actions over the past three decades**

Claims that Azerbaijan wants to force its citizens of Armenian origin out of the region and accusations by Armenia of so-called attempted “ethnic cleansing” are curious, given the volumes of evidence attesting to the practice of ethnic cleansing by Armenia in the formerly occupied territories of Azerbaijan over the past three decades aimed at consolidating the occupation of these territories and preventing hundreds of thousands of Azerbaijani IDPs from returning to their homes and properties. Azerbaijan rejects Armenia’s baseless accusations in the strongest terms.

In the post-conflict period, Azerbaijan has taken consistent steps towards fostering integration of local Armenian residents back into its social, economic and political space. Increased dialogue and contacts between the central Azerbaijani authorities and local ethnic Armenian residents aim at ensuring peaceful co-existence and will be sustained. This was the case when during construction of the new road bypassing the city of Lachin, there were contacts of Azerbaijani side with local Armenian residents of Azerbaijan. A large part of the construction process was carried out without presence of the temporarily deployed Russian peacekeeping contingent. Moreover, the direct contacts were established when Azerbaijani specialists with local experts visited and conducted technical monitoring of Sarsang water reservoir in August 2022.

Azerbaijan is resolute to re-integrate its citizens of Armenian origin residing in post-conflict territories, guaranteeing the same rights and freedoms with all the citizens of Azerbaijan. The Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan provides the solid legal framework in this regard. We stress once again that the issue of the rights and security of Armenian residents living in the Garabagh region of Azerbaijan is an internal matter of Azerbaijan.

Armenia has seized upon the Lachin-Khankandi road protests to try to create political leverage in the peace negotiations between the two States, and instead of trying to resolve issues, it encourages



hatred and fear of Azerbaijan and Azerbaijanis. When Azerbaijan, the Russian Federation and Armenia were due to meet on 23 December 2022 for another round of talks, including to address the situation around the Lachin road, it was Armenia that pulled out of those discussions at the last minute without prior notice or explanation.

Azerbaijan remains committed to engage in dialogue and calls for facilitation of expert's visit to the mineral deposits as it was previously agreed to conduct monitoring and to ensure that unlawful exploitation of resources is put to an end. It is not the Azerbaijani Government that refused dialogue, but our consistent efforts for dialogue are effectively sabotaged.

The sooner the legitimate concerns of Azerbaijani authorities and the general public with regard to abuse of the Lachin-Khankandi road for unlawful exploitation of resources and for military purposes will be addressed, the sooner the situation will be resolved.

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