



Statement by the Delegation of the Republic of Azerbaijan
1389th Meeting of the Permanent Council,
15 September 2022

*Continued threats posed by mines planted by Armenia
in the liberated territories of Azerbaijan*

Mr. Chairperson,

We would like to update the Permanent Council on continued threats posed by mines which Armenia planted on a massive scale in the liberated territories of Azerbaijan both in the course of previous occupation of these territories and afterwards.

The massive mine contamination problem that Azerbaijan currently faces is the result of military occupation of the territories of Azerbaijan by Armenia for almost three decades before Azerbaijan restored its sovereignty and territorial integrity following the 44-day Patriotic War of 2020 and subsequent signing of the trilateral statement of 10 November 2020. The statement put an end to the armed conflict and all military activities between Armenia and Azerbaijan. It also envisaged the withdrawal of all Armenian forces from the territory of Azerbaijan.

Thirty years of occupation accompanied by large-scale indiscriminate planting of mines by Armenia in the now liberated territories turned Azerbaijan into one of the most mine-contaminated countries in the world. Humanitarian demining being conducted after liberation of these territories reveals contamination by a wide range of anti-tank mines (ATM), anti-personnel mines (APM) and explosive remnants of war (ERW), such as rockets, missiles, artillery projectiles, cluster munitions and others.

Massive mine contamination of the liberated territories is the major impediment for the return of forcibly expelled Azerbaijani IDPs to their homes in safety and dignity. Providing safe environment for their return and ensuring their well-being through the implementation of necessary programmes could be a significant step in the elimination of the consequences of the former conflict and contributing to the regional peace, security and stability.

Azerbaijan has already initiated and currently implements large-scale post-conflict rehabilitation and reconstruction projects with its own resources. In this context, we recall that the first group of Azerbaijani IDPs recently returned to newly reconstructed Agali village of Azerbaijan's liberated Zangilan district after almost three decades of occupation. The gradual return of all IDPs to their homes is essential for the return to normal life and consolidation of peace and stability in the region.

Since 10 November 2020, 22,737 pieces of anti-personnel mines, 11,379 pieces of anti-tank mines and 31,840 pieces of unexploded ordnance were found and eliminated by the agencies of the Republic of Azerbaijan involved in mine clearance work in the liberated territories. However, challenges persist due to enormous scale of mine contamination of these territories. It is further complicated by the destructive actions of Armenia aimed at impeding the process of return of Azerbaijani IDPs, hindering wide-ranging post-conflict rehabilitation and reconstruction activities, and overall, undermining the post-conflict normalization process.

Thus, after the end of the armed conflict, in violation of the provisions of 10 November 2020 trilateral statement, as well as Armenia's other international obligations, Armenia continued intensive planting of mines in the territories of Azerbaijan. Starting from 15 August 2022, as a result of conducted search operations with a view to enabling the return of IDPs, more than 1300 pieces of anti-personnel mines were discovered and removed, and this is only in the territory of the Lachin district. It was established that these mines were produced in Armenia in 2021, which represents a clear evidence that they were laid in the territory of Azerbaijan after the signing of the trilateral statement by the remains of Armenia's armed forces and armed detachments illegally present in the territories of Azerbaijan, where the Russian peacekeepers are temporarily deployed.

The amount and type of found mines 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 civilian life in the liberated territories and putting innocent civilians under threat. It also demonstrates that Armenia misleads the international community by falsely announcing that "it has never produced or exported antipersonnel mines".¹

We remind the Permanent Council that 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 delays this process under various pretexts, while continuing to engage in large-scale deployment of new mines, building fortifications, and carrying out military-engineering 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 an utmost threat to peace, security and stability in the region.

Thus, contrary to the provisions of the trilateral statement, Armenia has not ceased military activities against Azerbaijan, which we also vividly witnessed in the wake of the latest large-scale military provocation committed by Armenia on the night of 12-13 September at the state border with Azerbaijan. Speaking of that provocation, we recall that the 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. The detailed account of this military provocation of Armenia has been shared by our Delegation at the Special Meeting of the Permanent Council on Tuesday and can be found under reference number PC.DEL/1262/22.

We also draw attention to the fact that aforementioned recently discovered mines which were produced in Armenia had been transferred to the territory of Azerbaijan through the Lachin road, which under the trilateral statement was envisaged to be used solely for humanitarian purposes. However, Armenia misused this road for its illegal military activities. Since the new road bypassing the city of Lachin was recently constructed and started its operation in line with the trilateral statement, we urge that this road should be used only for humanitarian purposes, as envisaged by the trilateral statement.

Along with indiscriminate deployment of landmines, 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 called the request of Azerbaijan to release these maps a "fake agenda" and initially refused to hand them over, but ultimately had to provide these records in a piecemeal fashion once faced international pressure.

¹ <http://www.the-monitor.org/en-gb/reports/2020/armenia/mine-ban-policy.aspx#ftn10>

However, when examined by field specialists, it turned out that the provided records were incomplete and covered only a 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 is only 25 percent and provide information about 390,709 anti-tank and anti-personnel landmines, as well as other explosive devices. 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 (SEC.DEL/53/21; 5 February 2021). Thus, only around 1,25 percent of the liberated territories of Azerbaijan have minefield records with reliable data.

We urge Armenia, in line with obligations under customary international law, to provide accurate maps of mines that it planted in all liberated territories of Azerbaijan.

In total, the number of mine victims in Azerbaijan during the last 30 years stands at 3,321 persons. Since the signing of the trilateral statement of 10 November 2020, 242 persons have become mine victims, with 40 killed and 202 maimed. We stress that 140, or close to 50% of these cases, were registered outside the areas for which Armenia released the mine maps so far. In a latest incident, on 20-21 August 2022, two Azerbaijani military servicemen received injuries due to mine explosion in the liberated Lachin district of Azerbaijan.

Mr. Chair,

Indiscriminate deployment of mines by Armenia, both old and new, continues to claim the lives and cause unnecessary suffering to civilians. Continued threats posed by mines create humanitarian urgency that needs utmost attention. Thus, we urge the international community to ramp up efforts to exert pressure on Armenia to finally withdraw all of its illegally present armed forces and armed detachments from the territory of Azerbaijan and to hold Armenia accountable for the indiscriminate use of mines and non-release of full records on planted mines. Armenia should also cooperate in good faith in order to provide material and technical assistance to demining operations in Azerbaijan, as it is the sole country responsible for the currently acute situation with regard to massive mine contamination in the territories of Azerbaijan.

Effective and soonest mine clearance in all liberated territories of Azerbaijan will not only speed up the process of the return of IDPs, and post-conflict rehabilitation and reconstruction, but will also provide a significant contribution to the normalization process between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Among others, it will facilitate construction and operation of regional rail and road transport links, and will spur regional cooperation to the benefit of all involved countries and their populations, making peace irreversible.

Despite being one of the most mine-contaminated countries in the world and accounting for a significant share of mine victims globally, Azerbaijan remains one of the least receivers of the international assistance for demining. The Government of Azerbaijan has set humanitarian demining as one of the key priorities. However, despite huge resources allocated by the Government, demining operations require more funding, given the enormous scale of the problem. Azerbaijan is in need of further institutional capacity building, cutting-edge technology, including aerial survey, establishing NGOs to conduct demining and raise awareness, increasing mechanical demining capacity, setting up female demining teams and improving mine victims' assistance.

Against this background, there is a clear need and opportunity for the international donor community, including the OSCE and its participating States to play a role in the enhancement of Azerbaijan's humanitarian mine action capacity. Increased international assistance to Azerbaijan will also make a

significant contribution to the global campaign against landmines. As mines present a humanitarian threat globally, any discrimination in distributing assistance aggravates the humanitarian threat posed by mines and devalues the cause of global efforts in this field. Therefore, as mines continue to pose an urgent humanitarian threat to civilian population of Azerbaijan, we urge the international community to render its assistance to Azerbaijan to tackle this threat.

I request that this statement be attached to the journal of the day.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.