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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement* submitted by Youth Parliament for SDG, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[3 February 2023]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



The Illicit Exploitation of Azerbaijan's Mineral Resources

The Azerbaijani liberated areas are rich in underground and land natural resources. The most widespread minerals are nonferrous metal ores, gold, mercury, chromite, pearlite, lime, marble, agate, mineral waters, and others. It has a wide potential for the resort-recreation. The area has different natural monuments and rare species of plants and animals. The mountain zone of the Small Caucasus is a wide forest region. Some trees are over 500 years old.

Even though the Armenians moved to these Azerbaijani regions only after their occupation in the war of the early 1990s, they found it unacceptable to hand those territories back to Azerbaijanis. Media reports show how Armenians in the liberated territories of Azerbaijan burn houses, cut down trees, and set forests on fire. This environmental terror against the formerly occupied regions of Azerbaijan started at the very beginning of the occupation. The region's ecosystem, wildlife, and natural resources have been violently destroyed over the last 30 years.

The inhumane attacks against the environment shocked Azerbaijani society and fueled anger, primarily among those people who had been displaced by Armenia from these territories back in the 1990s. Unfortunately, these acts have not received an adequate reaction from international institutions and NGOs that deal with environmental issues. All these unlawful acts need to be strongly condemned.

On many occasions, international organizations sounded alarms against the devastation of the environment of the Nagorno-Karabakh region and beyond caused by the occupation. In January 2016, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe adopted Resolution 2085 that condemned the fact that the occupation by Armenia of Nagorno-Karabakh and other, adjacent areas of Azerbaijan had created humanitarian and environmental problems for the citizens of Azerbaijan living in the Lower Karabakh valley. They called on the Armenian authorities to cease using water resources as tools of political influence.

Ecological Profile: Environmental Degradation

Before Armenia's occupation, various types of reserves (Basitchay, Garagol- state nature reserves, Lachin, Arazboyu, Gubadli, Dashalti-state nature sanctuaries) were established in these territories by Azerbaijan to preserve the natural landscape, rare species of plants and animals. During the occupation, the natural environment in these territories—including in protected areas—was significantly degraded or destroyed.

During the occupation more than 50 deposits such as gold, silver, copper, mercury, various construction materials, underground freshwater, and thermal-mineral water deposits valued at billions, have been exploited and plundered by Armenians. However, the Armenian side continues their unlawful exploitation of the natural resources of Azerbaijan, in the presence of Russian peacekeepers.

Since the liberation, the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources has been carrying out monitoring programs to assess the impact of the Armenian invasion. The monitoring shows that ancient trees with the status of natural monuments and hydrometeorological stations were destroyed and mineral and raw material deposits were exploited.

Currently, large-scale illegal exploitation of those deposits is being continued by Armenia, leading to air, water, and soil pollution, deforestation, biodiversity, and habitat loss. Since this exploitation is illegal and not compliant with international requirements, the environmental damage becomes more severe, targeting the unique ecosystem of those regions.

The protected areas experienced extensive damage, which influence the habitats of species during the 30 years of occupation. The deforestation of a rare sycamore forest in the Zangilan district which is the second largest in the world and the biggest in Europe is further evidence of ecological terror perpetrated by Armenia.

Following the talks with the Russian peacekeepers' command in December 2022, a group of experts from the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources, the State Property Service under the Ministry of Economy, and AzerGold CJSC were going to begin preliminary monitoring of the illicit mineral resource exploitation, as well as emerging environmental implications on Azerbaijani lands, where the Russian peacekeepers are temporarily deployed, on December 10, 2022. The expert team was expected to inspect the environmental condition at the 'Gizilbulagh' gold deposit and the 'Damirli' copper-molybdenum deposit, monitor various areas, organize cadastral property records, assess potential risks and threats to the environment, as well as to underground and surface water sources.

However, the expert group, accompanied by Russian peacekeepers, faced provocations by local armenians when arriving in the monitoring area. The planned initial inspection and monitoring did not take place since the Russian peacekeepers did not create the necessary conditions and prevented for the entire process to carry on.

Environmental Crimes

Ecological terror has been common in the occupied territories, including pollution, arson, deforestation, illegal exploitation of mineral deposits, etc.

Gold deposits and other natural resources of Azerbaijan in the once-occupied territories have been intensively looted by the local Armenian companies and those invited from overseas. Companies such as Vallex Group, First Dynasty Mines, Base Metals, Lydian International, GeoProMining, and Vedanta Group, as well as the Armenian-descent businessmen and entrepreneurs having close relations with the Armenian diaspora, had been involved in illegal mining operations in the once-occupied Azerbaijani lands. The Franck Muller luxury watch manufacturer company owned by a Swiss tycoon of Armenian origin, Vartan Sirmakes, used gold from the Soyudlu and the Vejnali deposits of Azerbaijan in the production of Frank Muller watches and sold on Swiss stock exchanges. Sirmakes has reportedly exploited gold worth \$302 million.

The unprecedented systematic deforestation activities in the Nagorno-Karabakh region have been repeatedly voiced by the Azerbaijani authorities, calling for an international investigation into the issue. From 2001 to 2020, Armenian ecological terror annihilated hundreds of hectares of tree cover in the Nagorno-Karabakh region, including in Tartar, Khojavand, Khojaly, Fuzuli, and Aghdam districts, according to Global Forest Watch, an online platform for monitoring global forests.

This behavior shows that Armenia violates not only the principles of territorial integrity of another state but also several conventions and resolutions, which prohibit the destruction of movable and immovable property of the occupied state. The state's current policy contradicts the UN environmental standard.

Energy Resources

Armenian vandalism in the occupied Azerbaijani territories has taken a toll on the Nagorno-Karabakh region's energy infrastructure. According to data compiled by the Energy Ministry of Azerbaijan, the energy facilities and resources of 20 substations in 10 power network districts and over 16,400 kilometers of power lines in the Nagorno-Karabakh region have been destroyed and looted. In addition, natural gas lines measuring 2,000 kilometers in length, and 34 pieces of gas distribution equipment have been destroyed and looted.

Armenia deprived Azerbaijan of the potential of 3 large hydropower stations in the Nagorno-Karabakh region, including the Tartar, Khudafarin, and Giz Galasi hydroelectric grids with the illegal occupation. The Sarsang water reservoir of the Tartar station once provided irrigation water for around 125,000 hectares of land in six districts of Azerbaijan. Armenians manipulated the water reserve in Sarsang with artificially created floods in winter and drought in summer months. The lack of technical control and outmoded equipment inventory posed a threat of reservoir dam destruction, which can lead to inundations in several regions of Azerbaijan.

The illegal exploitation of Azerbaijan's natural resources in Nagorno-Karabakh extended to the coal reserves in the Tartar district. Armenian authorities extracted and transferred the coal to Armenia for use reportedly in the restoration of the outdated power block of the Yerevan Thermal Power Plant.

Results and Conclusion:

The occupation represented a major challenge to the environment and the security of Azerbaijan, and posed specific problems such as the long-term impacts of the overuse of pastureland, clearing of forests, stockpiling of waste, and irrational use of land in Nagorno-Karabakh.

The satellite images show that the most valuable examples of flora and fauna in the occupied territories have been obliterated. Still, to ascertain the true condition of the flora and fauna of the liberated territories, it is necessary to conduct an appropriate investigation and objective scientific assessments on the spot and determine the damage caused to nature. Unfortunately due to the landmines Azerbaijan still faces barriers to entry in many parts of the liberated territories.

Nagorno-Karabakh has experienced massive destruction of the ecosystem that can be characterized as "ecocide," which calls for assigning criminal responsibility. Azerbaijan has discovered new incidences of environmental terror carried out by the Armenians on these lands for almost 30 years.

The hostile attitude toward nature of Azerbaijan not only pose a serious threat to the ecological balance, flora, and fauna of Azerbaijan but also, along with other provocative actions, instill further hatred and constitute a serious threat to peace and security in the region.
