



Security Council

Seventy-eighth year

9422nd meeting

Thursday, 21 September 2023, 3 p.m.

New York

Provisional

<i>President:</i>	Mr. Hasani/Ms. Dautllari	(Albania)
 <i>Members:</i>	Brazil	Mr. França Danese
	China	Mr. Geng Shuang
	Ecuador	Mr. Montalvo Sosa
	France	Ms. Colonna
	Gabon	Ms. Koumby Missambo
	Ghana	Ms. Opong-Ntiri
	Japan	Mr. Hamamoto
	Malta	Mr. Borg
	Mozambique	Mr. Fernandes
	Russian Federation	Mr. Polyanskiy
	Switzerland	Mrs. Baeriswyl
	United Arab Emirates	Mr. Al Sayegh
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Lord Ahmad
	United States of America	Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield

Agenda

Letter dated 13 September 2022 from the Permanent Representative of Armenia to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2022/688)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Letter dated 13 September 2022 from the Permanent Representative of Armenia to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2022/688)

The President: I would like to warmly welcome the Ministers and other high-level representatives present in the Security Council Chamber. Their presence today underscores the importance of the subject matter under discussion.

In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Germany and Türkiye to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Miroslav Jenča, Assistant Secretary-General for Europe, Central Asia and the Americas, Departments of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and Peace Operations, to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I also invite His Excellency Mr. Josep Borrell Fontelles, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I give the floor to Mr. Jenča.

Mr. Jenča: On 19 September, Azerbaijan announced that it had launched "local counter-terrorism activities in the Karabakh economic region" in response to the tragic deaths of two civilians and four police officers in incidents involving landmines, allegedly placed by Armenian armed forces. According to official statements, Azerbaijan had informed the Russian peacekeeping force and the Joint Russian-Turkish Monitoring Centre of its activities as being intended to prevent large-scale provocations by the Armenian armed forces, neutralize their military infrastructure and ensure their withdrawal and the restoration of the constitutional order of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

Developments indicated a serious escalation in military operations, with reports of Azerbaijani forces breaking through the Line of Contact. There were casualties reported, including among the civilian population, as well as evacuations of thousands of people within the region. The Russian peacekeeping force, which itself suffered casualties, documented numerous ceasefire violations. The United Nations, which is neither present along the Line of Contact nor in other areas under the mandate of the Russian peacekeepers, is not in a position to verify or confirm those various claims and allegations.

Allow me nonetheless to recall the Secretary-General's extreme concern over the recent resumption of hostilities that resulted in the tragic loss of civilian lives, including children. United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk also expressed concerns about the impact of the renewed use of armed force on civilians. He noted that it is critical to return to the peace process and work on an agreement grounded in respect for human rights. The Secretary-General urges all concerned to strictly observe the 2020 ceasefire in accordance with the 9 November joint statement and to continue implementing their obligations, notably as they relate to international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

The escalation occurred following the much-needed delivery, on the previous day, 18 September, of shipments of wheat flour and essential medical items simultaneously through both the Lachin corridor and the Aghdam road. Members of the Council will recall that, over the past months, issues of freedom of movement of civilians and humanitarian access have been major sources of tension and sharp exchanges between Baku and Yerevan. The Secretary-General remains deeply concerned about the impact of the escalation on the fragile humanitarian situation and calls on all parties to urgently facilitate unimpeded access for humanitarian relief to civilians in need.

We also note the concerns of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) about the humanitarian impact of the latest events on the already vulnerable population in the region. Recalling the extremely limited access to basic commodities and health care over the past few months, the ICRC assesses that the situation was likely to deepen their suffering.

The developments of the past few days should be seen in the context of the broader pattern of regular ceasefire violations that have continued to persist.

We note yesterday's announcement of a cessation of hostilities, with the situation on the ground remaining fluid. We also understand that, in a positive step, representatives of the local population and the Government of Azerbaijan met earlier today for an initial exchange.

In conclusion, we call for a credible and durable cessation of all hostilities. Any renewed escalation would lead to further loss of life and human suffering and further set back internationally supported peace efforts. The protection and essential needs of the civilian population, including their human rights, must be the overriding priority. A genuine dialogue between the Government of Azerbaijan and representatives of the region, together with full engagement in the normalization process by Armenia and Azerbaijan, are the only sustainable way forward. The Secretariat will remain in close contact with all relevant actors and the parties concerned and stands ready to support ongoing peace efforts as needed. The Secretariat is also ready and prepared to conduct humanitarian needs assessments, if given access, and provide assistance as needed.

The President: I thank Mr. Jenča for his briefing.

I shall now give the floor to those Council members who wish to make statements.

I call on Her Excellency Ms. Catherine Colonna, Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs of the French Republic.

Ms. Colonna (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank Assistant Secretary-General Miroslav Jenča for his briefing.

France requested the holding of this emergency meeting of the Security Council given the seriousness of the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh. After having amassed a large quantity of troops and military equipment for several weeks, on 19 September Azerbaijan decided to launch a large-scale military operation, which mobilized massive land and air resources and affected the civilian population. It was an operation that no one could believe was not premeditated, even as efforts towards a negotiated solution had intensified the day before and the delivery of humanitarian aid had resumed for the first time in three months.

With the greatest firmness, France immediately condemned that unacceptable offensive that contravenes

the principle of the peaceful settlement of disputes as enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations. And France is far from alone; many countries around this table have also expressed their clear rejection of violence and arbitrariness and called on Azerbaijan to show restraint and comply with international law.

As was to be feared, the results of those actions took a particularly heavy toll, causing several hundred injuries and dozens of deaths, including among civilians, including many children. A ceasefire was announced yesterday, which was essential. It is also essential that it be respected.

It is not the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan that is at stake here. Nobody disputes it, and nobody is threatening it. What is at stake is the possibility for the Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh to be able to continue to live there with respect for their rights, their history and their culture. Such a guarantee cannot exist when the strongest exercise deliberate coercion on the weakest, when the threat of permanent military intervention looms and when Nagorno-Karabakh has been the object of a blockade for several months now that prevents people from accessing food, medicine and energy.

France took note of President Aliyev's remarks yesterday affirming his desire to live in peace with the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh and preserve their rights. Those words commit Azerbaijan, which today bears responsibility for the fate of the population. If Azerbaijan is truly interested in reaching a peaceful negotiated solution it must now provide tangible guarantees. It must engage in good faith in the discussions, excluding any use of force or any threat of the use of force and accepting that the dialogue concerns rights and guarantees for the population, with the support of the international community. It must ensure amnesty for the forces that accepted the ceasefire. It must restore, without delay and unconditionally, traffic through the Lachin corridor, in accordance with the order issued by the International Court of Justice on 22 February 2023, which has since been confirmed by the Court. Finally, it must accept an international humanitarian presence in Nagorno-Karabakh. Doing so is essential as winter approaches. Without those guarantees, there can be no solution.

This is unfortunately not the first time that France has alerted the Council to the seriousness of the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh. This is not the first time that France has called on the Council to mobilize

to avoid a human tragedy and a worsening of this crisis, which threatens to profoundly destabilize the South Caucasus region. The events of recent days confirm it: we cannot remain passive and look away from what is currently happening in Nagorno-Karabakh, lest we become complicit in the mass exodus of a population that is already very hard-hit. As the Council is aware, several reports indicate that since yesterday, there are many currently preparing to depart, while almost 10 per cent of the population of Nagorno-Karabakh has been displaced owing to the offensive launched by Azerbaijan on 19 September.

The Council must contribute actively to resolving the crisis. It must defend the principles of the Charter and international security by providing its active support for defining the parameters of a solution negotiated between Baku and the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh. It must clearly state its determination to ensure respect for international law at all times and everywhere, and it must remain vigilant against any attempt to drag Armenia into these tragic events and to use them as a pretext to call into question its territorial integrity. In recent months, Prime Minister Pashinyan has shown his sense of responsibility, his desire for de-escalation and his commitment to reaching a negotiated solution with Azerbaijan, based on recognition and respect for the territorial sovereignty of both of the two countries, within clearly delimited and demilitarized borders. France is mobilized and will continue to be so, within the Council as in all relevant forums, for a just and lasting peace in the South Caucasus, to the benefit of all the peoples of the region. France stands ready to work with all those pursuing the same objective.

The President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Ian Borg, Minister for Foreign and European Affairs and Trade of the Republic of Malta.

Mr. Borg (Malta): I thank Assistant Secretary-General Jenča for his briefing.

Malta is deeply concerned about the latest military escalation by Azerbaijan against Karabakh Armenians. It happened only a few weeks after the Security Council called for efforts to de-escalate the situation and for all sides to engage in constructive dialogue. Such acts constitute an obstacle to peace. Malta condemns any act that endangers civilian lives. We once again call for the protection of women, children, the elderly, persons with disabilities and other vulnerable groups. The displacement of the local population and the destruction, casualties and loss of life as a result of military action

are deplorable. Further, we call for urgent humanitarian support to be delivered without obstacles to those most in need.

Aggressive and dangerous rhetoric and the propagation of disinformation and misinformation will only lead to mistrust between the parties. We therefore urge both sides to refrain from engaging in such campaigns. Following the ceasefire agreement, Malta calls for the immediate and complete cessation of hostilities and for it to be respected. We remain firm in our belief that safeguarding the safety, rights and well-being of civilians must remain the absolute priority. Malta also urges the respective parties to abstain from violence and to return to dialogue and diplomacy so as to ensure a peaceful settlement to the situation. We call on all sides to engage in good faith and to focus efforts on constructive and positive discussions, and we fully support the European Union's role in facilitating dialogue at all levels.

We reiterate our support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of both Armenia and Azerbaijan. We once again strongly encourage all sides to commit to inclusive dialogue and negotiations towards lasting peace. We reiterate that any peace agreement between both parties must protect the rights and security of all people in the region.

Mr. Al Sayegh (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank Assistant Secretary-General Mr. Miroslav Jenča for his comprehensive briefing on recent developments. We welcome the participation of ministers and other high-level officials in today's meeting.

Our meeting comes as world leaders gather here in New York to emphasize the urgent need to prioritize dialogue and peaceful solutions to the crises raging around the world, in order to preserve the security and safety of peoples and to focus on multilateral action so as to address common challenges. In that context, the United Arab Emirates welcomes the ceasefire reached in the region yesterday through Russia's mediation, confirming that all parties concerned have chosen the path of calm and de-escalation.

Despite the ceasefire, we cannot fail to stress the need for all parties to commit to protecting civilians and taking the necessary measures to ensure their security and safety in the event of heightened tensions. We also appreciate the role played by Russian peacekeeping teams in providing safe haven for civilians in recent

days, and we deeply regret the loss of civilian life. We offer our sincere condolences to the families of the peacekeepers killed in the line of duty.

We also appreciate that the International Committee for the Red Cross was able to deliver relief assistance to those in need, with the consent of the parties concerned. This constructive approach is an effective example of the role of dialogue in achieving positive results for all, especially in terms of alleviating the suffering of civilians through the provision of necessary relief aid. In that context, we welcome the deliveries of humanitarian assistance earlier this week and the deliveries of medical supplies to hospitals in the area affected by the escalation.

Finally, the United Arab Emirates stresses the need to maintain and stabilize the ceasefire. The parties concerned must exercise restraint and avoid any escalatory acts, in order to preserve the lives of civilians and the security and stability of the region, which cannot bear further repercussions resulting from any new escalation. We are encouraged that talks were held today in Yevlakh and hope that they can contribute to building further understanding between the two parties. We further emphasize the need to uphold the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, including respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of States and peaceful settlement of disputes. Recent events have demonstrated the fragility of the situation in the region and the urgent need for further dialogue at all levels to pave the way towards a peaceful and prosperous future for the peoples of Azerbaijan and Armenia.

Lord Ahmad (United Kingdom): I thank Assistant Secretary-General Miroslav Jenča for his update to the Council. We welcome in particular the participation of Armenian Foreign Minister Mirzoyan and Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Bayramov in today's important discussion. It is good to see them both again today — although we wish it was under slightly different circumstances, of course.

Like others around this table, the United Kingdom has been alarmed by the formidable pressures faced by the population of Nagorno-Karabakh. The humanitarian needs on the ground are immense, and they are growing. Earlier this week — as we heard already from the Minister of State of the United Arab Emirates — we were all indeed encouraged by the news, albeit small, that a small-scale movement of humanitarian goods had taken place, via both the Lachin and Aghdam roads into Nagorno-Karabakh. However, that opportunity for

progress was cut short by Azerbaijan's announcement of the start of a military operation.

Together with many of our partners, the United Kingdom has urged Azerbaijan to end its use of force, refrain from further escalatory action and, importantly, to return to dialogue. While we fully recognize the issues of sovereignty and territorial integrity, military might cannot be used to resolve tensions between communities. Direct dialogue is the only way to find genuine, sustainable peace and solutions. It is therefore now vital for talks to resume with representatives of the Karabakhi Armenians on the basis of a credible plan to ensure the rights and security of everyone in the region and to allow them to live in peace. At this time in particular, the United Nations and international organizations, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross, can also provide vital and crucial assistance in addressing immediate and long-term humanitarian needs.

The further use of violence will serve only to undermine the tentative, fragile progress towards a sustainable peace agreement between Azerbaijan and Armenia, based on the sovereignty and territorial integrity of both countries, which is unquestionably in the interests of the entire South Caucasus.

For its part, the United Kingdom welcomes yesterday's announcement of a ceasefire. We therefore strongly urge all the parties to respect that ceasefire, end the violence and engage in urgent, open dialogue on a safe and secure future for the people of the region. And I assure you, Mr. President, of our good offices, and that the United Kingdom stands ready to support that crucial process in any way we can.

Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield (United States of America): I thank Assistant Secretary-General Jenča for his informative briefing.

The United States is alarmed by the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh due to Azerbaijan's continued military actions, and we call for those actions to cease immediately. We note the announcements that military operations have been suspended. And if that is confirmed, that would be a positive development. But right now, the situation on the ground remains dire, and we are extremely troubled by the reports of violence against civilians. Let me be clear: Azerbaijan has a responsibility to ensure that its forces comply rigorously with international law, including international humanitarian law, and the rules governing

the conduct of hostilities, the protection of civilians and the humane treatment of combatants. Azerbaijan also has international obligations and commitments to respect the human rights and fundamental freedoms of all individuals in its territory.

The United States calls on the sides to ensure that humanitarian organizations can provide food, medicine and other essentials, without any roadblocks, and to ensure the safety and security of humanitarian workers. Earlier this week, we welcomed the delivery of humanitarian goods along the Lachin corridor and the Aghdam roadway into Nagorno-Karabakh. That was a critical step forward. But it is disappointing that military actions commenced a day after that positive confidence-building action. Azerbaijan has publicly stated that it is committed to alleviating the humanitarian situation in Nagorno-Karabakh and to providing access to food, shelter and medical care, as well as restoring electricity, gas and water supplies.

The residents of Nagorno-Karabakh are looking to us in their time of need. And for our part, the United States has provided more than \$24 million in humanitarian and development assistance since 2020 in response to the crisis. Our aid addresses food insecurity, water and sanitation requirements, medical care, winterization, child protection, mental health, psychological support and emergency response efforts. But let us be clear: the only solution to the crisis is to put an end to the violence and establish lasting peace. And as the sides work to de-escalate the situation, we reiterate the importance of an international mission that could provide reassurance and confidence to the residents of Nagorno-Karabakh that their rights and security will be protected, consistent with Azerbaijan's public statements.

The United States continues to engage with both Azerbaijani and Armenian leadership at the highest levels in pursuit of a permanent solution to the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh. Let us work together to advance peace and justice for all.

Mrs. Baeriswyl (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): I would first like to thank Assistant Secretary-General Jenča for his briefing. We appreciate the fact that this meeting is being held, at this crucial time, in the presence of the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Armenia and Azerbaijan. I also wish to acknowledge the presence of the other high-level representatives here today.

Switzerland is deeply concerned about the military operations that were launched by Azerbaijan earlier this week. That development places an additional burden on the civilian population of the Nagorno-Karabakh region, which is already suffering a very difficult humanitarian situation. Switzerland takes note of the ceasefire announced yesterday and calls for a lasting halt to the hostilities on the ground. The use of force to resolve conflicts is unacceptable.

Although hostilities appear to have ceased, the situation remains fragile. At this time of uncertainty, the obligations under international law must be emphasized all the more clearly. International humanitarian law and human rights, in particular minority rights, must be respected unconditionally. We are saddened by the reports of civilian casualties. The protection of the civilian population, the wounded and medical facilities remains paramount.

We also reiterate that humanitarian actors, including the International Committee of the Red Cross, must be able to carry out their impartial missions and that the rapid and unimpeded delivery of humanitarian aid to the population in need must be facilitated. While we were relieved by the positive developments with regard to humanitarian convoys using the Lachin corridor and the Aghdam road earlier this week — as mentioned by many others here today — that access must be maintained. We call on the parties to respect their obligations under the trilateral declaration of November 2020 and the decisions of the International Court of Justice, among other instruments.

In recent days, many of us at the United Nations have reiterated our commitment to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations. Just yesterday, the President of Switzerland and many others did so in this very Chamber (see S/PV.9421). We must therefore ensure that we do not confine ourselves to fleeting words but rather seek the unity that enables us to act in favour of respect for international law and the peaceful settlement of disputes. A lasting peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan must be achieved through continued dialogue at the negotiating table. Peace must be based on respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity and the protection of minority rights. It is up to everyone, including influential actors in the region, to commit to respecting international humanitarian law and peaceful solutions. Switzerland will commit to achieving that objective and remains available to the parties, if they wish.

Echoing the words of the Secretary-General in his appeal to the General Assembly (see A/78/PV.4), let us not give up on diplomacy at this crucial moment. It is absolutely essential that Azerbaijan and Armenia resume the peace process.

Mr. Polyanskiy (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Mr. Miroslav Jenča, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his briefing on the situation around Nagorno-Karabakh. We note the participation in the meeting of the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Armenia and Azerbaijan.

On 19 September, there was a sharp escalation of the military confrontation in Nagorno-Karabakh. The humanitarian situation has worsened. There have been risks of a steep increase in the number of refugees. Fighting has led to civilian deaths. Unfortunately, Russian peacekeepers once again bore the brunt of the attack in carrying out their mission. As a result of the shelling, they sustained several casualties. We took note of the readiness of the Azerbaijani side to immediately conduct a thorough investigation of the tragedy and to bring those responsible to justice.

Despite the complex situation, the Russian peacekeeping contingent continues to conscientiously carry out its mission and to do everything possible to protect the civilian population. From the moment the fighting resumed, the command of the Russian peacekeeping contingent has been in contact with representatives of Karabakh Armenians and Azerbaijani authorities and is actively taking steps to immediately put an end to the bloodshed and the fighting as well as to ensure adherence to humanitarian law for peaceful civilians. Some 5,000 civilians, including more than 1,000 children, were evacuated from the most dangerous regions. People were given shelter in our peacekeepers' camp, where they were protected from artillery and mortar fire. The wounded were given medical assistance, and temporary housing and hot food were provided.

With the active mediation of the Russian peacekeeping contingent, on 20 September an agreement was reached on a full cessation of the fighting, to begin at 1 p.m. of the same day, and on the start on 21 September of negotiations between the representatives of the Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh and the central authorities of Azerbaijan. Today the negotiations are taking place in the city of Yevlakh with the participation and coordination of Russian peacekeepers. The absolute

priority is to not allow a resumption of fighting and to direct the situation back to the political track and diplomacy.

The Russian Federation continues to play a leading role in the process of contributing to the normalization of relations between Azerbaijan and Armenia and more than anyone else has been interested in resolving the crisis as soon as possible. The President of the Russian Federation held talks with the Prime Minister of Armenia, Mr. Nikol Pashinyan, and the President of Azerbaijan, Mr. Ilham Heydar oğlu Aliyev. During those talks, the hope was expressed that efforts would be made to ensure the situation trends towards de-escalation and stabilization. We believe that the Armenian-Azerbaijani truce should be accompanied by reliable and clear guarantees of security and respect for the human rights of the population of Nagorno-Karabakh, based on universally accepted international principles.

The framework for the relevant parameters for the solution to the conflict were established by the authorities of Yerevan in October 2022 and May 2023 when, at summits held under the auspices of the European Union, they recognized that Karabakh was a part of Azerbaijan. At the same, in the concluding declarations of these summits, to which Yerevan agreed, the topic of the need to properly ensure the rights and security of the Armenian population of Karabakh was unfortunately simply omitted. We expect that contacts between Baku and Stepanakert/Khankendi will yield results and will make it possible to immediately launch measures to ease the humanitarian crisis in the region and ensure stability in the daily lives of the population of Nagorno-Karabakh.

We will contribute to that in every way possible. We need to develop a gradual road map to integrate the population of Nagorno-Karabakh into the constitutional order of Azerbaijan, with clear guarantees for their rights and security. Those processes will be actively supported by Russian peacekeepers. The security and rights of Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians are of key importance. Our position is that the set of trilateral declarations at the highest level made between 2020 and 2022 laid the legal groundwork for the process of Armenian-Azerbaijani normalization and that they are still the only real sustainable solution to the conflict in the South Caucasus. Nor is there any alternative to the Russian peacekeeping contingent. We intend to assist in resuming as soon as possible work on all the pillars for normalization agreed to by the three leaders, including

elaborating a peace agreement, unblocking transport communication, delimiting borders and building humanitarian contacts between the two neighbouring peoples.

Mr. França Danese (Brazil): I thank Assistant Secretary-General Jenča for his briefing and France for requesting this meeting. I welcome the participation of the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Armenia and Azerbaijan.

We deeply regret the rising tensions and the loss of human life, both civilian and military, resulting from violence last Tuesday in Nagorno-Karabakh. Brazil extends its solidarity to the families of the victims and wounded. We deeply regret the fatalities and wounded among Russian peacekeepers. We condemn the resort to unilateral actions. The attacks on populated areas, which resulted in dozens of casualties, including, as I said, civilians and Russian peacekeepers, put at risk the fragile stability achieved after the 2020 ceasefire. We welcome the ceasefire agreed yesterday and urge the parties to strive to safeguard the rights and the security of the civilian population and to avoid further escalation.

Brazil reiterates its support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Azerbaijan. We understand that the current crisis is part of a dispute that has involved generations and cost the lives of thousands, deepening resentment and mistrust between communities. It is essential, however, to avoid the logic of retaliation that has so often prevailed in the past, as well as to refrain from attempts to alter the political status by force.

We reiterate the call for the full reopening of the Lachin corridor. The civilian population must have unimpeded access to food and medicine and must no longer be subject to interruptions in the supply of energy and basic services. We urge all parties to explore mechanisms to prevent isolation and further tensions and clashes. The delivery of humanitarian assistance by the International Committee of the Red Cross, through both the Lachin corridor and the Aghdam road earlier this week, was a positive sign and should be unimpeded moving forward. Only diplomacy and negotiations, based on international law and the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, will bring lasting peace. Brazil recalls the trilateral declaration of 9 November 2020 and reaffirms its support for the mediation efforts by the European Union, the Russian Federation and the United States.

Mr. Montalvo Sosa (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Mr. Miroslav Jenča, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his briefing. Ecuador takes note of the letters from Armenia and Azerbaijan on the situation that were recently circulated in the Security Council and welcomes the Ministers for Foreign Affairs present in the Chamber.

The events of 19 September, which claimed the lives of a dozen people and forced thousands to flee their homes, are deplorable. There is no excuse for the use of military force in violation of international law and international humanitarian law. Those acts are contrary to the provisional measures issued by the International Court of Justice on 7 December 2021.

The recently announced ceasefire must be fully implemented on the ground and serve as a means to de-escalate tensions with a view to achieving the necessary guarantees for security and stability for the inhabitants of the region.

On a previous occasion, my delegation drew the Council's attention to the problem related to the freedom of movement in the Lachin corridor. We referred to the serious humanitarian situation and the underlying threat to security in that region. (see S/PV.9397) In that regard, the facilitation of unrestricted access to humanitarian aid remains essential in order to prevent the deterioration of the situation for the civilian population.

Ecuador calls on the parties to definitively resume dialogue and negotiations in all frameworks and with initiatives and tools that will enable a peaceful solution to be reached in accordance with international law and the principles of the Charter of the United Nations. Any agreement must have the necessary guarantees aimed at protecting the populations living in that region in full respect for human rights.

Ecuador encourages the Council to ensure that the dialogue processes result in the establishment of a definitive peace on the basis of diplomatic negotiations between the parties.

Mr. Geng Shuang (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I would like to thank Assistant Secretary-General Jenča for his briefing. We welcome the presence of the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Armenia and Azerbaijan and other high-level representatives at our meeting today.

China has taken note of the letters sent by Armenia and Azerbaijan to the President of the Security Council and the Secretary-General, respectively, and has noted that Assistant Secretary-General Jenča has just informed us that the parties concerned reached a ceasefire agreement yesterday mediated by Russia. We are following the current development of the situation and hope the parties will follow through with the ceasefire agreement, so that the situation will return to calm and be stable.

We express our condolences about the loss of Russian peacekeepers who were attacked. They persisted in fulfilling their functions under difficult circumstances. Their personal safety and security should have been guaranteed.

Armenia and Azerbaijan are neighbours that cannot move. Resolving disputes through dialogue and consultation will not only serve the fundamental interests of both countries but also help jointly safeguard regional peace and stability.

In numerous previous Security Council deliberations, China has consistently advocated the maintenance of calm and restraint by the two countries to avoid an escalation of the situation and human casualties and a deterioration of the humanitarian situation.

We support the two countries in continuing to build mutual trust through the mediation of relevant parties to meet each other halfway and properly resolve the disputes between them in accordance with recognized international law and norms governing international relations. China supports all diplomatic efforts that will help to achieve that goal and will also play a constructive role to that end.

Ms. Oppong-Ntiri (Ghana): At the outset, we would like to thank you, Madam President, and France for convening this meeting on the recent security developments in the Nagorno-Karabakh region. We also are grateful to Assistant Secretary-General Miroslav Jenča for his briefing. We welcome in this meeting the Foreign Ministers of Armenia and Azerbaijan and hope that the Council's deliberations will help to strengthen the resolve of the two nations for a peaceful and lasting resolution of the long-standing conflict.

The reported local anti-terrorist operation carried out by Azerbaijan in Nagorno-Karabakh two days ago, on 19 September, and its concerning casualties are a reminder of the fragile peace in the region and the

latent risk of tragic eruptions, as we have witnessed twice in the past.

We take this opportunity to extend our deep sympathies to the families and loved ones of those civilians and Russian peacekeepers who sadly and rather needlessly lost their lives.

We view positively the further news of a ceasefire arrangement having been reached within a day of the operation and join the calls made in the Council and in the general debate of the General Assembly for the immediate cessation of all military hostilities. An escalation of the tensions in Nagorno-Karabakh is one that the continent of Europe and the rest of our world can ill afford at this time of immense global insecurity and political upheavals.

The prevailing security conditions are unsettling but highlight the continuing need for international and regional support for trust- and confidence-building measures to complement ongoing political peace processes. All sides are strongly encouraged to exercise restraint amid the of heightened tensions and to cooperate with the Russian peacekeeping contingents within the framework of earlier agreed arrangements.

If the future reintegration of Nagorno-Karabakh with the rest of Azerbaijan is to be successful, we believe that the approach must be reconciliatory and non-confrontational. We therefore urge all concerned to disengage from all actions that foster mistrust and to seek the path of dialogue in good faith.

We wish also to emphasize that while the authorities continue in the discussions on the way forward, the recent developments should not be allowed to derail earlier ceasefire arrangements and the progress towards a comprehensive settlement and the normalization of relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan, including the delimitation and demarcation of borders.

The Council would recall that in December 2022, when the Lachin corridor was first closed, and in subsequent meetings on the subject, my delegation expressed concerns about the possible humanitarian fallouts. Nine months on and with the winter season drawing close, we remain deeply concerned about the fate of the thousands, especially women and children, whose access to life-saving aid, medical supplies and other critical necessities remain significantly diminished. We therefore reiterate our appeal for unimpeded humanitarian access, as well as the free movement of persons, commercial cargo and transport

along the Lachin corridor and other identified routes. We re-emphasize, in line with international law, that the rights and freedoms of all the inhabitants of Nagorno-Karabakh must be protected and preserved, devoid of ethnic considerations or any other form of discrimination.

In conclusion, we urge the unified support of the Council for a truly comprehensive and lasting peace for Nagorno-Karabakh and request the Council to remain seized of this matter.

Mr. Fernandes (Mozambique): We would like to thank the Albanian presidency for convening this meeting. We also thank Assistant Secretary-General Miroslav Jenča for his important briefing. We welcome the participation in this meeting of the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Mozambique is deeply concerned about the escalation of military violence that occurred in the Karabakh region of Azerbaijan on 19 September, which resulted in numerous deaths and hundreds of injuries, including among the civilian population.

We offer our heartfelt condolences for the lives lost, including those of the Russians peacekeepers.

We regret that after repeated appeals from the Council and the international community in general, violence has taken precedence over dialogue, compromising efforts towards peace between the Republics of Armenia and Azerbaijan.

This occurrence exacerbates the suffering and despair of the local population, which is facing a serious humanitarian crisis, as reported by Director Wosornu, from the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, in her latest briefing to the Council (see S/PV.9397).

The Charter of the United Nations is unequivocal regarding the pacific settlement of disputes. In that regard, we reiterate our call on the parties to end violence and to favour genuine dialogue to achieve durable peace.

Mozambique welcomes the ceasefire agreement reached on 20 September between the Government of Azerbaijan and representatives of the population of Nagorno-Karabakh, under the mediation of the Peace mission of the Russian Federation in Nagorno-Karabakh. We urge its strict compliance. We also urge the parties to fully comply with the trilateral agreement of 9 November 2020, which, among other

things, declares a ceasefire and the end of all hostilities in the conflict.

The combined efforts of regional and international actors must be maintained and reinvigorated in order to bring the parties back to the negotiating table. Political and diplomatic efforts should prevail in finding an adequate and mutually accepted solution, thus guaranteeing the maintenance of peace and stability in both countries and the region.

Ms. Koumby Missambo (Gabon) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank Assistant Secretary-General Miroslav Jenča for his briefing.

Last Tuesday, fighting broke out in the Karabakh region, causing numerous deaths, injuries and displacements of people. Those events took place even as the resumption of humanitarian convoys in recent weeks in the region had shown encouraging signs of de-escalation.

The use of armed force only complicates the political resolution of the crisis and worsens the humanitarian situation in the region. It is clear that the presence of military forces on the line of contact is a permanent source of tension that fuels belligerence. Three years after the deadly fighting in 2020, we must do all we can to avoid taking a step backwards.

My country reiterates that a political solution, based on the rule of law and, in particular, on the implementation of the tripartite agreement of 2020, is the only alternative for ending these cycles of deadly violence, implementing the ceasefire and finding a lasting situation to the situation. Diplomatic channels must remain open, and partners with influence in the region must redouble their commitment to maintaining communication, with a view to reaching a political solution.

My country hopes that the ceasefire agreement signed yesterday and the negotiations under way will bring peace to Karabakh and ensure that the sovereignty and territorial integrity of each of the parties are respected. My country welcomes this sign of appeasement and call on the parties to respect it.

In conclusion, I call on the parties to facilitate access for humanitarian personnel to the populations in need, without restrictions or politicization. We also reiterate our appeal to the parties to not exacerbate tensions by stirring up historical fears, hate speech and

bellicose rhetoric, but to build, instead, on what unites them for lasting peace and shared prosperity.

Mr. Hamamoto (Japan): I thank Assistant Secretary-General Jenča for his briefing. This week, the members of the United Nations have assembled to discuss international peace and security. We have talked about the ways and the need to enhance international cooperation. We have expressed our trust in multilateralism.

In the middle of these discussions, military activities were carried out in Nagorno-Karabakh. Japan then expressed serious concern about the worsening situation and strongly called for an immediate cessation of hostilities and for Azerbaijan to stop its military activities. Any unilateral change to worsen the situation is unacceptable.

As of 20 September, an agreement was reached to suspend military activities. Although the military confrontation stopped, the situation remains uncertain. The Security Council should remain seized of the situation on the ground in order to enable it to have a positive influence. In particular, the Security Council should particularly remain seized of the humanitarian situation in Nagorno-Karabakh. Safeguarding local livelihoods must be the top priority. The lives of the most vulnerable, including the sick and chronically ill, the elderly, women and children, must not be under threat. Humanitarian access by international organizations must be unimpeded so as to protect the security and needs of the local population.

The settlement of the conflict between Azerbaijan and the related parties is crucial for peace and stability in the Caucasus region. Dialogue between them is critical. Japan calls on all parties to resolve their issues through peaceful means.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Albania.

I thank Assistant Secretary-General Jenča for his briefing.

A week ago, we welcomed the shipment of humanitarian goods for the population of the Karabakh region, along the Lachin corridor and the Aghdam road. The delivery was conducted by the International Committee of the Red Cross. We had highlighted before that when it comes to humanitarian efforts, every possibility must be fully explored. We are happy that is

so, as here there was an indication of the need to further increase the flow of humanitarian supplies.

Only a couple of days after the situation deteriorated, reports of military clashes, including the loss of life, were disturbing, even though we have been aware of the fragility of the situation. We have followed with concern the recent developments on the ground. As is usually the case, the arguments advanced by the two sides differ sharply. While we reiterate that confrontation and conflict are always a bad choice, we renew our call on the parties to prioritize the protection of civilians and the preservation of residential areas and the civilian infrastructure. These are not only important, but also obligations under international law. We call for restraint, calm, peace and dialogue.

We understand that yesterday a ceasefire agreement was reached to stop the military actions. It is a triumph of reason, and it must hold. We urge both sides to remain committed to the agreement and to avoid any further escalation. We fully support efforts between Armenia and Azerbaijan to resolve long-standing issues and achieve a dignified and durable peace. The normalization process should be intensified and the negotiations on a peace treaty that were held during the past months in the United States, Brussels and other European capitals should continue.

It is very encouraging that the leaders of Armenia and Azerbaijan have reaffirmed publicly their commitment to the 1991 Alma-Ata Declaration and the territorial integrity of the two countries. Mutual respect of sovereignty and territorial integrity, in line with the Charter of the United Nations and international law, is a solid basis for addressing and solving the dispute by peaceful means. Both countries should make use of the readiness and the sincere efforts of the international community to find a just and peaceful solution to pending issues. We welcome the meeting held in Yevlakh today between the representatives of the central Azerbaijani Government and the representatives of the ethnic Armenians living there. The first results are encouraging. It is very positive that both sides have agreed to provide fuel supplies for the heating systems of kindergartens and schools, as well as emergency medical and firefighting services and humanitarian support. We strongly encourage the parties to build on that and move forward in finding suitable and mutually acceptable solutions.

I resume my functions as President of the Council.

I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Ararat Mirzoyan, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Armenia.

Mr. Mirzoyan (Armenia): I thank the Security Council for convening this emergency meeting to discuss the security and humanitarian situation in Nagorno-Karabakh stemming from the unprovoked and well-planned military attack by Azerbaijan.

While the seventy-eighth session of the General Assembly is under way and all the members of the international community are gathered here to look for ways to maintain peace and security worldwide, while we all speak about the imperative to condemn the use of force and prevent the further loss of human life caused by man-made disasters, and while each of us comes here to contribute to peace in our respective regions, Azerbaijan unleashed yet another large-scale offensive in the South Caucasus on 19 September against the people of Nagorno-Karabakh, in blatant violation of international law and the trilateral statement of 9 November 2020. Literally the whole territory of Nagorno-Karabakh, Stepanakert and other cities and settlements came under intense and indiscriminate shelling, with the use of missiles, heavy artillery and combat unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) and aircraft, including prohibited cluster munitions. The intensity and cruelty of the offensive makes it clear that the intention is to finalize the ethnic cleansing of the Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh.

The outcomes of the large-scale military operation clearly reveal their atrocious nature. Yet they are very preliminary, given the fact that through the targeted attacks against critical infrastructure, such as electricity stations, telephone cables and stations and Internet infrastructure, the members of the population have been completely cut off from one another and deprived of the possibility to report the real-time situation on the ground. Furthermore, Azerbaijani troops control the main roads in Nagorno-Karabakh, which makes it impossible to visit and get information on the ground. To date, it has been confirmed that more than 200 people have been killed and 400 people have been wounded, including women and children among the civilian population, which was also confirmed today by the Azerbaijani Ministry for Foreign Affairs. More than 10,000 persons have been forcibly displaced, including women, children and the elderly, who are living without shelter, food and other means of subsistence. Thousands of families have been separated. Coming on top of the approximately 20,000 displaced persons from the 2020

war, it is clear that there are enormous humanitarian needs on the ground.

People are still starving, owing to the severe shortage of food imposed by the ongoing 10-month blockade. The health-care system has been paralysed. Hospitals have no electricity, and there is a critical shortage of medicine. People have even been deprived of the chance of receiving first aid. Without fuel, ambulances cannot operate to take the wounded to hospitals. The images coming out of Nagorno-Karabakh are truly shocking — women, children and elderly people left without shelter or food, mothers desperately trying to find their lost children and wives crying out of fear that Azerbaijan may imprison their husbands. It is hard to believe that all that is happening not 100 years ago but today, in full view of the international community in the twenty-first century. Social media forums are full of Armenians from Nagorno-Karabakh searching for their children or relatives. Children have found themselves without warning living in shelters or even on the streets, crying inconsolably and asking their parents to take them home, unable to realize that they no longer have a home to return to.

During the shelling, an 8-year-old boy went missing in one of the settlements of Nagorno-Karabakh. His 10-year-old brother was killed, and it has not even been possible to remove his body from the village. The other brother was injured. Those are only a few examples, and there are numerous other cases. In the eyes of Azerbaijan, those children are terrorists, and Azerbaijan's actions, missiles, armoured vehicles, artillery and UAVs were directed against those children and their parents and grandparents. Azerbaijani social media are full of calls to find the missing children and women, to rape and dismember them and feed them to the dogs. Azerbaijani users of social media are sharing on platforms the profiles of Armenian women from Nagorno-Karabakh, betting on who will get to rape those women when they are placed under Azerbaijani custody.

This was foreseeable; the clear signs were there. We have been raising the alarm for a long time now. The international community refused to take it seriously enough. The current aggression has come as the culmination of a 10-month-long blockade of the Lachin corridor and the forced starvation imposed on the people of Nagorno-Karabakh. The severe shortages of food, medicine, fuel, natural gas, electricity and other essential goods had already brought the

vulnerable people of Nagorno-Karabakh to the brink of a humanitarian catastrophe. One would be naive to think that had not been precisely thought through ever since, or even before, the imposition of the inhumane blockade, with the aim of breaking down the will and ability of the people of Nagorno-Karabakh to resist and maintain their lives and livelihoods in their ancestral homeland. The Azerbaijani aggression that unfolded with explicit barbarity and the deliberate targeting of civilian populations and infrastructure was the final act of the tragedy, aimed at the forced exodus of the people of Nagorno-Karabakh.

When Azerbaijan blocked the Lachin corridor and we requested an emergency Security Council meeting in December 2022 (see S/PV.9228), the Council failed to react adequately. When the International Court of Justice, on 22 February and 6 July 2023, handed down legally binding orders and they were disregarded by Azerbaijan, the Council, the organ whose duty is to ensure the implementation of the Court's orders, failed to react adequately. When in April Azerbaijan installed an illegal checkpoint in the Lachin corridor and later started to kidnap people, including those under the protection of international humanitarian law, the international community failed to undertake adequate measures. When Armenia requested once again another emergency Security Council meeting in August 2023 (see S/PV.9397), warning about the fragile security and humanitarian situation and calling on the Council to use its toolbox to address all the issues and not leave the people of Nagorno-Karabakh behind, the Council failed to react adequately. During the days prior to the 19 September Azerbaijani aggression, when Armenia raised the alarm about the foreseeable use of force by Azerbaijan and sought concrete measures and actions to prevent such a scenario, the international community reacted to our warning with scepticism.

Now, when Azerbaijan has already once again begun to use force against the people of Nagorno-Karabakh, when those people are forcefully removed from their homes and are in danger of being forcefully deported from their homeland, when many of them who have been defending their families and their right to live in freedom and dignity in their homeland for the past 30 years are in danger of mass arrests and prosecution, and when we have a situation in which there is no longer the intent, but clear and irrefutable evidence of a policy of ethnic cleansing and mass atrocities — the Security Council must act.

Despite accepting all demands made by the Azerbaijani side to stop the bloodshed and despite the ongoing talks today, the people of Nagorno-Karabakh have once again been subjected to attacks through the use of different calibre weapons and mortars, thereby forcing civilians once again to seek shelter in basements. We believe that such attacks and further persecutions will continue unless there is clear international action.

By the way, with regard to the demands I just mentioned, I would like to state very clearly and unequivocally that the Republic of Armenia was not part of those discussions, and we resolutely reiterate that the claims and references to the presence of any military personnel of the armed forces of the Republic of Armenia in Nagorno-Karabakh do not correspond to reality. In that attempt, we clearly see the intention of some actors to involve the Republic of Armenia in military actions, thereby transferring the hostilities to our sovereign territories. The position of Armenia firmly remains the same — we should establish peaceful relations, based on mutual recognition of sovereignty and territorial integrity, which certainly cannot be misinterpreted in any way or used as licence for mass atrocities, including ethnic cleansing in Nagorno-Karabakh. The rights and security of the Armenian people of Nagorno-Karabakh must be properly addressed and internationally guaranteed.

There is also another very important aspect regarding the parties involved. As I noted, some members in their statements still make general calls to the sides of conflict. That approach and that terminology are no longer relevant. There are no sides to the conflict, but perpetrators and victims. There is no conflict, but a real danger of atrocity crime. Is it still possible to prevent that now? We are here because we believe so. We still believe in humankind, in international law and in the ability of the Security Council to act decisively when the lives of thousands are at stake.

Against that backdrop, time and again, I appeal to the Security Council to demonstrate its credibility and reputation by undertaking the following urgent measures: to condemn the resumption of hostilities and the targeting of civilian settlements and infrastructure; to demand full compliance with obligations under international humanitarian law, including those related to the protection of civilians, in particular women and children, and critical civilian infrastructure; to immediately deploy an inter-agency mission by the United Nations to Nagorno-Karabakh

with the aim of monitoring and assessing the human rights, humanitarian and security situation; to ensure unimpeded access of United Nations agencies and other international organizations to Nagorno-Karabakh, in line with humanitarian principles; and to ensure full cooperation of the parties, in good faith, with the International Committee of the Red Cross to address the consequences of the military action, including the removal and identification of bodies, search and rescue for personnel missing in action, the release of prisoners of war and the safe and unimpeded delivery of humanitarian assistance, in strict compliance with international humanitarian law.

Furthermore, we ask the Council to ensure the return of persons displaced in the course of the recent aggression, as well as persons and refugees displaced as a result of the 2020 war, to their homes in the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh and adjacent regions, under the monitoring and control of the relevant United Nations agencies, as was foreseen in the trilateral statement of 9 November 2020; to ensure the immediate restoration of vital supplies, including food, medicine, fuel, gas and electricity; to demand the immediate restoration of freedom and security of movement of persons, vehicles and cargo, along the Lachin corridor, in line with the orders of the International Court of Justice; to ensure a sustainable international mechanism for dialogue between representatives of Nagorno-Karabakh and officials in Baku to address the issues related to the rights and security of the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh; to demand the exit of any Azerbaijani military and law-enforcement bodies from all civilian settlements in Nagorno-Karabakh to prevent panic, provocations and escalation endangering the civilian population, until a result has been obtained in the negotiations; to prevent punitive action against Nagorno-Karabakh political and military representatives and personnel; and to create the possibility for a United Nations-mandated peacekeeping force to maintain stability and security in Nagorno-Karabakh.

Finally, let me mention that today, we celebrate the day of independence of the Republic of Armenia. And let me congratulate my compatriots on this very important and symbolic occasion.

The President: I now give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan.

Mr. Bayramov (Azerbaijan): I thank the Albanian presidency of the Security Council for an opportunity to attend this meeting of the Council.

Although Armenia's attempt to exploit the Security Council in its campaign to mislead the international community is deplorable, we take this opportunity once again to inform the Council and the wider international community about the challenges Armenia poses to regional peace and security. As a matter of fact — and this needs to be underlined at the very beginning — Armenia's request to the Council is related to the local counter-terrorism measures taken by Azerbaijan within its sovereign territory, in full compliance with international law, including international humanitarian law.

Therefore, Armenia's further appeal to the Security Council is a violation of the Charter of the United Nations, which demands respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of States and non-interference in their internal affairs. Such reckless abuse of the Council yet again is utterly inadmissible, a serious blow to the authority and reputation of this body and must be resolutely rejected.

It is also counter-productive and irrelevant. Indeed, when the Council was called to a debate today allegedly owing to concerns regarding the rights and security of ethnic Armenian residents of the Karabakh region of Azerbaijan, the counter-terrorism measures had already been ceased, and dialogue on the reintegration of ethnic Armenian residents of the Karabakh region of Azerbaijan had started in practical terms on the ground.

The long-overdue meeting of a special representative of the Government of Azerbaijan with representatives of Armenian residents took place today in the city of Yevlakh, Azerbaijan. At the meeting, the special representative assigned by the Government of Azerbaijan for the dialogue with Armenian residents outlined the Government's plans for reintegration, and issues related to the restoration and operation of infrastructure were discussed.

In the context of discussions of social and humanitarian matters and upon the request of the Armenian residents, the delivery of fuel for use by social facilities, such as kindergartens and schools, hospitals and other emergency services, as well as other humanitarian support measures, are expected to be implemented soon by the relevant central government institutions. Such a dialogue was not possible before owing to obstruction by the Armenian side, relying on heavy illegal military presence in the sovereign soil of Azerbaijan.

What Armenia tries to present to the international community as an attack on “peaceful” residents of the Karabakh region of Azerbaijan is, in fact, local counter-terrorism measures by Azerbaijan, fully in line with its rights under the United Nations Charter, to disarm the Armenian armed formations illegally stationed on the sovereign territory of Azerbaijan. Armenia itself, with its brazen and uncorrected disregard to its international obligations made those measures by Azerbaijan unavoidable.

Armenia’s attempt to accuse Azerbaijan of violating the trilateral statement of 10 November 2020 agreed by the leaders of Azerbaijan, the Russian Federation and Armenia is equally baseless. On the contrary, it is Armenia that blatantly disregarded its commitment, under the document mentioned, with respect to the withdrawal of its forces from the territory of Azerbaijan.

Throughout the past three years, since the signing of that statement, Armenia kept more than 10,000-strong armed formations, equipped with heavy weaponry, such as tanks and other armoured vehicles, artillery pieces, multiple rocket launchers, mortars, electromagnetic warfare equipment and other types of offensive arms in the territory of Azerbaijan. Those illegal armed forces were sustained through direct military technical, logistical and financial support by Armenia, including by abusing the Lachin road, in an attempt to fuel separatism in the sovereign territory of Azerbaijan for the purposes of its revanchist policy.

The counter-terrorism measures demonstrated the scale of illegal militarization by Armenia, despite the commitment it undertook under the trilateral statement to cease all military activities against Azerbaijan and withdraw its forces from Azerbaijan’s internationally recognized territory. In just 24 hours, more than 90 outposts of the illegal formations were taken, and 20 combat vehicles, 40 artillery pieces, 30 mortars, six electromagnetic warfare systems and two anti-aircraft missile systems were neutralized.

These are photos of heavy Armenian military equipment. It is absolutely clear that such offensive equipment was not present on Azerbaijan’s territory for peaceful purposes. No sovereign State would tolerate such a heavy illegal military presence on its soil, including Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan acted fully within the rights safeguarded by international law and its Constitution to protect the safety and security of all of its residents. Therefore, the systematic attempts by Armenia to create a new status quo with the illegal use

of force and to sustain a grey zone based on a line-of-contact logic on Azerbaijan’s sovereign territory were defeated.

Azerbaijan has been warning about Armenia’s looming military adventure for several weeks in the light of its intensified military engineering works and forces build-up. We registered and brought to the attention of the international community the intensive reinforcement of battle positions with military personnel, armoured vehicles, artillery pieces and other firepower; the raising of the combat-readiness level of forward units; the creation of additional mobilization units; the expansion of intelligence activities against Azerbaijan’s armed forces; and the incursions into the positions of our armed forces to carry out sabotage by planting new landmines in already demined areas and roads used by civilians. The systematic shelling of positions of the Azerbaijani armed forces by the armed formations of Armenia using weapons of various calibres, the continued mining of our territories, the fortification of battle positions and the increased number of trenches and military shelters in the Karabakh region of Azerbaijan over the past few months further escalated tensions.

Despite Armenia’s earlier statement on its recognition of the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan, which includes the Karabakh region, the Prime Minister of Armenia took yet another extremely provocative step by issuing a congratulatory message on the occasion of the so-called anniversary of the establishment of an illegal puppet structure in the territory of Azerbaijan. That is further evidence that Armenia has not abandoned its territorial claims against Azerbaijan and that it has no intention of stopping its fuelling of separatism in our territory by all available means, including through political, military and financial support.

The illegal activity conducted under the false pretext of holding so-called presidential elections by the puppet regime that was created as a result of Armenia’s occupation of the territories of Azerbaijan was another extremely provocative step. It made it crystal clear that, through those actions, Armenia aimed to nullify its previous statements recognizing the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Azerbaijan. It demonstrates that Armenia is not engaging in good faith in the negotiations on a peace treaty.

Armenia’s deliberate attempts to undermine peace efforts are not isolated from its worldwide smear campaign against Azerbaijan, which is based

on fabricated accusations of a so-called blockade and humanitarian crisis. That campaign essentially collapsed on 18 September 2023 in view of the eventual implementation of Azerbaijan's offer to use multiple routes for the delivery of goods to meet the needs of ethnic Armenian residents in the Karabakh region of Azerbaijan.

Therefore, following active diplomatic efforts by several international actors, including Security Council members, a simultaneous delivery of humanitarian goods through Aghdam and Lachin was finally conducted by the International Committee of the Red Cross after weeks of artificial delays caused by illegitimate obstructions by Armenia and its subordinate puppet regime.

Having failed to impose its fake narrative on the international community through a so-called humanitarian agenda, Armenia resorted to military provocation the next day, 19 September 2023, hoping that renewed tensions would help its blame game against Azerbaijan.

As a result of the explosion of mines planted by an Armenian sabotage group on the Ahmadbayli-Fuzuli-Shusha highway, two civilian road constructors tragically lost their lives. Four police officers fell victim to another mine explosion in the same vicinity while attempting to inspect the mine incident site. Those explosions led to the serious wounding of six more Azerbaijani police officers. Here we can see the horrible consequences of that reckless sabotage act against Azerbaijan within its own territories. Six persons with real names and surnames perished.

The area where the mine explosions took place had previously been under regular use by Azerbaijan, leaving no room for doubt that the mines had been recently planted by an Armenian sabotage group that infiltrated the area.

It should be noted that, since August 2022, a total of 2,728 landmines manufactured in Armenia in 2021 — that is, after the 2020 trilateral statement — have been detected and neutralized in Azerbaijan. That includes 1,119 landmines neutralized in the Kalbajar and Lachin districts, along the Azerbaijan-Armenia border area, and 1,609 landmines detected in the Karabakh Economic Region. Since the signing of the trilateral statement in November 2020, 314 individuals have fallen victim to landmines.

In response to the subversive acts of Armenian armed formations that inflicted civilian and military casualties, the armed forces of Azerbaijan launched local counter-terror measures to disarm those illegal armed formations and neutralize the imminent threat posed to the safety and security of Azerbaijani civilian and military personnel. The counter-terror measures were limited and proportionate to the threat posed to Azerbaijan's sovereignty and territorial integrity, as well as the safety and well-being of our citizens. The counter-terror measures were aimed exclusively at neutralizing legitimate military targets in the sovereign territory of Azerbaijan. As such, they were fully aligned with the sovereign right of Azerbaijan to self-defence enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations.

Azerbaijan acted in full compliance with the norms of humanitarian law. All measures were taken to avoid collateral damage to civilians and civilian infrastructure. Accusations of the intentional and deliberate targeting of civilians by the armed forces of Azerbaijan are baseless and false, in view of the photographic and videographic evidence. From the very first minutes, Azerbaijan's Ministry of Defence made several public statements calling on civilians to stay away from military installations. Similar notifications were sent to the Armenian residents of the Karabakh region of Azerbaijan via mobile short messaging service. That was done in view of the reckless attempt by Armenia-subordinated armed formations to deploy military equipment and installations within residential areas.

Azerbaijan's Ministry of Defence announced that the protection and security of administrative, social, educational, medical, religious and other facilities would be ensured in line with Azerbaijani law and the norms of international humanitarian law, while women, children, elderly people, people with disabilities and the sick would be provided with the necessary medical aid, supplies and other assistance. The armed forces of Azerbaijan behaved in an exemplary professional manner by using high-precision ammunition to neutralize illegal military installations only. As several pieces of video footage clearly demonstrate, the armed forces of Azerbaijan deliberately refrained from striking legitimate military targets in order to avoid collateral damage. As can be seen from these photographs, the Azerbaijani armed forces would have acted differently if the intention were to target civilians or conduct so-called ethnic cleansing.

In the context of certain interventions delivered before mine — including the one delivered by the Armenian delegation, which replicated groundless accusations against Azerbaijan — I can only draw the Council's attention to the fact that, just a few hours ago, the Prime Minister of Armenia dismissed all those accusations in a statement in which he publicly acknowledged that there was no direct threat to civilians in Karabakh and that allegations of mass atrocities against them are untrue. I wish to underscore that that was a statement made by the Armenia Prime Minister a couple of hours ago.

From the very beginning, it has been consistently communicated by Azerbaijan, including in contacts with international interlocutors, that as soon as Armenia and its subordinate puppet regime in the territory of Azerbaijan agree to lay down arms and disband their illegal structures, the counter-terror measures will stop immediately. That happened on 20 September 2023, when acceptance of those conditions was confirmed through the command of the peacekeeping contingent of the Russian Federation. Consequently, the local counter-terror measures were halted, effective 1 p.m. Baku time.

It was specifically agreed that the armed forces of the Republic of Armenia must be fully withdrawn from the territory of Azerbaijan and that the illegal armed formations that Armenia had formed with local Armenian residents and trained and supplied must disarm. That agreement was reached through the Russian peacekeeping contingent that is present on the ground and confirmed and publicly declared by the puppet structure subordinated to Armenia. That is in addition to the fact, previously documented on numerous occasions, that the Republic of Armenia was indeed militarily present on the sovereign soil of Azerbaijan and was in breach of its commitment under the trilateral statement to withdraw from Azerbaijan. Its attempts to deny such a presence were nothing but shameful deception of the international community.

It was also agreed that the issues pertinent to the reintegration of ethnic Armenian residents into Azerbaijan, including their rights and security in the framework of the Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan, would be discussed directly between their representatives and the central Azerbaijani authorities. As I have already mentioned, the first such meeting took place earlier today and yielded positive initial results. The meetings in that format will continue. Therefore,

the counter-terrorism measures taken by Azerbaijan achieved the established objectives. That could have been done peacefully long ago had Armenia honoured its commitments under the trilateral statement. It is Armenia and only Armenia that is to be blamed for the fact that it did not happen.

Armenia's failure to fulfil its obligations regarding the full, immediate and unconditional withdrawal of its forces from the territory of Azerbaijan had been the reason for the failure of all international efforts to settle the armed conflict unleashed by Armenia against Azerbaijan more than 30 years ago. The continued illegal military presence of Armenia in the sovereign territory of Azerbaijan remained the most serious obstacle to a post-conflict normalization process between Armenia and Azerbaijan, and to efforts to reintegrate the ethnic Armenian residents of the Karabakh region of Azerbaijan after the signing of the trilateral statement on 10 November 2020, under which the conflict was ended and completely new realities emerged in the region.

We have consistently and extensively drawn the attention of all involved international actors to the danger of such an illegal military presence. Unfortunately, acknowledgment of our legitimate concerns behind closed doors was not reflected in practical steps or in the public messages of our interlocutors. The lack of an adequate and targeted reaction by the international community to Armenia's irresponsible warmongering statements and aggressive actions only contributed to that country's sense of impunity and to the permissiveness that led to more military and political provocations. However, that was a grave miscalculation.

At a time when the practical implementation of disarmament and demilitarization on the ground has begun, accompanied by direct dialogue between Armenian residents and central Azerbaijani officials, the international community's consideration of the situation should correspond to existing realities in order to remain relevant and helpful. Conversely, a one-sided and biased approach driven by short-sighted political considerations or lobby connections — largely, that which is at the core of the convening of this debate in the Security Council — is utterly counter-productive and unhelpful.

Reliance on such a course of action has failed on several previous occasions. It can only lead to diverting the focus from a genuine normalization process, which

is not in the interest of either of Azerbaijan or Armenia, but which caters to the whims of certain outside forces that continue to manipulate existing differences for their own political purposes. Therefore, at this critical time, when there is a historic opportunity to eventually establish good-neighbourly relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan after a bloody conflict that lasted 30 years, it is more important than ever for the entire international community, including the Security Council, to adequately comprehend the risks and threats associated with Armenia's destructive actions and to resolutely resist Armenia's brazen attempts to exploit the Security Council to whitewash its internationally wrongful acts.

Despite all the serious challenges stemming from Armenia's destructive position, Azerbaijan once again reaffirms its readiness to engage in a genuine dialogue and negotiations on the basis of equal and reciprocal respect for each other's legitimate interests. We once again extend our offer of a just, fair and lasting peace to Armenia, notwithstanding the unhealed wounds of its armed aggression against my country, the massive devastation of our cities and villages and the deliberate desecration of our holy places. We hope this offer by Azerbaijan will finally be reciprocated by that country.

On a different track, the Republic of Azerbaijan reaffirms its determination to guarantee to the ethnic Armenian residents of the Karabakh region of Azerbaijan all rights and freedoms, in line with its Constitution and relevant international human rights mechanisms, including those safeguarding the rights of persons belonging to national minorities. Azerbaijan has a proud history of uniting different ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities within one nation. Ethnic Armenian residents are welcome to be part of our model of peaceful coexistence.

At the same time, Azerbaijan recalls the obligation of all States under international law to refrain from interfering in the internal affairs of other States, undermining the integration of persons belonging to national minorities or fuelling separatism in the territory of neighbouring States. Azerbaijan remains open to constructive engagement with all international partners with a genuine interest in peace, stability and well-being in our region.

The President: I now give the floor to the Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Federal Republic of Germany.

Ms. Baerbock (Germany): Far too many people have been killed in the course of just two days. Thousands have been forced to flee their homes. Azerbaijan has chosen to create facts on the ground by military force. We firmly condemn Baku's military assault and call on it to permanently and completely cease its military actions.

We have taken note of reports of a ceasefire, but what we need is a complete cessation of violence. Azerbaijan carries the responsibility to reliably and fully protect the civilian population, especially children, living in Nagorno-Karabakh. A displacement and forced exodus of ethnic Armenians from Karabakh are not acceptable. Having said that, I also want to reiterate what resolutions of this body have underlined time and again — the territorial integrity and the sovereignty of both Armenia and Azerbaijan must not be questioned.

It is hard to imagine the hardship that the children, women and men of Nagorno-Karabakh have been enduring for months, after the Baku authorities effectively closed the Lachin corridor. Store shelves remained empty, medical supplies ran out, and electricity and gasoline were scarce. Over the past weeks, together with many partners here in this Chamber, we worked hard to ensure humanitarian access to those in need, especially pregnant women, children and the elderly. Just at the moment when a glimpse of hope was emerging and humanitarian supplies were allowed into Nagorno-Karabakh, Baku broke its repeated assurances to refrain from the use of force, causing tremendous suffering to a population already in dire straits.

The people of Nagorno-Karabakh deserve to live in security and to have their rights protected. Keeping the Lachin corridor open is crucial in that regard — for humanitarian reasons, but also because the corridor provides a cultural and social bridge for ethnic Armenians living in Karabakh. Baku and Karabakh Armenians need to return to a dialogue. Since it began over 30 years ago, this conflict has produced too many victims. What we need — what the people in the region need — is a lasting peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan, and that can only be achieved at the negotiation table.

I will continue to make this very clear to both sides: I urge them to return to the talks mediated by the European Union, because now is the time to de-escalate. And I would like to underline that no country should use this situation to destabilize Armenia's democracy.

The men, women and children of Nagorno-Karabakh and the entire region deserve a life without fear — without fear of violence erupting again, fear of being forced from their homes or fear of being deprived of their rights, language and religion. They, like all of us, deserve a life in peace.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Türkiye.

Mr. Akçapar (Türkiye): I thank the members of the Security Council for providing me the opportunity to address them and I also thank the Assistant Secretary-General.

We are meeting at a time when a counter-operation has already ended and talks have begun as we speak. Since the end of the second Nagorno-Karabakh war some three years ago, Türkiye has repeatedly underlined on every platform the fact that a historic opportunity to achieve a comprehensive and lasting peace in the South Caucasus has finally emerged. We have urged all sides, third parties and international actors to make use of that opportunity and bring a lasting settlement to the ongoing conflict in the region. With that in mind, from the very beginning we have fully supported and continue to support the peace process launched between Azerbaijan and Armenia and have ourselves initiated a normalization process with our neighbour Armenia. We have welcomed, promoted and contributed to each and every effort deployed that has brought help to further that process between our two neighbours. In particular, the signing of a comprehensive peace treaty between Azerbaijan and Armenia based on the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity has been and remains crucial for the eventual success of that process.

However, over the past three years we have witnessed that the Armenian side has been reluctant to fully implement the trilateral declaration, which put an end to hostilities at the end of the second Nagorno-Karabakh war. In addition, the illegitimate structure in Khankendi has maintained its existence and separatist activities. The illegal military formations in Karabakh have continued their armed attacks. Heavy and other weaponry in the region remain deployed, and a bloody mine warfare was carried out against Azerbaijani citizens. The facts, data and evidence provided by Azerbaijan today speak for themselves. Nevertheless, Azerbaijan's consistent initiatives to address those issues through dialogue with Armenia and the representatives of Karabakh Armenians were met with an uncooperative attitude. Azerbaijan's initiatives

on the humanitarian front and on the reintegration of the Armenian population in the region, such as the opening of the Aghdam-Khankendi road, were also repeatedly refused.

Furthermore, over the past three years, the Armenian side has continued to spread false information about the situation in the region, directing baseless and unsubstantiated accusations, commissioning so-called expert reports based on distorted data and abusing international platforms to advance a fake agenda. That is not the way to seek peace and reconciliation. The way to do that is by approaching the negotiation table with sincere intent and political will to reach a settlement and to continue that process with good faith.

After suffering for three years from all those acts, we believe that Azerbaijan was left with no choice but to take the measures it deemed necessary for its own security and stability, and it therefore launched its counter-terrorism operation on 19 September against the illegal military formations in Karabakh. Surely that was not only Azerbaijan's sovereign right but also its obligation to ensure the security of its citizens. I would specifically like to remind the Council that just hours before beginning its counter-terror operation in Karabakh, Azerbaijan lost seven citizens in two separate mine explosions that had been planted by the separatist illegal formations as a strong provocation. The counter-terror operation was swiftly concluded on 20 September, and Azerbaijan's legitimate demands to disarm and disband the illegal military formations on its own land and for the dissolution of the illegitimate structure were finally accepted.

Türkiye welcomes the meeting between representatives of Azerbaijan and Karabakh Armenians held today, 21 September. We hope that such contacts will continue and be productive in order to resolve the decades-long issues.

I would like to echo the remarks made by my President during his address to the General Assembly (see *A/78/PV.4*), in which he said that we expect Armenia to fulfil its promises, especially the opening of the Zangezur corridor. As everyone now accepts, Karabakh is Azerbaijani territory. The imposition of a status other than that will never be accepted. Our primary goal should be for everyone, including the Armenians, to live peacefully, side by side, on Azerbaijan lands. We support the steps taken by Azerbaijan to protect its territorial integrity.

It is time to look ahead and support diplomacy. A new door of hope for a lasting settlement has opened. There is a historic obligation to seize that opportunity and bring it to its culmination. We therefore once again urge the Armenian side and the other interested parties not to waste this opportunity, not to repeat previous and recent mistakes, and to act with the prospect of leaving a peaceful and prosperous South Caucasus to succeeding generations.

The President: I now give the floor to Mr. Borrell Fontelles.

Mr. Borrell Fontelles: I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for convening this important meeting at this crucial moment.

The European Union has been closely following the developments. Let me start by expressing my full solidarity with the Karabakh Armenians, who have been enduring a period of intense hardship. For months, they have been in isolation due to the blockage of the Lachin corridor leading to shortages of food and medicine, their freedom of movement has been obstructed, and they have been faced with multiple disruptions to the delivery of gas and electricity. Azerbaijan bears the responsibility to ensure full respect for the rights and security of Karabakh Armenians. As we have repeatedly made clear, the use of force to resolve disputes is unacceptable. In that regard, the European Union has condemned the military operation by Azerbaijan, and we deplore the casualties and loss of life caused by that escalation. We have taken note of the respective announcements of a ceasefire and expect the cessation of hostilities and of any kind of violence to hold.

The local population urgently needs humanitarian assistance, as well as guarantees that their rights and

security will be respected. We therefore ask Azerbaijan to take the following concrete measures in that regard.

First, it should ensure unimpeded humanitarian access to the civilian population in need, including through a full reopening of the Lachin corridor. It is important for humanitarian actors to be able to continue to operate and scale up their activities, as needed in the current situation. The European Union and its member States stand ready to provide urgent humanitarian assistance. Today the European Commission announced an initial package of humanitarian aid to support those in need.

Secondly, it should engage in a comprehensive and transparent dialogue with the Karabakh Armenians to ensure their rights and security, including their right to live in their homes in dignity. We note that a meeting was held today on that issue.

Let me be clear. The European Union fully supports the sovereignty and territorial integrity of both Azerbaijan and Armenia and expects all actors to do the same. We call on Azerbaijan to reaffirm its unequivocal commitment to the territorial integrity of Armenia and to agree to the delimitation of the bilateral border between the two countries, in line with the letter and spirit of the 1991 Almata-Ata Declaration. The European Union also calls for the resumption of negotiations between Armenia and Azerbaijan on all pending issues with the aim of concluding a peace treaty. We remain committed to continuing to facilitate dialogue between all sides in order to ensure a comprehensive, sustainable peace for the benefit of all the people of the region.

The meeting rose at 5 p.m.