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**Statement by H.E. Mr. Yashar Aliyev
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**the Security Council Arrria-formula Meeting on “Safeguarding Lives, Sustaining Peace: Enhancing Mine
Action for Stabilization, Protection, Recovery and Inclusion”**

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Landmines, explosive remnants of war (ERW) and improvised explosive devices continue to affect many countries in conflict or post-conflict situations, posing a deadly threat to civilians, servicemen, peacekeeping and humanitarian personnel.

As is known, as a result of Armenia’s armed aggression against Azerbaijan in the early 1990s, tens of thousands of people in my country were killed, hundreds of our cities, towns and villages were ruined, more than 700,000 Azerbaijanis were forced to leave their homes and a large portion of the sovereign territory of Azerbaijan was occupied and remained under occupation for almost thirty years, in gross violation of international law and Security Council resolutions 822 (1993), 853 (1993), 874 (1993) and 884 (1993).

The counteroffensive operation and the local counter-terrorism measures carried out by Azerbaijan in the fourth quarter of 2020 and in September last year, respectively, put an end to the unlawful occupation of its territories and ensured the restoration of the country’s sovereignty and territorial integrity, in full accordance with international law, the Charter of the United Nations and the relevant Security Council resolutions.

Despite the end of the conflict and the progress achieved in advancing the peace agenda, the serious challenges remain and continue to impact civilians.

Azerbaijan is among the most heavily mine-contaminated countries in the world, with an estimated 1.5 million landmines and unknown number of other explosive devices planted in the territories of Azerbaijan when they were under occupation.

As a result, 3,461 citizens of Azerbaijan became mine victims, including 359 children and 38 women. At the same time, the number of post-conflict mine victims in the country has reached 382, of which 70 lost their lives and 312 suffered horrific injuries, the majority of whom are civilians, including children and women.

Furthermore, the mine threat delays the essential reconstruction and development works in the territories liberated from occupation, hinders the safe return of internally displaced persons to their homes in these territories and complicates the search for some 4,000 citizens of Azerbaijan who went missing during the conflict.

There is ample evidence showing that landmines and booby traps were placed in civilian areas and objects, far from the former front line, in places from which civilians were displaced and to which they are expected to return. Even cemeteries and cultural sites in the formerly occupied territories were mined to inflict maximum possible casualties.

The extensive mine contamination also poses a serious obstacle to full-fledged implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). In this connection, Azerbaijan declared the humanitarian demining as the 18th National SDG.

The minefields in Azerbaijan cover about 11,258 square kilometers of the country's total territory of 86,600 square kilometers. Approximately 14.2 percent of this area (165,871.5 hectares of land) has been cleared, while only 3.6 percent of all planted mines and other explosive devices have been detected and neutralized so far (that is, 54,430 mines and 104,940 ERWs, as of September 2024).

Armenia's claim that it has no obligation to provide information about the minefields is fundamentally wrong. It is well established that indiscriminate use of mines is prohibited under international humanitarian law. Further, States using landmines are also under the obligation to record their placement¹ and, at the end of active hostilities, to remove or otherwise render them harmless to civilians, or facilitate their removal.²

Moreover, as the International Committee of the Red Cross explained, "[t]he use of booby-traps which are in any way attached to or associated with objects or persons entitled to special protection under international humanitarian law or with objects that are likely to attract civilians is prohibited."³ International law likewise obliges States not to impede the safe return of internally displaced persons to their homes.⁴

The refusal to disclose the locations of landmines and other explosive devices after the end of the conflict also violates international human rights law, in particular the right to life and the right to liberty of movement and freedom to choose residence, as well as the prohibition on discrimination.

Since the end of the conflict, mine action in Azerbaijan has gained notable national and international attention.

Having 26 years of experience in the field of humanitarian demining, the Mine Action Agency of the Republic of Azerbaijan (ANAMA) has become a competent and reliable demining organization, successfully coping with demining activities on the territory of Azerbaijan, in collaboration with international partners.

¹ International Committee of the Red Cross, List of customary rules of international humanitarian law, Rule 82.

² *Ibid.*, Rule 83.

³ *Ibid.*, Rule 80.

⁴ *Ibid.*, Rule 132.

Since 2022, Azerbaijan has held three annual international conferences on mine action jointly with the United Nations, which have evolved into one of the prominent global dialogue venues addressing the mine problem. All three conferences produced tangible outcome documents addressing a wide range of issues on humanitarian demining and sustainable development, environmental impact of landmines and the imperative of international support in this context.

The 2024 conference this May, which aligned with Azerbaijan's Presidency of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP29), focused on the urgent need to address the environmental repercussions of landmine contamination. During this conference, ANAMA and UNDP also signed a Statement of Intent to formalize international collaboration in establishing the International Center of Excellence and Training for Mine Action in the country. This document marked a critical milestone in Azerbaijan's mine action efforts, bringing together local and international partners to tackle the legacy of landmines and unexploded ordnance in the region.⁵

Moreover, on the initiatives of Azerbaijan:

- the 15th meeting of the High Contracting Parties to the 1954 Hague Convention on the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict adopted a resolution entitled “Impact of landmines on cultural property”⁶;
 - the U.N. General Assembly, in its most recent resolution “Missing persons”, “expresse[d] concern at the impediments caused by landmines, explosive remnants of war and improvised explosive devices [...] to efforts on identifying the whereabouts of missing persons, and call[ed] upon States concerned to cooperate to facilitate the safe search for human remains and retrieval operations”⁷;
- and
- at its 19th Summit, the Heads of State and Government of the Non-Alignment Movement welcomed the proposal by Azerbaijan to establish a NAM Contact Group for consultations and practical cooperation on humanitarian demining and related issues.⁸

Azerbaijan also attaches special importance to the gender aspect of the mine action. The very first female demining teams were recently established in Azerbaijan within the framework of the project jointly launched by ANAMA, UNDP and the EU.

The scale and magnitude of the landmine threat in Azerbaijan warrant the necessity of stronger solidarity and partnership, concerted efforts and urgent, continued and adequate international assistance for its humanitarian demining capability and activities.

⁵ See A/78/908-S/2024/456.

⁶ Resolution 15 HCP 7, 11 December 2023.

⁷ Resolution A/C.3/79/L.35, 14 November 2024, para 9.

⁸ See the Final Document of the 19th Summit of the Heads of State and Government of the Non-Aligned Movement, Kampala, the Republic of Uganda, 19 – 20 January 2024, para. 392.