

S T A T E M E N T

**by His Excellency Alen Simonyan, President of the National Assembly
of the Republic of Armenia at the General Debate**

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Promoting Peaceful Coexistence and Inclusive Societies: Fighting Intolerance

Mr. President,

Excellencies,

Fellow parliamentarians,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I wish to thank our Bahraini hosts for their warm hospitality and excellently organized assembly.

Climate change, wars, and disasters - we are living in difficult times. Humanity must be steadfast in confronting these misfortunes.

May I offer my condolences to the people of Türkiye and Syria for the loss of thousands due to the recent devastating earthquake that hit these countries.

The main principles of peaceful co-existence - respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, equal rights and self-determination, non-interference in domestic affairs - should govern the relationships between states. However, we see that these principles are often violated.

Peaceful coexistence goes hand in hand with unity, which is essential for social, economic, and political stability. When united, individuals and states are more likely to work together to achieve common goals and resolve conflicts peacefully. This creates a stable and harmonious environment for the shared benefit of all.

Now, let me turn to our region and my country, Armenia, where minorities such as Yezidis, Kurds, Russians, Ukrainians, Assyrians, Jews, and Greeks live side by side as equal members of our society, enjoying their human, cultural and educational rights. Under a provision of the Armenian Constitution, four representatives of national minorities are members of our Parliament.

The cornerstone of our international policy is to maintain peaceful relations with all countries. Nevertheless, we face many threats. Tension in the South Caucasus remains high. Since May 12, 2021 neighboring Azerbaijan has violated the territorial integrity of Armenia and illegally occupied approximately 150 square kms of our land. Despite the challenges, our goal is to partner in building a sustainable peace.

Some say that Armenia seeks to expand its territory. Let me be absolutely clear: Armenia has no territorial claims on any of its neighbors.

Allow me to speak about the blockade of the Lachin corridor, the only road connecting Armenia and the world to Nagorno Karabakh, which is populated by ethnic Armenians who have lived there for over a thousand years.

The blockade is a gross violation of the November 9, 2020 Trilateral Statement, which declares that "The Republic of Azerbaijan shall guarantee the safe movement of citizens, vehicles, and cargo in both directions along the Lachin corridor." Blocked by dozens of Azerbaijani agents masquerading as "environmental activists," the road has been inaccessible to civilian and commercial traffic since December 12, 2022.

The situation has left approximately 120,000 ethnic Armenian residents of Nagorno-Karabakh without access to essential goods and services. They have been deprived of life-saving medication and health care, as humanitarian aid delivered by the Red Cross and peacekeepers has not met demand. Disruptions to the supply of electricity and gas have created extreme hardship. On many nights, the people of Nagorno-Karabakh are subjected to deafening calls to prayer and spotlights beamed at their homes.

Azerbaijan recently posted a video falsely showing Armenia supplying arms to Nagorno-Karabakh. But Azerbaijan does not limit itself to disinformation and the persecution already described.

Just days ago, on March 5th, three Nagorno-Karabakh police officers were killed and another wounded in a preplanned ambush ordered by Azerbaijan.

Esteemed colleagues, I ask: Is this not ethnic cleansing?

As we know, intolerance, demonization, and violence directed against people based on their race or religion must not be condoned.

In the words of Nelson Mandela: "No one is born hating another person because of the color of his skin, or his background, or his religion."

The looming catastrophe in Nagorno-Karabakh has rightfully drawn attention: The European Court of Human Rights applied measures against Azerbaijan over the blockade; the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights urgently called for it to be lifted. Amnesty International, the European Union, and the Helsinki Commission have independently called for an immediate end to the blockade.

On February 22, 2023, the UN International Court of Justice ruled that Azerbaijan must ensure "unimpeded movement" through the Lachin corridor. In a separate ruling, the court unanimously rejected Azerbaijan's false claim that Armenia had planted mines.

Azerbaijani authorities insist that the Lachin corridor is unblocked; the grave reality on the ground, however, tells a different story.

To conclude, I firmly believe that democracy, the rule of law, respect for human rights, and peaceful co-existence are the pillars upon which humankind should live in peace and harmony.

Thank you.