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Agenda item 3

Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief

Statement

delivered by Ms. Marziyya Vakilova-Mardaliyeva, First Secretary of the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Azerbaijan to the UN Office and other International Organizations in Geneva

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Madame President,

We thank the Special Rapporteur for his report. Azerbaijan expresses its deep concern over the rising incidents of Islamophobia in many parts of the world and we echo the concern over the desecration of mosques, as a manifestation of Islamophobic violence.

Mr. Special Rapporteur,

Azerbaijan has continuously expressed alarm at the intentional destruction and desecration of its Islamic heritage by Armenia during almost three-decade-long occupation of Azerbaijani territories, with the aim to completely erase the traces of Azerbaijani people from these lands. As we have informed you on numerous occasions, the scale of destruction, vandalism and looting evidenced after the liberation of Azerbaijani territories is unprecedented and shocking. Most parts of then-occupied territories have literally been turned into a ghost land, cultural and religious sites were razed to the ground. All 67 mosques in the liberated territories have been destroyed, vandalized or turned to cowshed and pigsty. More than 900 Muslim graveyards, tombs and shrines were ruined. Even the bones were removed from the graves in the cemetery in the city of Ağdam, and insulting acts were committed on them.

The Azerbaijani historical and religious heritage in Armenia shared the same fate. The Dəmirbulaq Mosque was raised to the ground, while the Göy Mosque was “renovated” in order to shift its identity. Other destroyed architectural monuments include the XVIII century

Hacı Novruzəli Bəy Mosque in Yerevan and the Sərdar Palace, or the Khan Palace complex. The Sərdar Mosque in Yerevan was systematically destroyed and completely demolished in 2014. The ancient and modern cemeteries of Azerbaijanis in Armenia, such as the grave of Aşıq Ələsgər also have been destroyed.

As a continuation to its aggressive and barbarian policy, Armenia also attacked and severely damaged religious shrines in the residential areas in Azerbaijan located far beyond the active military scene during its another aggression against Azerbaijan in September-November 2020. As a result of deliberate indiscriminate shelling by Armenia, the tomb of Şeyx Babı in the Füzuli region was severely damaged. Moreover, shelling took place in the proximity of the George Prophet shrine in the Beyləqan region of Azerbaijan.

Mr. Special Rapporteur,

Places of worship and cemeteries are an essential part of how people exercise and manifest their right to freedom of religion or belief. Thus, the destruction of religious and burial sites amounts to a deliberate violation of freedom of religion and belief of individual believers and community as a whole.

The deliberate destruction of and damage to centuries-old Azerbaijani religious heritage by Armenia is a gross violation of international law and conventions, namely the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and its Protocols, the European Convention on the Protection of Archaeological Heritage of 1992 and the UNESCO Convention on the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage of 1972. Armenia bears full responsibility for these crimes committed against cultural and religious heritage in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan.

We urge you to strongly condemn the barbaric acts committed by Armenia with the aim of total annihilation of the Islamic historical and cultural heritage on the liberated territories of Azerbaijan during occupation.

I thank you.