

Delegation of the Republic of Armenia

12th session of the UNTOC COP Working Group on Trafficking in Persons

Statement under agenda item 4: Matters pertaining to the Mechanism for the Review of the Implementation of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the Protocols thereto.

Vienna, 30 June 2022

Madame Co-Chair,

We would like to welcome the review mechanism of the UNTOC and its Constructive Dialogues. It is an important mechanism aimed at ensuring more effective implementation of the Convention by states parties through peer reviews and inclusive engagement with relevant stakeholders.

We would like to express Armenia's support to the participation of all interested NGOs in such dialogues without discrimination.

Such participation is beneficial not only for the NGOs, as they have an opportunity to acquire more insight about the review process and learn from their peers but also for the state parties and their societies, as eventually the knowledge and information gained by the participating NGOs will be beneficial for the societies in which they operate.

Having said this, Madame Co-Chair, we would like to [once again] express our grave concern over the unsubstantiated objection of Azerbaijan against the participation of two NGOs from Armenia in the upcoming Constructive Dialogues.

It is also unacceptable that Azerbaijan attempts to justify its objection by questionable political narratives, which have nothing to do with the mandate and objectives of the UNTOC COP, its working groups, as well as with the aims and goals of the Constructive Dialogues.

The two NGOs from Armenia have excellent credentials in helping to overcome many societal challenges in our country.

Throughout the years they have developed valuable expertise in education on human rights, gender equality and women's rights protection, youth empowerment for active civic participation, as well as advocacy for the improvement of state policies for protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms.

They have also been providing invaluable assistance to the Government of Armenia in its anti-trafficking efforts, including through active engagement in the development of relevant governmental strategies and action plans.

Those NGOs also have an exceptional record of humanitarian support and assistance to people in vulnerable situations, including to people of Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh), with the aim of mitigating the risk of their victimization.

To conclude Madame Co-Chair,

Let me mention that Armenia has always supported the widest participation of NGOs in the Conferences of the Parties to UNTOC and other relevant fora, without distinction as to which country they come from. Thank you

1st statement in exercise of the rights of reply

First Madame Co-Chair, allow me to stress that it is not our intention to discuss the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict here. This is certainly not the right place for that.

However, we regret that the delegation of Azerbaijan continues to bring into this forum its false interpretations about the status of Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh) and the characteristics of the conflict, which we resolutely reject.

Madame Co-Chair, this time we are not going to indulge the Azerbaijani delegation and engage in a lengthy political discussion, which would certainly distract the attention of delegations from the core issue.

And the core issue here is Azerbaijan's objected to the participation of two NGOs from Armenia for highly political reasons and with the aim of creating hindrances for their important humanitarian work on the ground.

My delegation had an opportunity to dwell upon this issue at length during the SOM Working Group meeting, with the statement of Armenia on this subject available on the website of that working group.

Let me stress that the main focus of their humanitarian work has been providing support to people in vulnerable situations, especially women and youth among refugees and internally displaced persons, in order to alleviate their vulnerability and prevent victimization.

Those NGOs have been also actively engaged in fostering and disseminating the idea of peace and coexistence in our region. It is really unfortunate, Madame Co-Chair, that Azerbaijan does not appreciate these efforts.

We hope that sooner or later, Azerbaijan will reconsider its approach towards the work of NGOs and civil society organizations, including those in Azerbaijan, because we believe that without the active and valuable contribution of all stakeholders we will not be able to address all pertinent issues ahead of us.

Thank you, Madame Co-Chair

2nd statement in exercise of the rights of reply

Madame Co-Chair,

Once again we regret that Azerbaijan continues its efforts to drag this issue into the direction of politicized discussions.

The delegation of Azerbaijan has been mentioning some of the principles of the international law, but what the delegation of Azerbaijan was intentionally overlooking is another principle of the international law, and that is the equal right of people and self-determination enshrined in the UN Charter, which is a higher principle and thanks to which many countries today can enjoy independent statehood. And the people of Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh) have 1991 exercised their right to self-determination in accordance with the UN Charter.

But let me raise another point. Azerbaijan has a well-known abhorrent record of curtailing of all civil and political rights domestically, including the right to freedom of expression and freedom of assembly, with the largest number of prisoners of conscience.

We regret that the delegation of Azerbaijan decided to export such deplorable practices to the UN fora by abusing the Vienna Spirit and manipulating with the Rules of Procedures.

Furthermore, the current behaviour of Azerbaijan should be viewed as part of its continuous anti-Armenian policy, and in the context of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict - as aimed at hindering any humanitarian assistance to the tormented people of Artsakh in the aftermath of 44-days war of aggression.

I shall reiterate that Armenia has always supported the widest participation of NGOs in the Conferences of the Parties to UNTOC and its Working Groups, including NGOs from Azerbaijan, Madame Co-Chair.

Let me mention that we have legitimate doubts as to the real nature and independence of the so-called “NGO” from Azerbaijan, which has applied for participation in UNTOC Constructive Dialogues.

However, regardless of the current non-constructive behaviour of Azerbaijan, Armenia nevertheless, as a matter of principle, did not obstruct the participation of “Azerbaijani NGO” from the upcoming Constructive Dialogue.

We believe that considering the vast expertise and experience of the two NGOs from Armenia, their participation in the upcoming Constructive Dialogues could bring valuable contribution to discussions.

I should once again stress that mentioned NGOs also have excellent credentials of impactful humanitarian work and engagement with people in vulnerable situations.

In this context, we noticed that the delegation of Azerbaijan mentioned that it is a “matter of national security for Azerbaijan”.

But unfortunately what Azerbaijani delegate failed to clarify - is how could the humanitarian engagement of those NGOs create “national security threats for Azerbaijan”.

We do not accept such hollow statements, without any substantiation.

We expect that the delegation of Azerbaijan will provide evidence and facts of “national security threats” emanating from those NGOs, as we have reasonable doubts about the credibility of such allegations.

Thank you, Madame Co-Chair