

THE JOINT STATEMENT
of the Leaders of the Religious Denominations in Azerbaijan

In the name of the One Creator!

We, the leaders of the religious denominations operating in Azerbaijan, voicing the wish and will of our communities, consider it important to make the following statement about appeals of the Armenian side, the Armenian Church in particular, purposed to mislead the public opinion on the peaceful protest action against environmental terrorism and illegal exploitation of natural resources in the Russian peacekeepers' temporary deployment area inside the territory of Azerbaijan, which is being carried out on the Shusha-Lachin road, situated in the sovereign territory of Azerbaijan, recognized by the international community, by representatives of our Country's non-governmental organizations, intellectuals, youth, ecologists and journalists.

First of all, it should be noted that the protest by representatives of the civil society, which has been going on for more than a week under the slogans condemning the looting of natural resources and environmental damage, is of a peaceful nature and derives from the priorities of Azerbaijan's will for peace. Protesters chant slogans demanding an end to the looting of natural resources of Azerbaijan and pollution of its ecology. According to research conducted by independent activists, there are activities of illegal exploitation carried out in "Kyzylbulaq" gold field and "Demirli" copper-molybdenum field of Azerbaijan. Despite the prior agreement on monitoring of this activity, the entry to those facilities was not allowed by the separatist forces. Currently, the protestors are demanding an on-site inspection of the above-mentioned fields, cease of illegal exploitation, start of monitoring and inventorying in various directions, evaluation of potential risks to the environment, and elimination of the consequences of damages.

We unequivocally state that the information disseminated by the Armenian side, and by Echmiadzin in particular, is false and slanderous, and the claims that the peaceful protest of NGOs caused a humanitarian crisis are completely untrue. The video records taken from the location of the protest action, show that civil trucks and ambulances can freely pass, and all necessary conditions are provided by the protestors for that. In case of any humanitarian problem, a hotline for Azerbaijani citizens of Armenian origin living in the Karabakh region has been established for the prompt resolution of their appeals.

During the campaign, From the other hand, claims of the Armenian media and propaganda carried out by the Armenian diaspora that the Khankendi-Lachin road was closed by Azerbaijani non-governmental organizations and the Azerbaijani media, are baseless as well. We are very disappointed that instead of demonstration of justice and telling the truth, the Armenian Church approaches the issue based on prejudice and slander in concord with the political conjuncture, and tries to present the peaceful protest action as "ethnic cleansing policy" and "inhuman act". Attempts of the Armenian Church to describe the events as "Armenian blockade and humanitarian disaster" is nothing else than provocation and slander. Azerbaijan is not a country that closes roads, but it builds new roads and bridges. Azerbaijan's unequivocal position regarding the Lachin road, which is located within its territory, recognized by the world community, is that this road can be used for civilian and humanitarian purposes, not for military or any illegal activities.

The bitter truth is that over a period of nearly 30 years, more than one million Azerbaijanis were forced to leave their ancestral lands and live as refugees and internally displaced persons as a result of ethnic cleansing, looting of natural resources, destruction of spiritual heritage, and crimes against the ecosystem carried out by Armenian extremists. During

the occupation period, the flora and fauna of the area were destroyed, the land was scorched, and the water reservoirs were poisoned. Our cities and villages were wiped out as a result of uricide. Due to the countless installed land mines, the return of the local population to their native lands is being delayed, while hundreds of civilians became victims of the mine terrorism. Destiny of more than 4,000 of our citizens missing during the conflict is still unknown. For nearly 30 years, mosques, temples, cemeteries, historical monuments, museums, libraries have been destroyed and looted in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan, Christian Churches belonging to Caucasian Albanian and Russian Orthodox Churches have been gregorianized, mosques have been turned into stables, and animals considered forbidden in Islam were kept there, insulting the entire Islamic world.

Azerbaijan is a peace-willing state and that was proved by its consistent participation in peace negotiations along the three-decade period of the conflict, and that was proved as well as by its active participation in the negotiations around signing of the peace agreement after the Victory in the 44-day Patriotic War. Armenia's destructive position hinders prospects for peace and economic prosperity of our Region. Our State respects all ethnic and religious groups living in its territory and protects their rights and values, including peaceful Azerbaijani citizens of Armenian origin in Karabakh. It is the civic duty of both Azerbaijanis and Armenians living in Azerbaijan to respect the Land and care about with all natural resources on it and in its bowels as a blessing of the Almighty.

Following the path of the Almighty Creator, we, the leaders of religious confessions, have always been faithful to human values, humanistic ideals and the ideas of peaceful coexistence, and always prefer dialogue and call on the religious leaders of neighboring Armenia for peace, for cease the war rhetoric. By this Statement, we call on the Armenian Church to voice the truth with refer to the ideals commanded by the Almighty Creator, not to drag the peaceful Armenian population in Karabakh into revanchism, and not to engage inciting activities among fragile peace environment. In turn, we invite peaceful Armenian population of Karabakh to show a joint firm position against the looting of the natural resources gifted by the Almighty, and against the environmental crimes committed in the lands where they live.

Sheikh-ul-islam Allahshukur PASHAZADEH
Chairman of the Caucasus Muslims Board

Milikh YEVDAYEV
Head of the Mountain Jews Community in Azerbaijan

Archimandrite ALEKSIY
Secretary of the Diocese of Baku and Azerbaijan
of the Russian Orthodox Church

Aleksandr SHAROVSKY
Head of the European Jewish Community in Baku

Robert MOBILI
Chairman of the Albanian-Udi
Christian Religious Community in Azerbaijan

Baku, December 20, 2022