

Baku, August 4, 2023

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

In the name of the One Creator!

In regard to prejudiced statements around the “truck show” - another provocative performance pretendedly created by Armenia on the Lachin-Khankendi road situated in the sovereign territory of Azerbaijan recognized by the international community,

We, the leaders of religious denominations operating in Azerbaijan, deem it necessary to declare the following.

First of all, we declare that although the discussion topic is not of a religious nature, however, our primary duty, like every person willing peace to be established in the Caucasus region and as religious leaders who put in a lot of effort on this issue, is to approach what is happening with the criteria of truth and justice. The reality is that the forwarding of trucks by Armenia to the Lachin checkpoint under the guise of "humanitarian aid" is part of a pre-planned provocative anti-Azerbaijani campaign aimed at attracting attention of the international community. The state authorities of Azerbaijan have repeatedly invited the local Armenian residents of the Karabakh region residing in Khankendi for discussion, but Armenia did not accept this and rejected the humanitarian initiatives of Azerbaijan. The fact of deliberately created problem in the direction of the Lachin border checkpoint of Azerbaijan by those trucks, and description of what is happening an “ethnic cleansing policy” and a “humanitarian crisis”, is another manifestation of the habitual behavior of the Armenian side to regularly distort the truth.

We unequivocally declare that the information spread by Armenia about the "policy of ethnic cleansing" is false and slanderous. The international community should not forget that as a result of the ethnic cleansing policy carried out by Armenian extremists, more than one million Azerbaijanis were forced to leave

their ancestral lands and lived the life of refugees and internally displaced persons for nearly 30 years. Exactly during Armenia's aggression against Azerbaijan, mosques, temples, cemeteries, historical monuments were destroyed and looted in our occupied territories, Christian churches belonging to Caucasian Albania and Russian Orthodox churches were Gregorianized, and the whole Islamic world was insulted by keeping in mosques of animals considered forbidden in Islam. Despite that the war is over, still hundreds of our citizens lose their lives or become disabled on explosions of the landmines coming directly to the territories of Azerbaijan by Armenia through the Lachin road.

The people of Azerbaijan, under the leadership of our Head of State, has restored its territorial integrity by saving from the aggression of Armenia our ancestral lands, officially recognized by the UN and international law. Today, paying attention to the restoration and reconstruction of religious and moral monuments at the state level, along with civil engineering projects in the territories liberated from occupation is a confirmation of Azerbaijan's tolerant image in the world, being one of the leading centers in the process of interreligious, intercultural and inter-civilizational dialogue. President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Mr. Ilham Aliyev, always known for his global thinking and humanistic ideas, a leader who decides the destiny of the region and rewrites the history, calls from the high stands for peace and coexistence, and invites the counter party to solidarity on the basis of political thought and humanistic logic for the sake of the future of the peoples.

It is a pity that, in return, Armenian revanchists continue to carry out slander campaigns against our country from the platforms of various international organizations, and even abuse the religious platform, and especially the World Council of Churches for their insidious political purposes. The Armenian Apostolic Church is at the forefront of Armenian revanchism, carries out revenge propaganda, smear campaign against Azerbaijan at the international level. At least, the fact that the World Council of Churches has issued 3 anti-Azerbaijani statements in one year indicates the key role in organizing this series of threat campaigns, played by one of the presidents of the World Council of Churches - the head of the Armenian Church of Cilicia Aram I, as the main ideologist, and the the deputy chairman of the Central Committee (moderator) Aykazyan, as one on the authors and performers.

In this regard, it is deeply regrettable that the World Council of Churches has been taking recently a one-sided and biased pro-Armenian position. The destructive position and anti-Azerbaijani propaganda of a religious organization

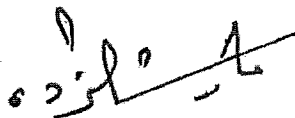
bearing the name of Church, which incites the Christian-Muslim conflict under the name of "Christian bigotry" by bringing the current situation to the inter-religious level instead of making conciliatory calls that contribute to promoting peace and coexistence, does not correspond to the mission and purpose of the religious institution that wants to serve peace, and is contrary to the principles of justice of religions as well. Earlier, in the letter addressed to the Secretary General of the World Council of Churches Mr. Jerry Pillay and the Chairman of the Central Committee (moderator) Dr. Heinrich Bedford-Strohm, our objection was expressed in regard to the statements made in the 11th Assembly of the Council, as well as in the final document of the last meeting of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches, that served the interests of the Armenian side, and it was noted that, along with the world community, the Prime Minister of Armenia N. Pashinyan in person and officially recognized 86.6 thousand sq. km. of the territory of Azerbaijan, where is no administrative unit called "Nagorno-Karabakh" - "Artsakh". Despite this, in the statement issued by the World Council of Churches on July 31 this year, and deliberately repeating in that text the word "Artsakh" several times, it has grossly interfered in the internal affairs, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Azerbaijan, and has demonstrated clear disrespect which is not befitting of an organization that bears the name of the Church.

The present position of the Council of Churches, which did not express its "concern" about the genocidal crimes and Khojaly massacre committed by Armenian invaders against the Azerbaijani population during the First Karabakh War, is based on double standards and politicking. The fact that the World Council of Churches, which never expressed objection to the protracted blockade of Nakhchivan - a sovereign territory of Azerbaijan, by Armenia, is now showing such hypocritical zeal, that doesn't befit an international religious organization. We strongly condemn such actions and call on Armenia, especially the Armenian churches of Cilicia and Etchmiadzin, to stop war rhetoric and calls for hatred between nations, and not to support idea of revanchism, because such a policy will ultimately aggravate the situation in the region, and will not benefit the Armenian people in particular.

For many years, we have witnessed a number of European countries, especially France, which encourages genocides, violence and conflicts in Africa and Oceania, as well as some Western organizations, making biased, anti-Azerbaijani decisions and adopting resolutions under the influence of the Armenian lobby. There is no doubt that the goal of official Yerevan, and

Karabakh separatists and their supporters under the "blessings" of Etchmiadzin in this new provocation is to disrupt the signing of the peace agreement by veering the ongoing Azerbaijan-Armenia negotiations on various platforms off the positive course, and to keep carrying out their revanchism activities. In these processes, the activity of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in the region is of particular concern. Some time ago, official Baku proved on the basis of facts that the ICRC was engaged in smuggling activities through the Lachin road, and exposed the direct participation of the ICRC in the transfer of Armenian war criminals and terrorists across the border.

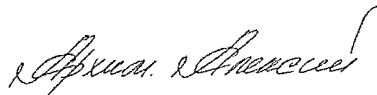
The history of religions clearly shows that all the prophets, and Jesus, called people to truth, justice and peace. With this statement, we, the leaders of religious confessions operating in Azerbaijan call on the world community, and particularly the World Council of Churches, not to follow the Armenian provocative propaganda, which is an obstacle to peace and tranquility in our region, and to pay attention to information based on facts. Let us not forget that the main duty of religious leaders is to obey the divine commands and be in a conciliatory position for the sake of human peace.



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