



**The Human Rights Defender of the
Republic of Armenia**



**Communiqué of the Human Rights Defender of Armenia
on the Humanitarian Consequences
of the Blocking of the Lachin Corridor**

July 12, 2023

Yerevan, Armenia

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I. Factual background:

1. According to the information received by the Human Rights Defender's Office, a group of Azerbaijanis in civilian clothes, posing as alleged environmental activists blocked the only road (Goris-Stepanakert highway which passes through the Berdzor (Lachin corridor) connecting Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh, hereafter Artsakh) to Armenia, and to the world, on December 12, 2022 , in violation of the obligations assumed by Azerbaijan through trilateral ceasefire statement of November 9, 2020 (point 6).¹
2. As a direct result of the road blocking, 120.000 people have appeared under complete blockade and siege. Only vehicles belonging to the Russian Peacekeepers, and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) have been allowed to pass through the blocked corridor, transferring much needed humanitarian assistance and the transfer of patients to Armenia. This act has been accompanied by the deliberate disruption of the operation of critical infrastructure of Artsakh, such as the supply of natural gas, electricity, internet, and mobile communication, aiming at further aggravating the dire humanitarian crisis and causing further suffering to the population of Artsakh.
3. On April 23, the Azerbaijani authorities installed a checkpoint on the Lachin corridor, after which the alleged environmental activists announced the end of their protest. As a result of the installation of the checkpoint on the border with the Republic of Armenia, the residents of the communities of Yeghtsahogh, Hin Shen, Metz Shen, and Lisagor of the Shushi district of the Republic of Artsakh remained under complete blockade; they were cut off both from the rest of Artsakh and from the possibility of leaving for Armenia. Additionally, the installation of the checkpoint completely disrupted the entry of humanitarian aid and fuel to Artsakh by the ICRC for 3 days.
4. On June 15, 2023, the Azerbaijani servicemen crossed to the Armenian side (near the Hakari bridge where the Azerbaijani authorities installed a checkpoint) and attempted to plant the Azerbaijani flag, as a result of which clashes erupted. Subsequently, the Azerbaijani side blocked all humanitarian transportation through the corridor.
5. On June 22, the Azerbaijani side resorted to another provocation, by placing concrete barriers near the checkpoint that they had placed on the Lachin corridor (prior to placing of the concrete barriers, they had also demonstratively placed armored vehicles on the road). On June 24, the Azerbaijani side partially removed the concrete barrier, while on the following day (June 25), several patients from Artsakh, along with accompanying individuals, were transported to specialized medical centers in the Republic of Armenia, through the mediation of the ICRC. Additionally, the ICRC was able to transport 80 tons of medical supplies to medical facilities in Artsakh.
6. However, as of June 15, 2023, the delivery of humanitarian assistance (essential goods and food supplies) by the Russian Peacekeepers and the ICRC has been blocked by the Azerbaijani authorities, resulting on the worsening of the humanitarian situation in Artsakh.

¹ <https://www.primeminister.am/en/press-release/item/2020/11/10/Announcement/>: accessed on July 10, 2023

7. On July 8, 2023, the Azerbaijani authorities restored the supply of natural gas to Artsakh, after they had disrupted it completely since March 22. However, a few hours later, the Azerbaijani side disrupted the supply of the gas through the pipeline again. This is yet another manifestation of the goal of the Azerbaijani authorities of disrupting the normal life and mental health of the people of Artsakh, and keeping them under constant psychological pressure.
8. As a result, a strict economic regime in all spheres has been implemented in Artsakh, including fuel. Accordingly, gasoline and fuel are provided in the most essential cases, for example, for the organization of agricultural works, for the transportation of persons with sickness to medical institutions, and for the organization of public transport and urgent activities of some state bodies.
9. According to the information registered by the Human Rights Defender's Office, the Azerbaijani authorities are making persistent efforts to remove the ICRC mission from Artsakh; The ICRC is only international organization which operates in Artsakh. This would have devastating consequences, and will lead to the worsening of the humanitarian situation in the region.²
10. Consequently, on July 11, the Azerbaijani side blocked vehicles belonging to the ICRC from transporting patients from Artsakh to Armenia; the State Border Service of Azerbaijan accused the ICRC of utilizing its vehicles to smuggle contraband items, such as cigarettes, mobile phones, chargers, and gasoline to Artsakh since the beginning of the month.
11. The blocking of the Lachin Corridor has led to the gross violations of the fundamental human rights of the Armenian population of Artsakh, including the rights to life, health and healthcare, freedom of movement, food, adequate standard of living, to family life; a specifically adverse impact of the blockade has been registered on the rights of vulnerable groups, such as children, women, persons with disabilities, etc.
12. The Human Rights Defender has published ad hoc reports on the humanitarian consequences of the blocking of the Lachin corridor presenting in detail the human rights violations as a result of the blockade, which is a manifestation of the policy of Armenophobia and ethnic hatred propagated by the Azerbaijani authorities.³

II. The state-sponsored policy of Armenophobia of the Azerbaijani authorities aimed at ethnic cleansing of Armenians in Artsakh

13. The current humanitarian crisis is a direct manifestation of the policy of Armenophobia and ethnic cleansing of the Azerbaijani authorities, whose ultimate aim is the emptying Artsakh of its native Armenian population, through terrorizing the population, subjecting them to constant physical and psychological attacks, and disrupting their normal lives.

² https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?ref=watch_permalink&v=1567738640419017

³ The ad hoc reports of the Human Rights Defender of Armenia on the blocking of the Lachin corridor:

https://ombuds.am/images/files/8015e970b4e618c7e518be045acd382b.pdf?fbclid=IwAR2aYR6S9VhIBNGrxllafiAEOvrVsvNd8tTWgc5aRgBco3AWvlGzce111_E;

<https://ombuds.am/images/files/c01555c03620fb8494eaf308fe9ca15.pdf?fbclid=IwAR1yX1JXeooDdRUvFGiKuGg9Ar5tjA9z0oDydGjrhnXOXNBusEpciXQt9Nk>; <https://ombuds.am/images/files/54e62052ad99432e130355ec768bd53f.pdf>;

https://www.ombuds.am/images/files/798e81176d93081e6199ca90cfa31466.pdf?fbclid=IwAR3pY99hghxTAW_Ozj0Tyhgi8ONKJQOCpTGNCNTWI6xwT-eD11lOdrHJY

14. The most evident example of the policy of Armenophobia and ethnic cleansing of the Azerbaijani authorities was provided by the President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev that stated that (as mentioned in the updated joint ad hoc public report of Human Rights Defenders of Armenia and Artsakh, on January 10, 2023) “I want to say once again that conditions will be created for those who wish to live there under the flag of Azerbaijan. As citizens of Azerbaijan, both their rights and their safety will be ensured for them ...if someone does not want to become our citizen, then the road is not closed, but opened. They can go, or they can leave by themselves, no one will stop them, or they can leave under the awning of peacekeepers' trucks, or they can go by bus”.⁴
15. During the period of the blockade, high level Azerbaijani state officials, including the President of Azerbaijan, deputies of the National Assembly, ministers, and other public officials have clearly indicated that the creation of a humanitarian crisis in Artsakh is intentional and deliberate, and pursues the aim of demonstrating the ethnic Armenian population of Artsakh that their lives are at risk and depend on the willingness of Azerbaijan to allow the ICRC and the Russian peacekeeping mission to transfer people, food and other products through the Lachin corridor.



Azerbaijani children in the Trophy Park in Baku, dedicated to the 44-day Artsakh war of 2020⁵

16. Caliber.az, a media outlet with close links to the Ministry of Defense of Azerbaijan, published an article on July 1, 2023, with the subheading “new provocations=fresh graves in Yerablur⁶”, warned of another military response (Operation Revenge 3) against the Armenians of Artsakh, in response of alleged provocations by the Armenian side⁷. Azerbaijani state TV channel AzTV, ran a poll on its YouTube channel, asking its viewers whether Azerbaijan should launch a new military operation against Artsakh.⁸ Thus, the state

⁴https://ombuds.am/images/files/8015e970b4e618c7e518be045acd382b.pdf?fbclid=IwAR2aYR6S9VhIBNGrxIlafiAEOvrvSvNd8tTWgc5aRgBco3AWvIGzce1I1_E

⁵ The Human Rights Defender released an ad hoc report on the Trophy Park, an “exhibition-park” related to the September-November 2020 war in Artsakh which was opened in Baku on April 12, 2021, which is a manifestation of Armenophobia, and aims at deepening the ethnic hatred of Armenians by the Azerbaijani public. The ad hoc report is accessible at: <https://www.ombuds.am/images/files/96e6d55d169a784b6424e4d565b29dba.pdf>

⁶ Yerablur military pantheon is the military cemetery located in Armenia.

⁷ <https://caliber.az/post/175967/> accessed on July 4, 2023

⁸ <https://oc-media.org/azerbaijani-state-media-warns-of-inevitable-military-operation-in-nagorno-karabakh/>: accessed on July 4, 2023.

sponsored/linked media outlets of Azerbaijan are preparing the ground for further military operation and aggression against Artsakh.

17. The policy of Armenophobia and ethnic cleansing of the Azerbaijani authorities is discussed in detail in the ad hoc reports on the humanitarian consequences of the blocking of the Lachin corridor, prepared by the Human Rights Defender's Office of Armenia.⁹

III. The right to adequate standard of living/the right to food, and the risks of starvation:

18. As a direct result of the blockade of the Lachin corridor, and the deliberate disruptions of vital infrastructure, the standards of living of the people of Artsakh has been deteriorated. Moreover, the complete disruption of the supply of humanitarian assistance since June 15, has created a critical situation, especially bringing forward the risk of starvation.



Empty shelves in a supermarket in Stepanakert, Artsakh

19. Due to the situation caused by the blockade, 860 business entities have suspended their operations, constituting 20% of all business entities in Artsakh. Moreover, 11,000 people have lost their jobs, have become unemployed, and have lost their source of income.
20. According to the information registered by the Human Rights Defender's Office, the blockade has resulted in the prevention of around 80,400 tons of vital supplies and goods from entering Artsakh, resulting in a shortage of supply of foodstuffs in the markets of Artsakh. Only an amount of 5,688 tons of supplies have entered Artsakh during this period. The authorities in Artsakh had introduced a ration stamp system, which will allow for the distribution of certain essential foodstuffs proportionately.

⁹ Check footnote no: 2



Long queues in front of a market in Stepanakert, Artsakh

21. This fact has been compounded by the fact that since June 15, the Azerbaijani side has prevented the entry of humanitarian assistance (essential goods and food supplies) by the ICRC and the Russian Peacekeepers. According to the information registered by the Human Rights Defender's Office, as a result of the complete ban on the entry of humanitarian assistance, bread shortages (as a result of lack of fuel) have been recorded in Artsakh, where bakeries are forced to deliver bread to the shops once a day, instead of 3; bread is sold in the bakeries with restrictions (one or two loaves per person). Moreover, to cover the basic needs of the population, a distribution of sugar (0.5kg) and oil (1kg) to families who have minor children was organized.



22. Furthermore, the risk of starvation is significantly critical for the residents of the communities of Yeghtsahogh, Hin Shen, Metz Shen, and Lisagor of the Shushi district of Artsakh, as they are under complete blockade, as result of the installation of the Azerbaijani checkpoint.

IV. Human rights violation/humanitarian crisis as a result of the blocking of the Lachin corridor:

➤ The right to life:

23. On March 5, 2023, Azerbaijani servicemen ambushed and killed 3 servicemen of the Artsakh Police, and injured another near Stepanakert. The Police officers were in their service vehicle, when they were ambushed and killed by an Azerbaijani sabotage group, who had crossed the contact line. On June 28, 4 Armenian servicemen of the Artsakh Defense Army were killed, after the Azerbaijani armed forces attacked the Armenian military positions. Thereafter, the Azerbaijani side banned the transfer of the bodies of 2 of the killed servicemen to Armenia to be buried; the Azerbaijani side also denied the entry of the family members of one of the killed servicemen to Artsakh, causing further psychological and mental suffering to the family. The 2 bodies of the killed Armenian servicemen were later transferred to Armenia through the mediation of the ICRC.¹⁰

24. The Azerbaijani armed forces have regularly conducted targeted shootings at Armenian civilians conducting agricultural work in their lands which are located in the immediate vicinity of the Azerbaijani positions. This has led to the obstruction of agricultural activities, and has caused damages to the machinery and equipment used by the Armenian villagers.

➤ **The right to freedom of movement:**

25. The blocking of the Lachin corridor by the Azerbaijani alleged environmental protesters, and subsequently by the installation of the Azerbaijani checkpoint has resulted in the complete restriction of the movement of people and cargo (food and medical supplies) from and to Artsakh. As a result, only vehicles belonging to the ICRC have transported patients to Armenia, and a limited amount of supplies to Artsakh.

26. As mentioned above, the Azerbaijani side has banned the transportation of humanitarian aid through the Lachin corridor as of June 15, while the transportation of patients from Artsakh to medical institutions of Armenia has been resumed since June 25, through the mediation of the ICRC. As mentioned above, the blockade has resulted in the prevention of around 80,400 tons of vital supplies and goods from entering Artsakh, resulting in a shortage of supply of foodstuffs in the markets of Artsakh. Only an amount of 5,688 tons of supplies have entered Artsakh during this period.

27. Due to the acute shortage of fuel, especially after June 15, the movement within the territory of Artsakh has been significantly reduced, and currently there are no public transportation available during weekends in Stepanakert.

➤ **The right to health and healthcare/humanitarian assistance:**

28. The blocking of the Lachin corridor has had an adverse effect on the enjoyment of the right to health of the ethnic Armenians living in Artsakh, as the transfer of patients in need of medical assistance in Armenia, and the transport of medical supplies are conducted through the intervention of ICRC and the Russian Peacekeepers. Shortages, and in certain cases complete lack of life-saving medications have been registered in Artsakh.

¹⁰ The Azerbaijani side has used the fact of the transfer of the bodies of the killed Armenian servicemen to Armenia to claim that the servicemen of the Armenian Armed Forces are still deployed in Artsakh; according to the information registered by the Human Rights Defender's Office, only the Artsakh Defense Army, where ethnic Armenian residents of Artsakh serve, is deployed in Artsakh.

<https://www.facebook.com/ArtsakhInformation/posts/pfbid02zXmNqjew73XkwsN7mBqyujEBqaZ2x5uNK2VVBHsRuJ8D3FapuautagkQprV92qrl>

29. Since June 15, the Azerbaijani side has banned the delivery of humanitarian assistance (essential goods and food supplies) by the Russian Peacekeepers and the ICRC, resulting on the worsening of the humanitarian situation in Artsakh. The ICRC was able to transport 80 tons of medical supplies to medical facilities in Artsakh, while the transfer of patients was resumed after several days of disruption.
30. Since the start of the blockade, 609 patients have been transferred from Artsakh to Armenia to receive the appropriate medical assistance, while 1550 people have been deprived of the opportunity to receive medical treatment, as a result of the suspension of planned surgeries in the medical institutions of Artsakh.
31. According to the information registered by the Human Rights Defender's Office, in accordance with the procedure, all the passengers, including the medical staff and the patients are asked to exit the ambulance; thereafter, Azerbaijani personnel take their pictures, and check their documents and passports, after which they are allowed to cross the corridor.¹¹
32. 44 children are currently receiving medical assistance in the medical institutions of Artsakh, 5 of whom are in the neonatal and intensive care unit; 87 patients (adults) are currently receiving treatment in the medical institutions, 5 of whom are in the intensive care unit (4 of them are in critical condition).
- **The right to family life-separation of families:**
33. During the period of the blockade, 3900 people (including 550 children) have been separated from their families, of which 1669 have been reunited with the assistance of the ICRC and the Russian Peacekeepers.
- **The rights of vulnerable groups:**
34. The rights of 30.000 children living in Artsakh has been violated as a result of the blockade of the corridor; the severe shortage of medical supplies, medications, and the postponement of scheduled surgeries have had adverse effect on their right to health.
35. The right to education of the children living in Artsakh has been violated as a result of the blockade, and the deliberate disruptions of the critical infrastructure (electricity, supply of natural gas) by the Azerbaijani authorities.
36. The rights of other vulnerable groups, such as 9000 persons with disabilities, 20,000 older persons, and 60,000 women living in Artsakh has been grossly violated as a direct result of the blockade of the Lachin corridor, which has led to shortages or lack of foodstuffs, medications, and medical supplies.

¹¹ <https://twitter.com/marutvanian/status/1674138258136092675?s=20>