



Armenian Bar Association

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Via Email

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Dear Mandate Holders:

The members of the Armenian Bar Association are deeply concerned about the press release issued on October 2, 2023, (the "Press Release") by the UN Resident Coordinator in Azerbaijan, Vladanka Andreeva, following the UN's recent "observer mission" ("UN Mission") to Nagorno-Karabakh. We are hereby expressing our grave reservations regarding several statements made in the Press Release.

The Press Release makes several conclusory assertions that are either factually wrong or create a highly misleading characterization of the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh and the fate of its Armenian population.

According to the Press Release, "The mission was struck by the sudden manner in which the local population left their homes." There was no mention of the nine-month-long blockade created by the Azerbaijani government that was intentionally put in place to punish and terrorize the Armenian population by denying them essential medicines and creating conditions that invariably lead to malnutrition, disease, and eventual death. There was no mention of the endless streams of threats of violence, torture, and arbitrary executions circulating in social media. There was no mention of Azerbaijan's state policy of racial animus directed at ethnic Armenians, which the highest judicial organ of the United Nations, the International Court of Justice, recognized to be the case. The Press Release's indication of surprise or bafflement on the part of the UN Mission provides no explanation for the displacement of the Armenian population, whereas the reasons are quite obvious and can be confirmed by the very individuals, who fled their homes: thousands and thousands of men, women, and children left in utter desperation because they feared for their lives.

The Press Release also stated that members of the UN Mission "saw no damage to civilian public infrastructure, including hospitals, schools and housing, or to cultural and religious structures" in parts of the city they visited. However, at the time of the UN Mission's visit, there was ample evidence that damage had been done to civilian infrastructure and buildings. This omission of clearly salient facts once again creates a false narrative of what took place in Nagorno-Karabakh.

Several news agencies have already reported on the Press Release and presented its dubious claims as the final word on what transpired in Nagorno-Karabakh.¹ This unfortunate development has already been exploited by the Azerbaijani government by claiming that the UN has absolved it of crimes against the Armenian population including ethnic cleansing.² The UN must not allow to be manipulated by the Azerbaijani government into whitewashing its crimes. It is also a tremendous disservice to the international community, who are being misled and misinformed by the Press Release's troubling assertions.

It is our understanding that in addition to the Resident Coordinator in Azerbaijan, several other UN entities were involved in the "fact-finding" UN Mission, including representatives from UNOCHA, UNHCR, UNICEF, FAO, UNDSS, and the WHO. And yet, with the exception of the Resident Coordinator, none of these other agencies endorsed the Press Release. The various

¹ <https://www.reuters.com/world/un-team-nagorno-karabakh-did-not-see-any-damage-hospitals-schools-2023-10-02/>.

² <https://en.trend.az/azerbaijan/politics/3806193.html>.

UN agencies that were involved in the UN Mission, either individually or jointly, will at some point issue reports announcing their findings. We believe that it is these official reports that are the proper venue for adducing fact-finding conclusions, not the Press Release issued by the Office of the UN Resident Coordinator in Azerbaijan. It is critical that factual findings be reported after a thorough, unrestricted, and impartial investigation is conducted. This is yet to take place.

For these reasons, we kindly request that the Press Release be either retracted and removed from the UN affiliated websites or revised by removing the misleading and inaccurate conclusory claims. Assertions about what transpired in Nagorno-Karabakh should be reserved for the official reports and on the basis of an independent and unrestricted fact-finding mission.

We will continue to monitor the UN's effort to assist the more than 100,000 ethnic Armenian men, women, and children who have been forcibly displaced from their homeland by Azerbaijan.

Sincerely,

ARMENIAN BAR ASSOCIATION

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Taline', with a long, sweeping horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Taline Sahakian
Chairwoman