



THE REPUBLIC OF ARTSAKH HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER



INTERIM REPORT

ON THE VIOLATIONS OF HUMAN RIGHTS OF
ARTSAKH PEOPLE AS A RESULT OF THE
DELIBERATE DISRUPTION OF CRITICAL
INFRASTRUCTURE IN THE MIDST OF THE
BLOCKADE OF ARTSAKH BY AZERBAIJAN
SINCE DECEMBER 12, 2022

STEPANAKERT - 2023

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Introduction

“Extermination includes the intentional infliction of conditions of life, inter alia the deprivation of access to food and medicine, calculated to bring about the destruction of part of a population.”

The Statute of the International Criminal Court, Article 7¹

Beginning December 12, 2022, at around 10:30 am, Azerbaijani government agents posing as independent actors in civilian clothes, blocked the only road connecting Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh) to Armenia and the outside world – the Goris-Stepanakert Highway – that passes through the “Lachin (Berdzor) corridor”, which is referenced in the Trilateral Ceasefire Statement of November 9, 2020. By this act, Azerbaijan violated one of the provisions of the mentioned statement signed by the leaders of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Russia, namely, Point 6: (...) *“The Lachin corridor (5 km wide) which will ensure the communication between Nagorno-Karabakh (NK)/Artsakh and Armenia and at the same time will circumvent the city of Shushi, shall remain under the control of the peacekeeping contingent of the Russian Federation”*.² By sustaining the blockade of the Lachin corridor, Azerbaijan remains in breach of its international obligations assumed under the Statement of November 9, 2020, which further provides, in no uncertain terms, that *“Azerbaijan must guarantee the security of people, vehicles and cargo moving along the Lachin corridor in both directions.”*³

As a result of the physical obstruction of the sole highway—along with Azerbaijan’s deliberate disruption of Internet connection, gas and electricity supplies from Armenia to Artsakh—120,000 people have been effectively placed under a complete blockade with no access to essential goods and services, including medication, food, fuel and hygiene products, for more than 40 days.⁴ Additionally, four communities of the Shushi region— Lisagor, Mets Shen, Hin Shen and Eghtsahogh—have found themselves in complete isolation both from Artsakh and Armenia. Against this backdrop, Azerbaijan’s intentional targeting and attacking of the critical infrastructure of Artsakh only aggravates the already dire humanitarian situation impacting in the Artsakh civilian population under blockade.

This is the second time that Azerbaijan has blocked the Lachin corridor in the post-2020 war period. Previously, on December 3, 2022, a group of Azerbaijanis, had

¹Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, [https://legal.un.org/icc/statute/english/rome_statute\(e\).pdf](https://legal.un.org/icc/statute/english/rome_statute(e).pdf)

² Statement by the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia, the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the President of the Russian Federation, <https://www.primeminister.am/en/press-release/item/2020/11/10/Announcement/>, 10.11.2020

³ Ibid

⁴ Human Rights Defender of Armenia and Human Rights Defender of Artsakh, Updated joint ad hoc public report “The humanitarian consequences of blocking the only road connecting Artsakh with Armenia and the world”, https://ombuds.am/images/files/8015e970b4e618c7e518be045acd382b.pdf?fbclid=IwAR1Oz_IbKQZSKX9Q5umT1kjdYX7DkDUgWBG-Ey1cL-ICjSOMLBrYyC99qPQ, 13.01.2023

blocked the highway under fabricated ecological concerns over the mining of natural resources by Artsakh. As a result of 3-hour negotiations, under the mediation of the Russian peacekeeping contingent, the road was opened.

Further aggravating the situation, and with the intention of causing a humanitarian catastrophe, the Azerbaijani authorities cut the supply of natural gas to Artsakh only days later. On December 13-16, 2022, at around 6:00 pm, in severe winter conditions, the Azerbaijani authorities cut off the supply of natural gas from Armenia to Artsakh, depriving the Artsakh civilian population of the basic necessities necessary for safeguarding its livelihood.⁵ The gas supply to the entire territory of Artsakh was cut off again by Azerbaijan on January 18, 2023, at around 01:00 pm, leaving the majority of Artsakh's households still without access to heating and hot water in the dead of winter.

The deliberate nature of these disruptions is clearly evidenced. In March 2022, Azerbaijan disrupted the natural gas supply via the only pipeline from Armenia to Artsakh (currently passes through the territories occupied by Azerbaijan during the 44-day war of 2020) for more than 20 days by detonating a critical portion of it. After detonating the pipeline, Azerbaijan installed a valve on the pipeline, allowing it to establish arbitrary control over the gas supply to Artsakh. The humanitarian consequences of this criminal act of Azerbaijan were discussed in detail in the interim report “*On violations of the rights of Artsakh people by Azerbaijan in February-March 2022*” of the Ombudsman of the Republic of Artsakh.⁶

Additionally, On January 9, 2023, the sole high-voltage line supplying electricity to Artsakh from Armenia, was damaged in the Aghavno-Berdzor section (Lachin corridor) under Azerbaijani control. Azerbaijani authorities have not allowed repair works to be conducted on the damaged section by Artsakh specialists and, as a result, electricity is now being supplied exclusively by local hydropower plants. Thus, the Artsakh Government has been obliged to schedule rolling blackouts and other restrictions across all of Artsakh in order to save water resources in the Sarsang reservoir in an effort to secure and extend electricity production for the civilian population. However, the reservoirs essential to generate hydropower have very limited resources.

On January 12, 2023, the sole fiber-optic cable supplying the Internet connection to Artsakh from Armenia was damaged in the section of the Stepanakert-Goris highway where the Azerbaijanis have been blocking the road since December 12, 2022. As a result, the whole of Artsakh was deprived of Internet services for two days, resulting in total information isolation. On January 14, 2023, the connection was restored, yet

⁵ Human Rights Watch, “Azerbaijan: Nagorno-Karabakh Lifeline Road Blocked”, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/12/21/azerbaijan-nagorno-karabakh-lifeline-road-blocked>, 21.12.2022

⁶ Human Rights Defender of Artsakh, “Interim Report on violations of the rights of Artsakh people by Azerbaijan in February-March 2022”, <https://artsakhombuds.am/en/document/910>

recurrent disruptions of the Internet connection persist. After the establishment of the 2020 ceasefire, the Azerbaijani side has consistently disrupted mobile communication and Internet access throughout Artsakh, using various types of jammers and silencers.

Amidst this rapidly unfolding humanitarian crisis in Artsakh, Azerbaijan uses the vulnerability of critical infrastructure to terrorise and intimidate the peaceful civilian population of Artsakh, inflicting still further suffering on the people of Artsakh already under blockade, with the aim of their total destruction and eviction from their native land – the end goal of the decades-long systematic and consistent policy of Armenophobia, ethnic cleansing and genocide led by Azerbaijan^{7,8}.

This purpose of this report is to illustrate the ongoing violations of the most fundamental rights of Artsakh people caused by the disruption of the operation of the critical infrastructure of Artsakh amid the month-long blockade by Azerbaijan.

⁷ INTERIM PUBLIC REPORT ARMENOPHOBIA IN AZERBAIJAN ORGANIZED HATE SPEECH ANIMOSITY TOWARDS ARMENIANS, <https://artsakhombuds.am/hy/document/570>, 21.01.2023

⁸ AD HOC PUBLIC REPORT ORGANIZED HATE SPEECH AND ANIMOSITY TOWARDS ETHNIC ARMENIANS IN AZERBAIJAN AS ROOT CAUSES OF ETHNICALLY BASED TORTURE AND INHUMAN TREATMENT BY AZERBAIJANI ARMED FORCES, <https://artsakhombuds.am/hy/document/780>, 21.01.2023

1. Humanitarian consequences of the disruption of the critical infrastructure

The deliberate attacks on the critical infrastructure of Artsakh is a method of warfare and ethnic cleansing that Azerbaijan has repeatedly implemented against the peaceful civilian population of Artsakh since the 2020 war. The main aim of these criminal actions is to terrorise the peaceful population of Artsakh and create such inhumane living conditions that the population is eventually forced to leave its native land.

1.1. Gas supply disruption

The unfolding humanitarian crisis has been seriously aggravated by Azerbaijan's disruption of the natural gas supply from Armenia to Artsakh via the single pipeline that traverses the territories currently under control of Azerbaijan. From the start of the blockade on December 12, the Azerbaijani side has deliberately cut off the gas supply 4 times: on December 13 (for 3 days), on January 17 (for 1 day), on January 18 (for 3 days), on again on January 21. Since January 21, at around 21:00 pm, the natural gas supply to the whole territory of Artsakh through the sole gas pipeline coming from Armenia to Artsakh has been cut off by Azerbaijan once again. The disruption has left the majority of Artsakh households as well as crucial medical, social and educational institutions in Artsakh without access to heating and hot water in the severe winter conditions. The attack on Artsakh's gas infrastructure by Azerbaijan has caused multiple violations of fundamental human rights of the population of Artsakh.

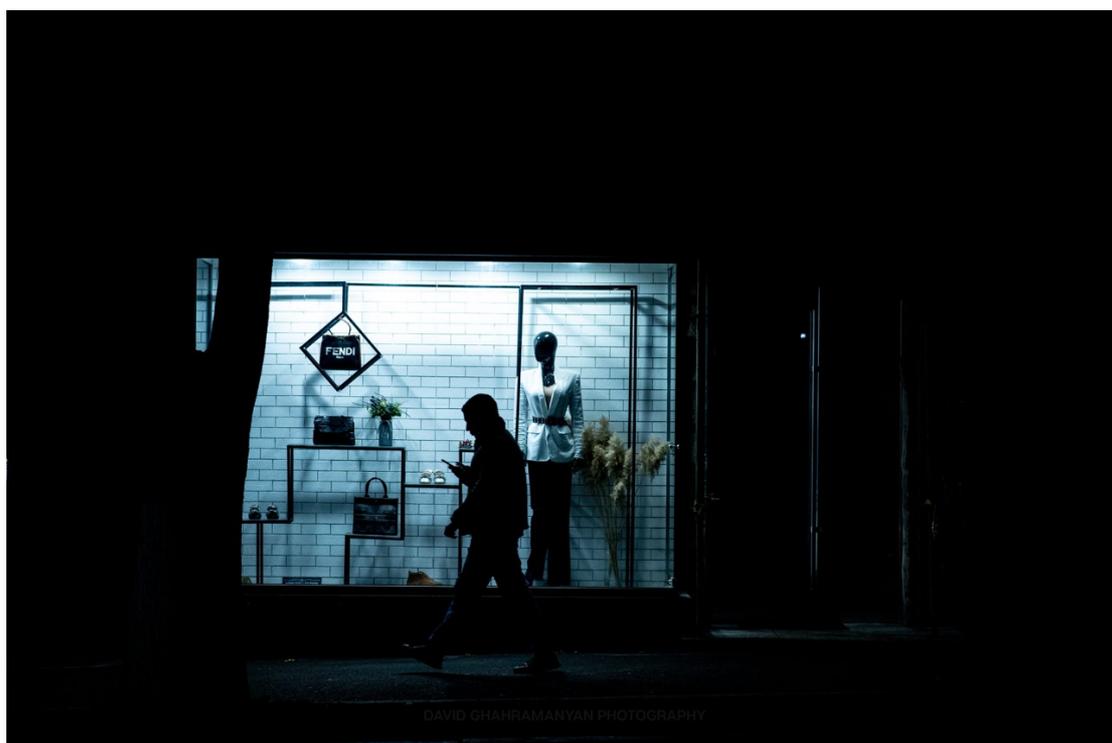
About 80% of the approximately 120,000 people currently living in Artsakh have their homes supplied with gas. Gas is widely used by people of Artsakh in various areas of life: for heating houses, public and private organisations, educational, social and health organisations; for hot water supply; for food production; and for a multitude of other economic activities. Therefore, due to the disruption of the gas supply, the humanitarian ramifications have only intensified critically in blockaded Artsakh.

During the previous gas supply disruption by Azerbaijan in March 2022, people overcame the humanitarian difficulties by using electricity. However, now, the sole electricity line from Armenia to Artsakh has also disrupted by Azerbaijan, leaving 120,000 people in a complete energy isolation. A stop-gap measure of scheduling rolling blackouts was adopted by the government of Artsakh to prevent the overload and total breakdown of the internal electricity supply system, mitigate the energy crisis and save energy. Thus, the entire population of Artsakh is currently deprived of electricity for 6 hours per day, which, coupled with the gas supply cut-off, means that people have patently insufficient resources to support their livelihoods.

1.2. Electricity supply disruption

On January 9, 2023, the sole high-voltage line providing electricity from Armenia to Artsakh was damaged in the Aghavno-Berdzor (Lachin) section, which is under Azerbaijani control. The Azerbaijani authorities refuse to allow repair works to be conducted at the accident site. Accordingly, the Artsakh Government was obliged to organise electricity supply through the local hydropower plants with certain growing restrictions. Starting from January 10, electricity started to be supplied to the population of Artsakh at certain intervals, with intermittent outages.

As Artsakh produces only 57% of its electricity consumption, a 4-hour rolling blackouts schedule was introduced by the Artsakh government for several days to manage the electricity crisis in Artsakh. The Azerbaijani authorities are still not allowing repair works by Artsakh specialists on the main electricity line of Artsakh, damaged since January 9, 2023. Accordingly, and as of January 21, 2023, a 6-hour rolling blackouts schedule has been implemented. Notably, the local production of electricity is carried out mostly through the Sarsang Hydro-Power Plant, where water in the Sarsang reservoir is used in large volumes to generate electricity. Continuing use of the reservoir in these volumes will deplete capacity quickly, and longer rolling blackouts will need to be imposed.



Power outages on streets of Stepanakert under blockade during rolling blackouts. Artsakh, 2023

This circumstance causes a particularly critical problem for those who either heat their houses with electricity in the winter and for those use electricity as an alternative power system for heating in the absence of gas supplies. In blistering cold winter conditions, and heavy snowfall, Artsakh is facing an alarming energy crisis, which compounds the

already dire humanitarian crisis, as people are now deprived of any type of heating for at least 6 hours per day.

1.3. Internet connection disruption

On January 12, 2023, the Internet connection in Artsakh was disrupted, as a result of the damage to the sole fiber-optic cable providing Internet services to Artsakh from Armenia. According to the local internet provider in Artsakh, the damage of the cable took place exactly at the location where the Azerbaijanis have blocked the highway. According to the fact-finding activities of the Office of the Human Rights Ombudsman of Artsakh, Azerbaijan purposefully damaged the sole cable supplying an Internet connection to Artsakh from Armenia to cause further suffering to the population of Artsakh, as well as create an atmosphere of intimidation, fear and uncertainty. At the time of preparing the Report, access to the Internet was restored, but considering that the Azerbaijani side has consistently disrupted access to telecommunications in the entire territory of Artsakh since the establishment of ceasefire on November 2020, the Human rights defender expects that Azerbaijan will take similar steps in the future.

2. Violations of human rights in the light of the disruption of critical infrastructure

In times of humanitarian crises—particularly those driven by a dangerous and simultaneous convergence of multiple causes, as is the case in Artsakh—human rights are always at stake, especially of the most vulnerable groups of the society such children, elderly, women and persons with disabilities. Thus, these rights and groups require specific attention and protection.

2.1. Right to adequate livelihood (heating, hot water, food production)

In the dead of winter, the average temperature in the territory of Artsakh fluctuates around -2+2 degrees Celsius and can often plummet as low as -5 degrees Celsius. It snows and freezes for days. In these dangerous winter conditions, residential houses; temporary residences of displaced persons; a myriad of educational and health institutions; private enterprises; and state institutions remain deprived of stable and sufficient heating due to Azerbaijan's intentional attack on Artsakh's infrastructure. About 80% of the approximately 120,000 people currently living in Artsakh have their homes supplied with gas. The main source of heating for the vast majority of Artsakh's population is obstructed.



Winter weather conditions in Artsakh

Gas is also used in Artsakh households to prepare food; therefore, its absence directly affects the normal organisation of nutrition of the population. The danger is compounded here, where both gas *and* electricity are not being supplied to Artsakh: people are deprived of vital necessities—heating for physical warm and heat and hot water for cooking food—with absolutely no alternative source of energy. In this precarious confluence of the deprivation of essential resources, the humanitarian urgency is compounded geometrically.



“When both gas and electricity are gone, my baby simply starts to freeze and cries for 2 hours. Her hands and nose freeze immediately, although we wrap her up with several blankets, but all in vain. I also notice that she is afraid of the dark, she feels restless when the lights are gone. When the electricity is back, we can somehow warm her up again. But my heart breaks when I see how my baby suffers from this inhuman situation and I can do nothing about it. As a mother, I think of all those kids in Artsakh deprived of proper nutrition, heating and now education. What did we do to deserve such an attitude? By just being Armenians and living on our native land?” says Eleonora, mother of a 2-month-old baby from Stepanakert.

2.2. Right to education

Due to the blockade of Artsakh and disruption of its vital infrastructure by Azerbaijan, children’s rights have been violated—primarily, the right to education. The issue of heating has fundamentally upset the normal functioning of the educational process of Artsakh, as a large number of educational institutions are gas-heated including kindergartens, schools, secondary vocational and higher education institutions. Thus, the right to education of the children of Artsakh was clearly disrupted on December 14-16, 2022, when Azerbaijan cut off the gas supply to Artsakh for the first time during the blockade. Since January 18, 2023, with the second series of Azerbaijani disruptions to the gas supply from Armenia to Artsakh, the right to education of Artsakh children has been trampled upon, yet again.

In the current situation, it is impossible to operate education effectively in Artsakh. 65% of the schools in the country are heated by gas only; importantly, 60% of the total number of Artsakh students receive education in such gas-heated schools. Due to the impossibility of providing proper heating, the Artsakh Government was obliged to suspend the school classes until further notice.



A child in Stepanakert under blockade during electricity blackouts. Artsakh, 2023

In addition to the heating problem, the blockade has impeded the process of supplying, organising and delivering food to educational institutions—where the most vulnerable groups of children (aged 2-6) attend, such as kindergartens, pre-schools, groups of primary schools and schools working with extended hours. Thus, 117 schools, 41 kindergartens, 56 pre-schools and 20 all-day education institutions have been forced to close down due to the combination of the heating problem and food crisis arising from the blockade. Consequently, more than 20,000 children are currently deprived of the opportunity to receive care and education. Since these institutions were running out of food supplies, and now it has become impossible to provide food for children, these educational institutions suspended operations as of January 9, 2023. In the last days of December 2022, the activities of 31 public, 7 charitable and 3 private kindergartens and 56 preschool groups of 30 public schools were already completely suspended.

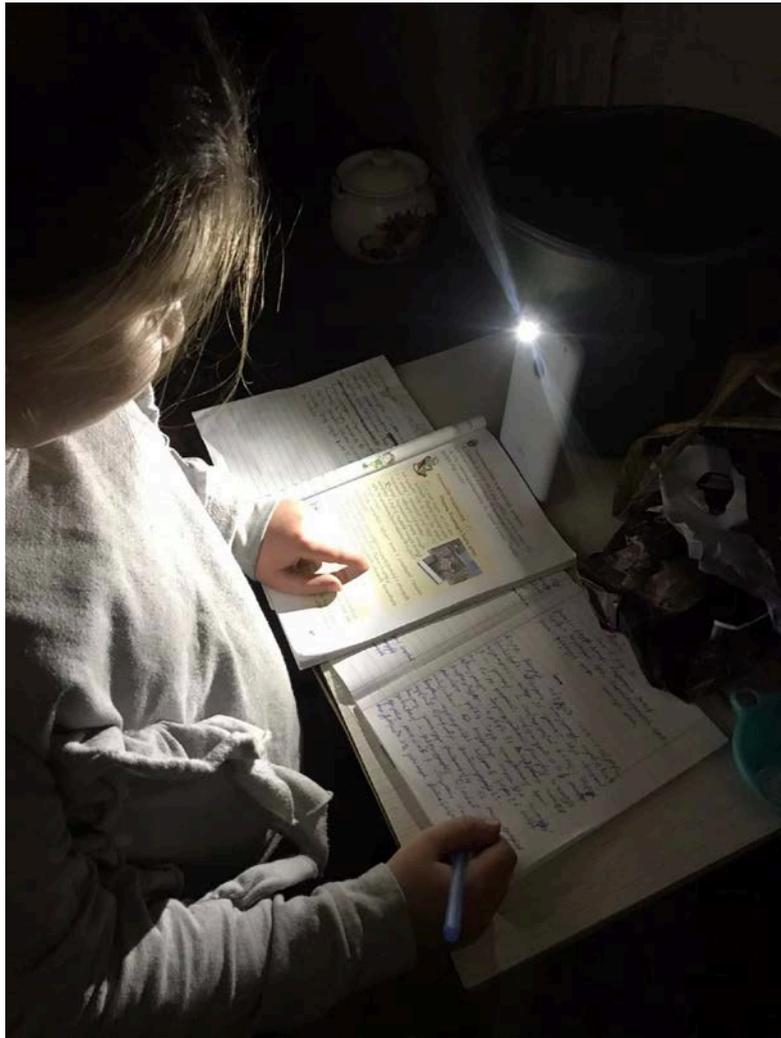
As for the higher education institutions, 100% of both public and private universities are heated by gas. Although some of the classes can be conducted remotely, the general educational process is hindered in Artsakh due to the ongoing criminal actions of Azerbaijan.

90% of other educational institutions, such as secondary vocational schools, art schools, medical and music colleges, and youth creative centres, are also heated by gas. Due to the absence of gas supply, these also had to completely cease their activities.



Empty Kindergarten №2 of Stepanakert under blockade without gas and electricity. Artsakh, 2023

“The education of my children was already disrupted by the 2020 war and displacement from our native Hadrut, which affected greatly the mental and psychological state of my children. Now with this blockade, shortage of all vital necessities and food, absence of gas and stable electricity, suspension of school classes, our children are left in the state of a limbo. Azerbaijanis’ hatred towards us knows no bounds. What have these innocent children done to them even? Why did we deserve so much hatred and inhuman treatment? These are just kids, they are not responsible for anything, but they suffer the most in this situation.” says Venera, a displaced mother of 4 children from Hadrut.



A child in Artsakh doing a lesson at home under a phone flashlight

2.3. Right to healthcare

Azerbaijan’s disruption of the operation of critical infrastructure in Artsakh immediately affects the normal functioning of the healthcare system, generating complex and persistent issues for public health. Azerbaijan’s disruption of the gas and electricity supplies to Artsakh, particularly amidst the 40-day-long blockade of the sole road connecting Artsakh with Armenia and the outside world, has hindered the realisation of

Artsakh people's right to healthcare. People are now deprived of the proper access to life-saving services, such as urgent treatments, planned surgeries and operations, laboratory tests, periodic examinations and regular health check-ups, due to the lack of proper heating, absence of necessary medicaments, medical equipment and materials at the healthcare institutions.

As of January 20, 2023, 113 people are being treated in the medical institutions of the Republic of Artsakh, out of which 35 are children. 8 children and 12 adults are in the intensive care unit, while 4 of the latter are in critical condition. Furthermore, 7 newborns and 23 pregnant women are currently treated in the maternity hospital.

70% of the hospitals of Artsakh are heated by gas.⁹ During the previous gas supply disruptions, some of the medical institutions had the opportunity to switch to alternative heating systems using gasoline, diesel fuel or electricity. However, in the conditions of scheduled outages and absence of diesel fuel supplies, these alternative methods of heating likewise have become inaccessible and unreliable. Moreover, the monitoring activities of the Artsakh Human Rights Defender have shown that the required temperature (14-15 degrees Celsius) in the wards is not reached, even where alternative sources are being utilized. In addition, the management of healthcare institutions note that, because of switching to alternative energy, the operational costs have increased immediately, imposing additional pressure on the normal operation of these institutions.

“In the conditions of constant blackouts, absence of gas supply for proper heating, it is quite dangerous and risky to conduct surgeries, especially if it is an hours-long and complex operation. We had to refuse to operate hundreds of people since the beginning of the blockade. Now with the disruption of gas supplies and rolling blackouts, we are facing a serious issue of heating the hospital wards, where we currently provide inpatient treatment to dozens of people. This situation leaves us, doctors, in a very difficult position, as we can no longer perform our duty to the full extent.” says a doctor of a hospital in Stepanakert.

2.4. Impact on economic activity and right to work

Due to the disruption of the critical infrastructure of Artsakh by Azerbaijan's malevolent actions, problems in different sectors of the economy of the Republic have also arisen. In particular, the gas supply in the capital city of Stepanakert is necessary for the baking of bread, not to mention other food. Due to the absence of both gas and stable electricity supply, the production and supply of bread has been impacted. A shortage of bread—a critical staple of survival—is already being observed in Stepanakert.

⁹ Human Rights Defender of Artsakh, “Interim Report on violations of the rights of Artsakh people by Azerbaijan in February-March 2022”, <https://artsakhombuds.am/en/document/910>

Notably, more than 50% of the population is concentrated in Stepanakert, including the majority of the forcibly displaced population as a result of the 2020 Azerbaijani-Turkish aggression against Artsakh.

“Our bakery used to work all night to bake bread enough for the whole neighbourhood [of Stepanakert] and beyond. Our stoves operate using gas, and only during the gas supply disruption we would switch to electric stoves that are much costlier. However, now that we do not have any gas supply and stable electricity due to the scheduled outages, including at nights, the bakery is operating in a part-time regime. We no longer manage to cover the demand that we used to before the blockade. Half of our staff are now left without jobs. You know, bread is the most basic foodstuff that people usually need to sustain, especially in these difficult times. Depriving people of bread means deliberately exposing the whole nation to hunger. This is the real intention of Azerbaijan today – our collective destruction.” says a bakery employee in Stepanakert.

The disruption of the gas supply to Artsakh has negatively affected the public transport sector across all of Artsakh. Many vehicles for personal, corporate and public use gas. However, in the absence of gas, petrol and diesel fuel all at the same time, the people of Artsakh are left practically with no means of transportation, which has caused tremendous logistical and cost issues for the entire population. The connection between Stepanakert and regions of Artsakh is now very limited, as people can no longer commute between their usual destinations for work, business or education as before. The service industry faces the same predicament. For example, the operation of taxi services in Artsakh is completely halted now, as there is no gas or petrol available to refuel the cars.

All gas and petrol stations in Artsakh ceased operations essentially since the beginning of the blockade. As a result, the owners of stations have suffered, and continue to suffer, serious financial losses, while hundreds of their employees are now idle, deprived of their fundamental right to decent work.

Hundreds of economic entrepreneurs of Artsakh also suffer huge economic and financial losses due to the disruption of the gas supply. Greenhouses, where the production and storage of food take place, are one of the most affected as they are gas-operated. However, with the rolling blackout system put in place, they cannot rely on the alternative power systems either. Accordingly, the necessary conditions for production and storage of food cannot be consistently maintained.

Finally, since January 19, 2023, the state institutions of the Republic of Artsakh had to switch to a special mode of operation, requiring the imposition of certain restrictions and modifications.¹⁰ In the situation of an unfolding energy crisis, and in an effort to

¹⁰ Artsakh Info Center Official Telegram Channel, “The Republic of Artsakh is switching to partial restrictions of the working regime since January 19, 2023” <https://t.me/texekatvakanshtab/5359>

ensure the uninterrupted operation of vital facilities and services, as well as to meet the basic energy needs of the population for as long as possible, only those employees whose work requires their physical presence at the workplace are allowed to come to work; others will have to perform their work duties remotely. A gamut of other modifications, including packing employees into only one room and still other measures, have been implemented to use electricity as efficiently as possible.

2.5 Impact on ecology and garbage collection

In the absence of gas supply, there is a sharp increase in the use of wood by the population to provide heating and other living conditions for the houses. Accordingly, deforestation is a real risk as recourse to wood as a heating source will likely cause significant forest depletion, which will definitely affect the environment.

According to the information received from Stepanakert Municipality and the administrations of all regions, there are problems with garbage collection in the communities. The machines and equipment used for garbage collection work mainly using gas, and there is no possibility to switch to other fuels.

Finally, serious environmental problems will arise due to the fact that, in the absence of gas supply and other energy sources, the water of the Sarsang reservoir is necessarily being used beyond its natural limitations. This means that in the spring and summer, when the water of the Sarsang reservoir is used for irrigation purposes, the reservoir will be dangerously depleted, and there will be a water supply problem. It is noteworthy that the water of the Sarsang reservoir is mainly used for the irrigation of the territories under the control of Azerbaijan and, with the blockade and disruption of infrastructure to drive out indigenous Armenians of Artsakh, Azerbaijan not only inflicts harm on the Artsakh Armenians, but it also stands to harm its own citizens as well.

Concluding remarks and recommendations

In light of the 42-day-long blockade of Artsakh by Azerbaijan—and as a result of attacking Artsakh’s vital infrastructure, such as its gas and electricity supplies and its internet connection—the Republic of Artsakh has found itself in an unprecedented and life-threatening energy crisis. As a result of Azerbaijan’s cutting off of the only natural gas pipeline from Armenia to Artsakh and sole electricity line from Armenia to Artsakh, medical institutions in Artsakh are unable to provide primary medical care, the activities of the educational institutions are suspended, and the work of state bodies and agencies is disrupted. The lack of all fuel and energy for people, institutions, and vehicles disrupts the lives of the population and is engineered to generate a complete collapse of sustenance, food and energy security and all logistics in the country.

The Stepanakert-Goris highway—the only road connecting Artsakh with Armenia and the outside world—is of great humanitarian importance. Its blocking is causing, and will further cause, grave humanitarian consequences for the entire population of Artsakh. In addition, it directly sets back any peace talks and peace-making initiatives in the region, and it fundamentally undermines international and regional confidence and trust.

Unfortunately, the blockade of Artsakh is not an isolated act; it constitutes a part of a decades-long, wide-spread and systematic policy of Azerbaijan aimed at ethnic cleansing of Artsakh Armenians and their complete expulsion from their native land. Since the establishment of the ceasefire guaranteed by the Trilateral Statement of November 9, 2020, Artsakh’s Ombudsman has repeatedly reported on the recurrence of similar threats and provocations from the Azerbaijani side. Over the past two year, Azerbaijan, *inter alia*, has:

- (a) resorted to military aggression, violating the ceasefire established by the Trilateral Statement, killed 18 people, including 3 civilians, and subjected hundreds of people to attempted murder;
- (b) deliberately and numerously attacked the infrastructure of Artsakh with the aim of terrorising and intimidating the population of Artsakh;
- (b) left the entire population of Artsakh without gas and water supplies for weeks;
- (c) disrupted seasonal agricultural work by targeting peaceful villagers;
- (d) constantly subjected the Armenian communities in close vicinity to their military positions to psychological pressure by loudspeakers;

- (e) spread disinformation and panic among people by carrying out cyber-attacks on the state media outlets of Artsakh.

Given the current humanitarian situation in Artsakh, Ombudsman of the Republic of Artsakh calls on the international community and all its actors championing human rights to take urgent action, namely:

- (1) urge Azerbaijan to respect and fulfil its international obligations assumed, in addition to international conventions, by the Trilateral Statement of November 9, 2020, implying provision of security guarantees to the population of Artsakh and safeguarding their livelihoods;
- (2) pressure Azerbaijan with use of all practical instruments to immediately open the sole highway without any preconditions, enable free movement of people and uninterrupted access to essential goods and services via the Corridor, acknowledging its primarily humanitarian nature;
- (3) launch an international fact-finding mission to the Artsakh to assess the humanitarian situation on the ground;
- (4) grant unimpeded access to international human rights organisations and missions to enter Artsakh, assess the situation and provide the necessary humanitarian relief based on the needs of the civilian population;
- (5) urge Azerbaijan to refrain from attacking the critical infrastructure of Artsakh, as well as its transport, energy and communication connections with Armenia in the future;
- (6) condemn Azerbaijan's inflammatory state-sponsored, Armenophobic rhetoric among its population that is calling for discrimination and aggression towards Armenians of Artsakh;

While welcoming all the statements and reactions received from the international organisations and counterparts genuinely standing for the fundamental human rights of Artsakh people^{11,12}, the Ombudsman of the Republic of Artsakh believes that the

¹¹ Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe, "Movement along the Lachin Corridor should be restored as a matter of urgency to prevent a deterioration of the humanitarian situation in Nagorno-Karabakh", <https://www.coe.int/en/web/commissioner/-/movement-along-the-lachin-corridor-should-be-restored-as-a-matter-of-urgency-to-prevent-a-deterioration-of-the-humanitarian-situation-in-nagorno-karabakh>, 22.12.2022

¹² European Parliament resolution of 19 January 2023 on the humanitarian consequences of the blockade in Nagorno-Karabakh (2023/2504(RSP)) , https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2023-0012_EN.pdf, 19.01.2023

governments and international actors involved in the resolution of the conflict should use all the diplomatic measures at their disposal to stop the blockade of Artsakh, restore its supply of essential necessities, call on the Azerbaijani authorities to stop targeting critical infrastructure (gas, electricity, Internet, mobile communication, water), stop the impending humanitarian catastrophe and protect the fundamental human rights of the people living in Artsakh.

The international community should urgently take a unanimous and unambiguous stance, and take targeted action to condemn, punish and prevent Azerbaijan from continuing to act with a sense of absolute impunity. The international community must prevent Azerbaijan from realising its ultimate genocidal goal – the ethnic cleansing of the indigenous Armenian population of Artsakh.