



633 Third Avenue, Suite 3210, New York, NY, 10017
Tel: (212) 371-2559, 371-2832 (ext. 101); Fax: (212) 371-2784, (646) 738-6143

**Statement by the Delegation of the Republic of Azerbaijan
at the 2023 session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names in
connection with the report submitted by the Republic of Armenia**

4 May 2023

The Republic of Azerbaijan expresses its strongest protest against the report submitted by the Republic of Armenia “on the national standardization of the names of geographical objects” (GEGN.2/2023/97/CPR.97), which represents an overt encroachment on the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Azerbaijan and an evident attempt to falsify history, distort the causes and consequences of its aggression against Azerbaijan and promote its hate narratives. The following points need to be made in that regard.

In order to realize its unlawful and groundless territorial claims, in the early 1990s, Armenia unleashed full-scale war and committed aggression against Azerbaijan. By May 1994, when the ceasefire was established, a large portion of the sovereign territory of Azerbaijan was occupied; tens of thousands of people were killed; more than 700,000 Azerbaijanis were expelled from their homes; hundreds of cities, towns and villages were razed to the ground; and tremendous losses were inflicted on Azerbaijan’s cultural heritage and the environment.

In its resolutions 822 (1993), 853 (1993), 874 (1993) and 884 (1993), the Security Council condemned the use of force against Azerbaijan and the occupation of its territories and reaffirmed respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Azerbaijan. The Council also reaffirmed that the territories claimed and occupied by Armenia, in blatant violation of the Charter of the United Nations and international law, are an inalienable part of Azerbaijan and demanded the immediate, complete and unconditional withdrawal of the Armenian occupying forces from all the occupied territories.

Armenia ignored these demands and, instead, directed all its efforts at colonizing the seized territories, including by means of implanting settlers from Armenia and abroad, destructing and/or appropriating historical and cultural heritage and changing place names.

The systematic replacement of historic Azerbaijani place names was a core feature of Armenia’s campaign of erasing all traces of Azerbaijani roots in favour of mono-ethnic Armenian settlements and preventing the hundreds of thousands of expelled Azerbaijanis from returning to their homes.

The State Agency for Geodesy and Cartography of the Republic of Azerbaijan identified at least 125 geographic names that were arbitrarily replaced by Armenia in those territories.¹ Apart from being unlawful as such, these replacements had nothing to do with the history of the region.

All occupied districts of Azerbaijan were re-organized into new “administrative districts” with new Armenian names. Worse yet, as the OSCE Field Assessment Mission observed in 2010, “[t]he city of Aghdam, which had as many as 70,000 inhabitants prior to the ... conflict, no longer appears on maps or road signs”.² Erasing Azerbaijani cities—literally—from the map was the culmination of Armenia’s ethnic cleansing and cultural “scorched earth” campaign.

What Armenia erroneously called “Nagorno-Karabakh” in its report is the legacy of the Bolshevik past, which long ago ceased to exist as an administrative and territorial unit. This area is the internationally recognized sovereign territory of Azerbaijan, which was under Armenia’s unlawful occupation for nearly three decades.

The legal name of this historic area of Azerbaijan is the Garabagh (Qarabağ) Economic Region, which consists of the city of Khankandi (Xankəndi) and the districts of Aghjabadi (Ağcabədi), Aghdam (Ağdam), Barda (Bərdə), Fuzuli (Füzuli), Khojaly (Xocalı), Khojavand (Xocavənd), Shusha (Şuşa) and Tartar (Tərtər). Following the liberation of the territories of Azerbaijan from occupation as a result of the 44-day war in the fall of 2020, the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan established this region by the decree of 7 July 2021, along with the East Zangazur (Şərqi Zəngəzur) Economic Region consisting of the districts of Jabrayil (Cəbrayıl), Kalbajar (Kəlbəcər), Gubadly (Qubadlı), Lachin (Laçın) and Zangilan (Zəngilan).

There are some other localities in Azerbaijan, to which Armenia continues to groundlessly refer with invalid Soviet names. As is known, it was widely practiced in the USSR to name cities, towns and other objects in honour of prominent communist leaders. Thus, for example, the aforementioned town of Khankandi, which was founded by the Khans of the Azerbaijani Garabagh Khanate in the 18th century and is translated from the Azerbaijani language as the Khan’s Village, in September 1923, after the establishment of Soviet rule in Azerbaijan, was renamed Stepanakert after Stepan Shaumian, a communist Commissar and Vladimir Lenin’s proxy in the South Caucasus. In 1991, Azerbaijan returned the town its historic name, Khankandi. However, Armenia still calls this town “Stepanakert” and does so because Shaumian was an ethnic Armenian and also as a token of special gratitude for his “services” in the massacres of Azerbaijanis and the ethnic cleansing of Azerbaijani settlements.

¹ See the list of the falsified names in Annex 1 to the report submitted by the Republic of Azerbaijan to the 2023 session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (GEGN.2/2023/140/CPR.140).

² 2010 OSCE Fact-Assessment Mission Report, p. 6.

The United Nations is based on and guided by the Charter of the United Nations, international law and the decisions adopted by the States Members of the Organization. The inherent right of States to possess and control the use of their place names derives from underpinnings of the international legal order and has its origin in the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity. The duties to respect these principles and not intervene in matters within the domestic jurisdiction of States, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and international law, require, inter alia, that only geographical names established by legitimate and competent national authorities in relation to their territory be recognized and used in the United Nations.

In that connection, it is pertinent to recall that resolution III/16, entitled “National standardization”, adopted at the third United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names in 1977, recommended, inter alia, that “any changes made by other authorities in the names standardized by the competent national geographical names authority should not be recognized by the United Nations”. In addition, resolution VI/9 of the sixth Conference of 1992, entitled “Recognition of national standardization”, specifically discouraged the “unauthorized changing of geographical names that have already been established by a legally constituted entity and are nationally recognized”.

Armenia’s allegation about the falsification by Azerbaijan of the “original and indigenous” geographical names in the territory of Armenia is equally fallacious. It totally ignores the fact that there were over half a million Azerbaijanis living in the Azerbaijani Khanate of Iravan (İrəvan) in the territory of present-day Armenia until the establishment of Soviet rule in the region in the 1920s. Since then, they have been methodically forced out of their ancestral lands. The process of eradicating original Azerbaijani toponyms there started in the early 19th century, after the mass settlement of Armenians in the area, and intensified in the Soviet period. Eventually, in the late 1980s, the remaining more than 200,000 Azerbaijanis were brutally expelled from Armenia and their historical and cultural heritage was deliberately targeted, vandalized and consistently eradicated throughout Armenia. By the mid-1990s, Armenia’s legislated map contained virtually no Azerbaijani toponyms. To be convinced of the scale of erasing the traces of Azerbaijanis in these territories, suffice it to compare the maps of the Caucasus in the 19th century with the maps of today’s Armenia.

For the reasons above, the aforementioned report of Armenia must be rejected as fundamentally incompatible with international law, the principles and procedures for the international standardization of geographical names established within the United Nations and historical evidence.
