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DELEGATION OF THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA

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**61st SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS COMMISSION
ON HUMAN RIGHTS**

STATEMENT BY

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REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA**

Geneva, 15 March 2005

Mr. Chairman,

This is a special year for multilateral diplomacy as we celebrate the 60th anniversary of the United Nations. This is also a critical year as we contemplate the reforms necessary to bring this institution, the UN, in line with the various evolutions and revolutions that the world has seen in this past 60 years. The UN is the place where we have built security institutions and structures on the foundations of human freedom and economic access. Here, we both take from and give to a more interdependent world. With the future in mind, this is place where we will eventually look to find ways to avoid threats as we broaden and enlarge human rights and civil liberties.

It is noteworthy that the Commission on Human Rights is the only non-principal UN body which has been mentioned in the High Level Panel Report and for which far-reaching reforms have been recommended for this Commission. That is because I believe all of today's biggest challenges affect and are affected by the absence of or adherence to human rights. This makes the nature of the report very important. How and with what instruments and mechanisms those rights are to be protected is the concern addressed by the report and by each of us. Everyone in the international community needs to become engaged as we contemplate that report.

The international community's increased focus on shared responsibility for promoting human rights and freedoms at the national level requires open and enhanced international co-operation. To justify the need to make new decisions about old problems, do we need to constantly remind ourselves that our world is not the same as it was 60 years ago, or even 15 years ago? Then, local human rights abridgements were local or domestic tragedies. Today, such abridgements are the first step toward international catastrophes. Hiding behind national sovereignty in order to avoid responsibility for to provide protection to human rights, today, risks proliferation of injustice, insecurity, misery and conflict, internationally.

Mr. Chairman,

Armenia's membership in the Commission on Human Rights is as much a function of our sense of responsibility as of our deep sense of belief and conviction that the basic human rights of a society, and individual and collective security are all inextricably, inarguably, expressly interconnected. For Armenians, the human rights principle, the concept of man's inalienable rights touches a raw nerve. We lived the greatest part of the last century under a regime that endured solely because of the absence of human rights, civil liberties and freedoms. Immediately prior to that period, we had the dubious honor of being the century's first victims of genocide. At the end of that century and today still, we were still fighting to secure the rights of self-determination of the Armenians of Nagorno Karabakh.

Let me reflect on each of these.

After living, as I said, under an ideologically different helmet only fourteen years ago, our domestic experience has been difficult and sometimes bumpy. We have

learned to believe less in snap changes, we have our reasons to be sceptical of revolutions, we know that smooth public relations do not last as long as decent human relations. Therefore, as last year, so next year, we will continue to build on our successes, through evolutionary, incremental ways: poverty reduction, protecting the rights of conscientious objectors and religious sects, reforming the judicial system, strengthening political diversity and free expression, protecting and promoting the rights of women and children, fighting human traffickers.

As for Genocide, Mr. Chairman, it is the ultimate manifestation of the violation of human rights. This year marks the 90th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide. Two-thirds of the Armenian population perished between 1915 and 1918. As a minority, living in the Ottoman Empire, their call for the application of the lofty principles of liberty, equality and fraternity, led to their death sentence. Today, their survivors, living within and outside the Republic of Armenia expect that the world's avowal of the universality of those same noble principles will lead to recognition that Genocide was committed against Armenians.

Ninety years after the event, we still live with the memory of suffering unrelieved by strong condemnation and unequivocal recognition. In this we are not alone. The catharsis that victims deserve and societies require in order to heal and move forward together, obliges me to appeal to the international community to call things by their name, to remove the veil of obfuscation, of double standards, of political expediency.

Very recently, at the highest levels, the Turkish leadership called for a historical debate. They suggested that historians from Turkey and Armenia go through archives and sort out this issue. My immediate response that Armenia would not participate in a historical debate was interpreted as rejection of dialogue.

Let's not confuse the two kinds of dialogue. One is a debate about history. The other is a political discussion. Periodic calls by various Turkish administrations for historical debate simply delay the process of reconciling with the truth. The facts are clear. The historical record is clear. We know well what happened to our forebears. Even in the first days of the Turkish Republic, the local Turkish authorities who had actually carried out the genocidal acts were tried and found guilty by their own Turkish courts. The Turks themselves, for their own reasons, put aside that historical record and moved away from that honest, dignified approach to one of denial and rejection. Turkey owes the world's generation that recognition so we move forward.

Mr. Chairman,

This slice of our history is even more reason for the international community to denounce genocide, once and for always, as a political tool. We commend the Secretary General's 5-point action plan, we believe in strengthening the capacity and mandate of his Advisor on Genocide, and we believe that governments who commit Genocide must be persecuted and prosecuted the governments who commit genocide.

Inability to continue down this path means we have failed structurally and institutionally. It also means we have failed to make the difficult policy choices because of short-term political costs, even though we know well that there will be

long-term human and international consequences. A financially bankrupt government is turned over to international organizations until it reforms and renounces its wrongs. Can we tolerate any less of a government which is morally bankrupt? Do we want successive generations to believe that genocide is inevitable in each generation, on each continent? Can we allow governments to commit such massive violence against their own people? How can we explain why a report on Threats Challenges and Change must consider genocide a threat, even at the beginning of the 21st century?

Finally, the third human rights issue is that of the self-determination of the Armenians of Nagorno Karabakh.

Ironically, Mr. Chairman, even as societies have learned to support the victims of domestic violence, we have not yet graduated to offering the same support to victims of international or government violence. At best, the world watches silently as the victims attempt to defend themselves, and if somehow, against great odds, they succeed, then the world quickly pulls back, as the state loudly cries foul and claims sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Just as the perpetrator of domestic violence loses the moral right to custody, so does a government that commits and promotes violence against its own citizens lose its rights. It is in such instances that the notion of self-determination is significant and legitimate.

This is exactly what happened to the people of Nagorno Karabakh during the days of the collapse of the USSR when they opted, peacefully, for self-determination. The government of Azerbaijan immediately not only rejected the peaceful dialogue but resorted immediately to forceful suppression of those aspirations. Azerbaijan continued to militarily respond. At one point, the people of Nagorno Karabakh were on the verge of annihilation had there not been the last minute mobilization and their determination to fight for their lives, homes and their homeland. Today the Government of Azerbaijan has lost the moral right to even suggest providing for their security and their future, let alone to talk of custody of the people of Nagorno Karabakh.

Mr. Chairman, for us, defense and protection of human rights is not an abstract principle. It is the difference between survival and annihilation. We believe it is the same for many in the world. Yet, our individual and collective tendency is to ignore or neglect problems for which we have no immediate answer or prospect for solution. This is even more true in situations which defy belief, surpass common norms, and shake our very assumptions and values. For these very reasons, in our ever-shrinking world, what is required is resolve on the part of the committed in order to expand the engagement of those still hesitant.

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