



**ON FACT-FINDING ACTIVITIES IN
VILLAGES OF GEGHARKUNIK
PROVINCE OF ARMENIA DAMAGED BY
AZERBAIJANI MILITARY ATTACKS
30 SEPTEMBER - 1 OCTOBER**

YEREVAN 2020

On September 30, the Human Rights Defender visited Gegharkunik province of Armenia to conduct a fact-finding mission related to the Azerbaijani air and artillery attacks towards civilian settlements. The fact-finding activities were conducted in the city of Vardenis and the villages of Sotk, Shatvan, Kut as well as other villages in the immediate vicinity.

The working group recorded evidence on location indicating that the Azerbaijani air and artillery attacks were indiscriminate. The fact-finding mission also determined that targeted attacks against civilian settlements of the Armenian Gegharkunik province were conducted in the early morning of September 27. The attacks continued and grew more aggressive on 28 and 29 September, during which one civilian was killed.

Artillery and air attacks, including by remote-controlled unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), were carried out against villages every day, mostly in the early morning and afternoon. Intensive shillings were carried out during the night of September 29-30. The monitoring in Kut and Shatvan villages showed that artillery and UAV attacks were carried out in the direction of these settlements.

Unexploded or partially exploded artillery missiles were discovered stuck into, and protruding out of, the land next to homes in the villages. Their location and direction indicate that the Azerbaijani side deliberately targeted, with the intent to damage, what was clearly a civilian settlement.

An artillery missile was also fired toward the house of the head of the amalgamated community of Geghamasar in the village of Sotk. The fact-finding group recorded, on location, that the missile fell just a few meters from the community leader's house, in the immediate vicinity of the stone fence of the land adjacent to the house. The family was home at that time but was not injured—only because of the missile did not explode. It is evident, moreover, that an explosion of the landed missile would have caused severe damage to the house. Furthermore, and in the event that the missile detonated, the stone fence would have been impacted and could have caused further serious damage to the other homes in the village and, consequently, to the life and health of others as well.

Moreover, in Sotk village, the fact-finding mission recorded that houses located within 20-50 meters of the site of the explosion were damaged as a result of the shelling directed towards the residential houses. It was also recorded that civilians were present in all the houses at that time.

As part of the fact-finding activities, the Human Rights Defender also spoke with residents of the villages who informed that, during the attacks, they were at home or undertaking agricultural work related to the seasonal harvesting in the land adjacent to the house. It was evident from the conversations that the explosions had caused fear among the civilian population. They were worried because it was unpredictable when, in what direction and at what time of day the next attack would happen.

In addition, and as a result of the UAV attack directed towards the residential part of Sotk village, another home was damaged in addition to a school located 100-150 meters from the site of the explosion. Due to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), the classes in the village school are now largely remote; however, certain subjects are in fact taught in the school on certain days of the week.

Although at the time of the explosions there were no children at the school, their parents informed the Defender that they were frightened and had to hide in basements with their children to seek shelter from the danger.

The Human Rights Defender once again underlines that the Azerbaijani armed attacks towards the Armenian civilian population are condemnable and of criminal nature for another reason as well: they are carried out during the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, which has been ongoing for several months, and during which many people are mostly at home. Accordingly, the risks of harm to their lives and health are magnified under these circumstances.

Pursuant to the pre-determined plan of fact-finding mission undertaken by the Human Rights Defender of Armenia, there were further fact-finding activities scheduled to be conducted in other villages of the province, namely Norabak, Tretuk, Kutakan and Shatjrek—all of which were also damaged by the Azerbaijani attacks. However, as a result of the appearance of the Azerbaijani UAVs during the monitoring, the working group had to suspend its fact-finding activities. The UAVs appeared approximately at 18:00 near Shatvan village. The Human Rights Defender and his staff personally witnessed how the UAVs were solely flying over the civilian settlements, either to attack or to identify locations for attacks.

The fact-finding activities were carried out pursuant to a special methodology. Visits were conducted to all the civilian settlements, residential houses, the school and other civilian objects which were impacted by the armed attacks. Private interviews were held with residents, including with those village residents whose homes were targeted and/or damaged by the missile attack or whose lands and properties were impacted by the missile attacks.

Prior to the visit, the Human Rights Defender also met with the head of the Gegharkunik province, with whom the data in relation to the shelling of the civilian settlements recorded by the Province Administration was discussed. Thereafter, all visits to specific locations subjected to attacks were undertaken either in the company of the head of the amalgamated community of Geghamasar or the residents of the villages themselves.

The results of the fact-finding activities of the Human Rights Defender will be published and disseminated to relevant international community institutions as well as to international human rights organizations. Finally, this *ad hoc* report concerning the attacks by Azerbaijani air and artillery on civilian settlements in the Gegharkunik province of Armenia is supported by relevant photos.

IMAGES

SOTK













KUT





SHATVAN

