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**FM: STATUS QUO IN KARABAKH CONFLICT CAN RE-ESCALATE AT ANY TIME**

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21.09.2016

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20 September 2016

Trend.Az

Armenia must realize that relying on the status quo and armed provocations is a grave miscalculation, said Azerbaijan's Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov in New York.

He made the remarks during the first meeting of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) Contact Group on the aggression of Armenia against Azerbaijan.

I would like to thank the Secretary General, Mr. Iyad Ameen Madani, for having organized and chairing the first meeting of the OIC Contact Group on the aggression of the Republic of Armenia against the Republic of Azerbaijan, said Mammadyarov. I warmly welcome the members of the group and express my sincere gratitude to each of them for joining the contact group.

Establishment of the OIC contact groups has proved itself to be a successful practice in focusing more attention of the OIC member states to the issues of crucial importance for the organization, according to the foreign minister.

In this regard, I believe that the meetings of this contact group will be an opportunity for updating the OIC member states about the latest status of the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict in and around the Nagorno-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan and exchanging views on possible contribution of the OIC to the conflict settlement process, said Mammadyarov.

As you all know, the Republic of Armenia unleashed the war and used force against Azerbaijan, occupied almost one fifth of its territory, including the Nagorno-Karabakh region and seven adjacent districts, carried out ethnic cleansing of the seized areas by expelling about one million

Azerbaijanis from their homes and committed other serious crimes during the conflict, he added.

The foreign minister noted that the international community has consistently deplored the use of military force against Azerbaijan and the resulting occupation of its territories.

He recalled that in 1993, the UN Security Council adopted resolutions 822 (1993), 853 (1993), 874 (1993) and 884 (1993), condemning the use of force against Azerbaijan and occupation of its territories and reaffirming the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Azerbaijan and the inviolability of its internationally recognized borders.

In those resolutions, the Security Council reaffirmed that the Nagorno-Karabakh region is part of Azerbaijan and demanded the immediate, complete and unconditional withdrawal of the occupying forces from all the occupied territories of Azerbaijan, added the foreign minister.

The UN General Assembly adopted three resolutions on the conflict (48/114 of 20 December 1993, 60/285 of 7 September 2006 and 62/243 of 14 March 2008), and since 2004 the special item entitled The situation in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan has been included in the agenda of the regular sessions of the UN General Assembly, said Mammadyarov.

Since the eruption of the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, OIC, on the basis of the relevant UN Security Council resolutions, has explicitly determined the actions of Armenia on the territory of Azerbaijan as aggression and condemned in the strongest possible terms the use of force against Azerbaijan and the occupation of its territories, he said.

Taking this opportunity, I would like once again to express my gratitude to the OIC member states for their solidarity with and support for the just cause of Azerbaijan, added Mammadyarov.

Twenty-four years have past since the beginning of the armed conflict. However, in total disregard of the demands of UN Security Council and UN General Assembly resolutions, decisions of OIC and other international organizations and positions of individual states, and in flagrant violation of the generally accepted norms and principles of international law, Armenia continues to unlawfully occupy the territories of Azerbaijan, said the foreign minister.

Armenia continues to undertake efforts aimed at further consolidating the current status quo of the occupation, strengthening its military build-up in the seized territories, changing their demographic, cultural and physical character and preventing the hundreds of thousands of

Azerbaijani forcibly displaced persons from returning to their homes and properties in those areas, he added.

Moreover, regular ceasefire violations, attacks on the towns and villages in Azerbaijan situated along the line of contact of the armed forces of Armenia and Azerbaijan and the border between the two states have become more frequent and violent in recent times, resulting in the killing and injuring of many Azerbaijani civilians, he said. Most recently, Armenia conducted large-scale attacks against the civilian population of Azerbaijan in early April of this year.

The April escalation was a vivid reminder to us all that the status quo, which has been acknowledged as unsustainable and unacceptable by the international community, is dangerous and has the potential to re-escalate at any time with unpredictable consequences, he noted.

Armenia must realize that relying on the status quo and armed provocations is a grave miscalculation, said Mammadyarov.

Azerbaijan expects from Armenia to halt its military build-up in occupied territories, and engage in negotiations with Azerbaijan in good faith so as to find a political solution to the conflict, which is long overdue, he said. The sooner Armenia withdraws its troops from the occupied territories of Azerbaijan, the better it is for the regional security.

The establishment of the OIC contact group and its effective functioning is of great importance, considering the urgent need for more concerted efforts to force Armenia to comply with its international obligations and the persistent calls of the OIC to its member states and the international community to use such effective political and economic measures in order to put an end to the Armenian aggression and occupation of the territories of Azerbaijan, according to Mammadyarov.

We believe that the deliberations within this contact group will contribute to the implementation of the relevant OIC resolutions and will help to harmonize the individual and joint efforts of the OIC member states to this end, he said.

In conclusion, I would like to wish a successful start and fruitful deliberations to the OIC contact group on the aggression of the Republic of Armenia against the Republic of Azerbaijan and extend once again our appreciation to the OIC Secretary General Mr. Iyad Ameen Madani and his highly dedicated team for their valuable support in the establishment and the realization of the goals and objectives of this contact group, added the foreign minister.

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