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**AZERBAIJAN'S MFA ISSUES STATEMENT ON ANNIVERSARY OF KALBAJAR DISTRICT'S  
OCCUPATION AND APRIL 2016 ESCALATION**

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Azerbaijans Ministry of Foreign Affairs has issued a statement the on the anniversary of the occupation of the Kalbajar district of Azerbaijan in 1993 and April escalation of 2016.

The statement reads:

On April 2, 1993 the Kalbajar district of Azerbaijan was occupied by armed forces of Armenia. Kalbajar located beyond the Nagorno-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan was occupied as a result of an offensive operation mainly carried out from the territory of Armenia by use of heavy weaponry, Mi-24 helicopter gunships and advanced fixed-wing aircrafts of Armenia.

As a result of the occupation, up to 60.000 inhabitants of Kalbajar were subjected to ethnic cleansing and expelled from their native lands, 511 innocent civilians were killed, 321 persons were taken hostage or went missing. Currently, more than 70,000 Kalbajar residents are temporarily residing in different regions of Azerbaijan as internally displaced persons (IDPs).

Armenian occupation destroyed the rich historical-cultural heritage of Kalbajar.

The original architectural features of cloisters belonging to the ancient Albanian Christian heritage of Azerbaijan and having no connection with the Armenian Church were changed and armenianized.

Natural mineral resources of Kalbajar are subject to illegal exploitation. Armenia, in blatant violation of the international humanitarian law, transfers settlers of Armenian origin to the occupied Kalbajar district, with a view to change demographic features of these territories.

In response to the occupation of the Kalbajar district, on 6 April, 1993 UN Security Council adopted Resolution 822, which reaffirmed the inviolability of international borders and the inadmissibility of the use of force for the acquisition of territory and demanded immediate withdrawal of all occupying forces from the Kalbajar district and other recently occupied areas of Azerbaijan. Following the adoption of this, the CSCE Minsk Group worked out the timetable of urgent steps to implement the resolution.

Armenia until now continues to disregard the implementation demands of the UN SC resolutions.

Escalation of the situation along the line of contact on April 2, 2016 as the result of attacks by the

armed forces of Armenia on settlements densely populated Azerbaijani civilians with heavy weapons once again demonstrated that the illegal presence of armed forces of Armenia in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan remains a major threat to regional peace and security. In response to the attacks of Armenia, the Armed Forces of Azerbaijan have taken countermeasures, which resulted in providing security for the Azerbaijani civilians residing in close vicinity of the line of contact through the liberation of strategically important territories and heights from occupation.

Armenia has to understand that the occupation of Azerbaijan's lands, including Kalbajar district is temporary. Armenia is responsible for all the illegal activities in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan and sooner or later the aggressor state will respond for its unlawful actions.

The Armenian side must cease its policy of annexation and ethnic cleansing, and comply with its international obligations, as well as the demands of the UN SC resolutions and decisions of other international organizations.

The only way to achieve a durable and lasting peace is to ensure the unconditional and complete withdrawal of the Armenian armed forces from the occupied territories of Azerbaijan, the exercise by the forcibly displaced persons of their inalienable right to return to their places of origin in safety and dignity.

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