
**■■■■■■■■■■ OF NATURAL RESOURCES ON THE TERRITORIES OF AZERBAIJAN
OCCUPIED BY ARMENIA SHOULD BE ON THE AGENDA OF THE WORLD COMMUNITY'**

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Armenias aggression against Azerbaijan has been going for 30 years. During this period, Armenia's aggressive policy has been intensively reflected in its illegal activities at various levels. The Armenian government's supportive actions regarding aggression against Azerbaijan, the attempts to present baseless lies to the international community, and the steps taken to carry out illegal economic activities in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan are an integral part of this aggressive policy, said Chairman of Executive Board of the State Agency for Management of Mineral Resources Samir Gurbanov.

It should be noted that the occupying regime is ruthlessly exploiting minerals, non-ferrous and ferrous metals, mineral waters, as well as other freshwater resources, forestlands in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan and systematically destroys flora and fauna.

According to official data, 163 deposits locates in the occupied territories, which cover different types of minerals.

A large part of Azerbaijan's mineral resources is located in the occupied territories. Therefore illegal and intense mining activities mostly targeted gold, silver, copper, molybdenum, mercury deposits prevailing in the territories of Kalbajar, Lachin, Tartar, Aghdam, iron and chromium deposits covering the territory of Jabrayil, Kalbajar, Lachin, sulfur deposits located in the territories of Tartar, Kalbajar, and sand, gravel, clay and other mineral deposits that covered by Aghdam, Fizuli, Jabrayil.

Revenues earned from illegal mining of minerals are accountable for the significant part of finance obtained from illicit activities in the occupied territories and build a basis for the occupying regime's financial security. Also, I would like to emphasize that many foreign companies including Vallex Group, Base Metals, GeoProMining, GoldStar and others have been involved in such illegal activities,

Our government has taken systematic measures to draw the world communitys attention to the illegal activities carried out by the Armenian occupying forces and their foreign partners within Azerbaijan's borders. For instance, in 2016, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan published a special report called "Illegal economic and other activities in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan." It provides detailed information on all aspects of illegal economic

activities. The report also presented detailed comments on the consequences of such activities in the light of international law. The report emphasizes violation of the requirements of the 1949 Geneva Convention for the Protection of Civilian Persons in War, the IV Hague Convention on the Laws and Customs of War on the Land, and many international human rights conventions. Also, the document underlined the most severe violations and the obligations of Armenia raised as a result of the mentioned situation. I want to emphasize that the publication of the report in English leads to the timely and accurate informing of the international community.

The Prosecutor General's Office of the Republic of Azerbaijan also initiated several criminal cases against various Armenian and foreign citizens engaged in illegal business activities in the occupied territories, and illegally crossing the state border of Azerbaijan. The Prosecutor General's Office carried out investigative measures and took various steps against them within the national criminal law.

I would also like to emphasize the initiatives raised by state-owned company AzerGold CJSC. The company appealed to the Prosecutor General's Office with the initiative against companies engaged in illegal exploitation and trade of non-ferrous metals in the occupied territories. Based on this appeal and the submitted materials, a relevant criminal case was initiated in March 2018, and currently, the investigation is continuing. The AzerGold CJSC has also engaged professional international and local law firms in the implementation of the project to get a legal assessment of such illegal activities at various international levels.

The continuing negative effect derived from illegal economic activities for the environment, ecosystem, flora, and fauna needs to be strongly emphasized. I recently stressed that the Armenian occupiers and their foreign partners are intensively extracting non-ferrous and ferrous metals, as well as mineral water and common minerals in Azerbaijani territories.

Information from publicly available resources proves that environmental requirements are not met during mining. Resources are actually extracted in excess of the production volumes established by Azerbaijani legislation and international standards, and no measures are taken to prevent the discharge of toxic waste local reservoirs and rivers. This, in turn, leads to the destruction of mineral and other deposits, the poisoning and degradation of large areas of land, and the sharp decrease of fresh and drinking water sources' quality. Another problem that needs to be urgently addressed is the serious damage to the river network of occupied territories. According to the publicly available and official sources, the construction of numerous small power plants on local rivers by illegal regimes leads to the sharp decline in water levels in the rivers and triggers the mass extinction of living species in these rivers.

Regular fires initiated deliberately by the Armenian armed forces in the occupied territories is also considered as an environmental crime. As a result of such fires, large plots of land become unusable, rich forest lands face the danger of extinction, and flora and fauna in the burned lands are simply destroyed.

I believe that illegal economic activities in Azerbaijan's occupied territories must receive a legal assessment through various instances and means and must bring appropriate legal consequences for criminals. The ruthless extraction of Azerbaijan's natural resources in the occupied territories and the fact that illegal mining is the main source of funding for military operations, the systematic destruction of nature, endemic species, flora, and fauna should raise deep concerns of not only Azerbaijan but also drag the urgent attention of foreign governments, politicians who are

defenders of human rights, and democratic values, and it must be the focus of international environmental activists as well. The world community must assess these committed crimes and their consequences, and international efforts to prevent these crimes should be united with the Republic of Azerbaijan's efforts. Illegal economic activities carried out in the occupied territories of the Republic of Azerbaijan must be legally assessed within the framework of relevant international instances and mechanisms, Samir Gurbanov said.

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