

Crimes committed by Azerbaijan against prisoners of war and civilians in the 2020 Artsakh war

Introduction

International humanitarian law plays an important role during conflicts because it is designed to protect several groups of people. According to the International Committee of the Red Cross “International humanitarian law is part of the body of international law that governs relations between States. International Humanitarian Law aims to limit the effects of armed conflicts for humanitarian reasons. It aims to protect persons who are not or are no longer taking part in hostilities, the sick and wounded, prisoners and civilians, and to define the rights and obligations of the parties to a conflict in the conduct of hostilities.”¹

The Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols combine clear legal obligations and set out basic humanitarian principles.²

1. Soldiers who surrender or who are hors de combat³ are entitled to respect for their lives and their moral and physical integrity. It is forbidden to kill or injure them.
2. The wounded and sick must be collected and cared for by the party to the conflict which has them in its power. Protection also covers medical personnel, establishments,

¹ International Committee of the Red Cross, War and International Humanitarian Law, 2010, www.icrc.org/eng/war-and-law/overview-war-and-law.htm

² International Committee of the Red Cross, War and International Humanitarian Law, 2010, www.icrc.org/eng/war-and-law/overview-war-and-law.htm

³ "Hors de combat" refers to soldiers who are incapacitated and therefore unable to fulfill active duties as soldiers. This category includes the sick, wounded, and detained.

transports and equipment. The emblem of the red cross, red crescent or red crystal is the sign of such protection and must be respected.

3. Captured combatants are entitled to respect for their lives, dignity, personal rights and convictions. They must be protected against all acts of violence and reprisals. They must have the right to correspond with their families and to receive relief.
4. Civilians under the authority of a party to the conflict or an occupying power of which they are not nationals are entitled to respect for their lives, dignity, personal rights and convictions.
5. Everyone must be entitled to benefit from fundamental judicial guarantees. No one must be sentenced without previous judgment pronounced by a regularly constituted court. No one must be held responsible for an act he has not committed. No one must be subjected to physical or mental torture, corporal punishment or cruel or degrading treatment.
6. Parties to a conflict and members of their armed forces do not have an unlimited choice of methods and means of warfare. It is prohibited to employ weapons or methods of warfare of a nature to cause unnecessary losses or excessive suffering.

Parties to a conflict must at all times distinguish between the civilian population and combatants in order to spare civilian population and property. Adequate precautions shall be taken in this regard before launching an attack.

September 27, 2020, marked the beginning of the war between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh). The Azerbaijani army launched an attack along the entire line of contact, violating the truce reached years earlier. During this war and after it, the

Azerbaijani army violated the norms of humanitarian law and committed truly terrible war crimes, from the execution of captives to the beheading of civilians. Videos and photos posted on various social networks by Azerbaijani users are proof of these crimes. The war crimes committed by Azerbaijan will be discussed in this paper one by one, indicating the relevant norms of humanitarian law.

Crimes committed against military personnel

As mentioned above, the four Geneva Conventions establish clear obligations and rights for belligerents. An important part of these conventions are the obligations of the parties to the conflict regarding humane treatment of the wounded and sick, prisoners of war, etc. Article 12 of the First Geneva Convention, dedicated to the treatment of the wounded and sick under the power of either party to a conflict, provides that "Members of the armed forces and other persons who are wounded or sick, shall be respected and protected in all circumstances." In the second paragraph of the article, an explanation is given of how the wounded and sick can and cannot be treated "They shall be treated humanely and cared for by the Party to the conflict in whose power they may be, without any adverse distinction founded on sex, race, nationality, religion, political opinions, or any other similar criteria. Any attempts upon their lives, or violence to their persons, shall be strictly prohibited; in particular, they shall not be murdered or exterminated, subjected to torture or to biological experiments; they shall not wilfully be left without medical assistance and care, nor shall conditions exposing them to contagion or infection be created." Article 13 of the First Geneva Convention states that "The

Present Convention shall apply to the wounded and sick ... Members of the armed forces of a Party to the conflict as well as members of militias or volunteer corps forming part of such armed forces." Article 14 of the same convention provides that the above persons who fall into the hands of the enemy are considered prisoners of war, "and the provisions of international law concerning prisoners of war shall apply to them." Article 4 of Geneva Convention III defines "prisoners of war" as individuals who have fallen into the power of the enemy.

Articles 12-16 provide for the general conditions of treatment of prisoners of war by the Detaining Power. They state that prisoners should be treated in a humane manner throughout their time in captivity. Their honor and persons must be respected in all circumstances and in no case must they be subjected to violence, physical harm, reprisal, intimidation, or discrimination. With physical violence certainly having detrimental effects on mental health, prisoners must also be protected from acts or omissions which would impair their morale or degrade their dignity and sense of honor. Because POWs are vulnerable individuals who have suffered defeat from the hands of the enemy, it is especially important to maintain their sense of civil capacity.⁴

The Azerbaijani side not only did not follow the rules of the Geneva Conventions, but also grossly violated all the above-mentioned norms even though it is a state party to the Geneva Conventions. These crimes have been recognized and condemned by a number of international organizations and media giants, such as Human Rights Watch, Bellingcat, The Guardian, etc.

⁴ Ad hoc public report, Responsibility of Azerbaijan for torture and inhuman treatment of Armenian captives: Evidence-based analysis, (The 2020 Nagorno Karabakh war), The Human Rights Defender of the Republic of Armenia, Yerevan, September 2021.

During and after the war, Azerbaijani users posted numerous videos and photos on social networks, more actively on Telegram, showing war crimes committed by Azerbaijani soldiers. These videos and photos are proof that the war crimes claimed by the Armenian side were actually committed by Azerbaijan. Dozens of videos alleging abuse of Armenian POWs have been posted to social media. Some of these videos were also studied by Human Rights Watch, who expressed the following opinion “Human Rights Watch closely examined 14, and spoke with the families of five POWs whose abuse was depicted. The videos were posted to Telegram channels, including Kolorit 18+ and Karabah_News, and to several Instagram accounts. None of the videos have metadata that could confirm the time and location where they were recorded attached, as it was stripped when the videos were uploaded to Telegram and other platforms. But Human Rights Watch is confident that none of these videos were posted online before October-November 2020.”⁵ As we can see the Human Rights Watch confirms the authenticity of these videos.

In these materials, we see executions of prisoners of war, killings of wounded and sick soldiers who could not actively participate in conflict due to incapacitation, episodes of torture of prisoners of war and other inhuman crimes.

The different videos and photos of executions were spread in social media networks. The examination of this materials show that 13 Armenian solders were executed in Kovsakan by Azeri soldiers. Armenian Legal Center carried out an investigation on this case and proved that this incident took place. Using various techniques and careful study of videos and photos

⁵ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/12/02/azerbaijan-armenian-prisoners-war-badly-mistreated>

posted by Azerbaijani users, the center was able to prove that 13 Armenian soldiers who were prisoners of war at the time of posting these materials were executed by Azerbaijani soldiers.⁶ In many videos, Azerbaijani soldiers kill wounded Armenian soldiers. In these videos, you can hear how they swear, torture the Armenian soldiers before they are killed. These murders are particularly brutal because the Azerbaijani soldiers urge each other to use all the bullets to make sure that the Armenian soldier is dead, they do not hide their joy and pride over killing an Armenian soldier, they show disrespect to the corpses of dead soldiers, etc.⁷ Many Armenian soldiers were executed when they fell into Azerbaijani power. Instead of being properly treated as prisoners of war, they were killed. This is also provable because there are many cases where Armenian soldiers were alive on videos posted by the Azerbaijani side, but instead of being repatriated, only their dead bodies or corpses were handed over to the Armenian side. There are cases when Armenian soldiers captured by Azerbaijani forces were executed when they were used as targets. These crimes committed by Azerbaijan is a direct violation of Article 13 of Geneva Convention III which states that “Any unlawful act or omission by the Detaining Power causing death or seriously endangering the health of a prisoner of war in its custody is prohibited.” This kind of crimes occurred even after the ceasefire agreement. On December 27, 2020, the Azerbaijani army killed at least four Armenian prisoners of war in occupied Hadrut under the pretext of attempting to attack Azerbaijani positions in Hadrut. One of those killed was identified as a 19-year-old Armenian soldier taken hostage by the Azerbaijani armed forces in early December 2020 after the ceasefire entered into force. The identified soldier was seen in

⁶ The Kavsakan incident report, Armenian Legal Center, Yerevan, 2021.

⁷ All the videos and photos mentioned can be found in this website: <https://azeriwarcrimes.org/>. Also there is various articles about Azeri crimes by different international newsletters.

previous videos alive while in captivity.⁸ We can see that the Azerbaijani side comes up with various reasons to justify their crimes against humanity.

Many such crimes were committed by Azerbaijan, but the saddest thing is that there was no accountability. In conditions of absolute impunity, the Azerbaijani side committed the same crimes during the clashes against Armenia in September 2022, executing at least seven Armenian soldiers. These crimes were condemned by Human Rights Watch, the organization noted that this act is a war crime for which there should be accountability, and the organization's director for Europe and Central Asia noted that such crimes should not be repeated.⁹

The Azerbaijani crimes did not end there, the unexecuted prisoners of war were kept in inhuman conditions and subjected to daily torture. Testimony of repatriated individuals (40 prisoners of war and 10 civilians) collected by the Human Rights Defender of Armenia and International and Comparative Law Center – Armenia with the support of the Washington DC-based Armenian Legal Center for Justice and Human Rights and was presented in the report of the Human Rights Defender, shows a different level of hatred of the Azerbaijani people in general towards Armenians.¹⁰

According to the testimony, the prisoners of war were not transferred to the camps that need to be established in accordance with Article 19 of the Geneva Convention III. Instead, they were transferred to Baku confinements and constantly transferred from one place to another. The

⁸ <https://azeriwarcrimes.org/2021/02/15/18-willful-killing-the-staged-diversion-of-hadrut-and-execution-of-armenian-captives-by-azerbaijani-armed-forces/>

⁹ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/10/14/video-shows-azerbaijan-forces-executing-armenian-pows>

¹⁰ Ad hoc public report, Responsibility of Azerbaijan for torture and inhuman treatment of Armenian captives: Evidence-based analysis, (The 2020 Nagorno Karabakh war), The Human Rights Defender of the Republic of Armenia, Yerevan, September 2021.

report states that “the general attitude and treatment of the prisoners by Azerbaijani forces had been abusive, violent and degrading; for instance, Azerbaijani soldiers constantly beat POWs with feet, hands and clubs and made chant degrading anti-Armenian slogans.” Which is a violation of Article 13 of the Geneva Convention III, according to which prisoners of war must be treated humanely during the entire period of their detention. Also, various articles of the Geneva Convention III are designed to ensure the proper maintenance of prisoners of war, to provide them with access to water and food, medical care, hygiene, etc. Combining all the testimonies of repatriated individuals we can say that they were held in awful conditions, and were a subject of constant psychological and physical torture. According to the prisoners of war, the cells where they were kept were either very humid, dry or cold. In all these places they were kept without sufficient access to food and water. In some cases, the Azerbaijanis did not give them food for days, and if they did, they gave them 10 seconds to eat or they poured the food on the ground and forced the POWs to eat from the ground. According to some prisoners of war, when they asked for water, they poured cold water on them and forced them to sleep on the floor with wet clothes, opening the windows of the cells. The quality of food and water was also a problem, as it caused some POWs to develop skin rashes and other infections until they returned to Armenia. All conditions were created to make them feel as bad as possible: from being forced to stay or stand still with their hands tied to a radiator or a heating rod, with an empty bed next to them, to daily beatings. The prisoners of war were able to hear or see the torture of other prisoners of war. One of the repatriate soldiers testified that he was tortured with a skewer, which is not hard to believe, since there is a video posted on social networks by Azerbaijani users, which shows how Armenian prisoners of war are being tortured with

skewers.¹¹ The mentioned video was studied by Human Rights Watch, who met with the families of the prisoners of war filmed in the video, studied the materials provided by them, as a result of which its authenticity was confirmed.¹² Another testified that the guards beat him every 5 minutes. Some of the severely wounded prisoners of war testified that they were not given medical attention for several days and were left to endure pain. According to report “One severely injured captive in need of a wheelchair was so physically injured that he was unable to walk and had to crawl for 20 days. He could not bathe and developed skin rashes.” Another prisoner of war, who was subjected to torture, received multiple injuries, and did not receive proper medical care, completely lost his sight. Those who happened to be in medical institutions were also subjected to ill-treatment. They testified that while they were in different medical institutions, some medical staff beat or ignored them instead of treating them, and for several days they were not given food or water.

As we can see, during the detention of Armenian prisoners of war in Azerbaijan, there were many violations of the Geneva Convention III. There have also been violations of article 17. Under article 17, prisoners of war are required to provide general information such as name, surname, rank, etc., at the same time, the article prohibits obtaining the above information by force under any circumstances. According to the report “Captives were forced to provide military information. They were asked about other soldiers, where did they serve, guns and ammunitions used and serial numbers for each one, and where the weapons were used, commander positions military secrets. They would electroshock, beat them with clubs, ropes

¹¹ <https://azeriwarcrimes.org/2020/10/30/pows-blindfolded-and-tortured-with-skewers-by-azerbaijani-armed-forces/>

¹² <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/12/02/azerbaijan-armenian-prisoners-war-badly-mistreated>

with accusations on lie. Azerbaijani representatives would even collect personal information about family members, their jobs, addresses, phone numbers and more.” Confessions were also illegally extracted from prisoners of war, as “They were forced to make recorded false statements or sign unknown papers in a language they did not understand.” Armenian prisoners of war were also forced to make anti-Armenian statements or say “Karabakh is Azerbaijan,” if they refused, the Azerbaijanis severely tortured them. The videos of these statements were widely shared on social networks. This is also a violation of Article 13, which provides that “... prisoners of war must at all times be protected, particularly against acts of violence or intimidation and against insults and public curiosity.” This implies a prohibition on the use of prisoners in propaganda materials, whether in person or via photo or video materials in which they are featured.¹³ According to report “POWs were also systematically subjected to humiliation and violence publicly—in front of forces and civilians of Azerbaijan. Moreover, Azerbaijani military forces allowed civilians to participate in the inhumane treatment of certain prisoners.” All this and other evidence shows that prisoners of war were actively involved in propaganda by the Azerbaijani government.

The religious rights of prisoners of war were also violated, their crosses were removed and destroyed in front of them. When they asked for a book to read, they were only given a Russian translation of the Quran¹⁴.

¹³ See 17.

¹⁴ Ad hoc public report, Responsibility of Azerbaijan for torture and inhuman treatment of Armenian captives: Evidence-based analysis, (The 2020 Nagorno Karabakh war), The Human Rights Defender of the Republic of Armenia, Yerevan, September 2021.

The above-mentioned crimes are a small part of everything that has been committed by Azerbaijan. Many violations of the principles of humanitarian law in relation to prisoners of war, in particular war crimes prohibited by the Geneva Conventions I and III, were committed by Azerbaijan. The international community must take steps to bring those responsible for these crimes to justice to prevent their recurrence in the future.

Crimes committed against civilian population

According to the Geneva Convention IV, crimes committed against “civilians” or “protected persons,” as defined in the convention, are considered war crimes. The Article 4 of the convention states that “Persons protected by the Convention are those who at a given moment and in any manner whatsoever, find themselves, in case of a conflict or occupation, in the hands of a Party to the conflict or Occupying Power of which they are not nationals.” That is, persons who live in territories occupied by the enemy or for one reason or another fall under the control of the enemy are considered protected persons. The fact-finding activities of the Staff of the Ombudsman of the Artsakh Republic, the results of which are presented in the report of ombudsman¹⁵, 80 civilians killed during the 2020 war were identified and 163 cases of civilian injuries were recorded. According to report “42 of them were killed as a result of targeted strikes, 38 - in captivity. A number of cases of torture and mutilation of corpses, inevitably targeted civilian deaths were recorded. The Human Rights Ombudsman also recorded

¹⁵ Interim report on the cases of the killing of civilians in Artsakh by the armed forces of Azerbaijan (Updated on September 27, 2021).

the cases of 163 civilian injuries, most of which resulted from strikes that resulted in the deaths of others.”

Article 27 of Geneva Convention IV provides that the person, honor, family rights, religious beliefs and customs of protected persons must be respected in all circumstances, they must be treated humanely and protected from manifestations of violence or its threat, insults, and public curiosity. According to Article 47 of the same Convention “Protected persons who are in occupied territory shall not be deprived, in any case or in any manner whatsoever, of the benefits of the present Convention... .” Summarizing the above-mentioned articles, we can say that those Armenians who, for various reasons, could not leave the villages and cities occupied by the Azerbaijani army during the war, had the right to be treated humanely and not to be subjected to violence. However, the Azerbaijanis did not differentiate the Armenian civilian population from the military personnel in any way and in some cases they treated them more cruelly. They were tortured and many were killed. During the 2020 war, there have been many cases of executions, beheadings and brutal killings of civilians. One of the execution cases was investigated by Bellingcat¹⁶. Bellingcat¹⁷ has analyzed and authenticated two different videos of the capture and execution of two Armenian combatants (Bellingcat calls them combatants, but according to the 2021 updated report of the Artsakh Ombudsman, they were cattle breeders who were not able to leave to a safe place due to the blockade of the city of Hadrut¹⁸) captured in Hadrut in mid-October 2020. The first video shows that they are unarmed and do not show any resistance to Azerbaijani soldiers. On the second one the same two people are

¹⁶ Information about Bellingcat can be found here: <https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bellingcat>

¹⁷ <https://www.bellingcat.com/news/rest-of-world/2020/10/15/an-execution-in-hadrut-karabakh/>

¹⁸ The report can be found here: https://artsakhombuds.am/en/document/785#_Toc83492396

sitting with their hands tied behind their backs, wrapped in the flags of Armenia and Artsakh¹⁹. On command, firing began, and they were executed. The Azerbaijani side removed these and many other videos from their Telegram channels, claiming it was fake. The Azerbaijani Ministry of Defense has made similar claims, but investigations and fact-finding by media representatives like Bellingcat show that these crimes did indeed take place. The Guardian investigated and confirmed two cases of beheadings of two elderly Armenian civilians who were also captured by Azerbaijani forces in the Hadrut and Askeran regions²⁰. The article says “The ethnic Armenian men were non-combatants, people in their respective villages said. Both were beheaded by men in the uniforms of the Azerbaijani armed forces. The short, gruesome videos of the killings are among the worst of a torrent of footage portraying abuse, torture and murder that has continued to emerge more than a month after a Russian-brokered ceasefire came into force.” One of these cases of beheading was witnessed by a neighbor who lived near the victim, she saw how Azerbaijani soldiers beheaded her neighbor, an Armenian civilian, in his garden. And after cutting off the head of the other victim, the Azerbaijanis placed his head on the corpse of a dead pig and mocked his body. In both cases, the Azerbaijanis showed particular cruelty, rejoicing, celebrating and proud of their murders. As a result of the search operation of dead bodies, the beheaded corpses of a number of other citizens were found, the beheaded body of an Armenian citizen with a broken hand was found in the village of Vardashat, another one was found in the village of Togh of the Hadrut region, the head of a civilian was missing and

¹⁹ These videos can be found here: <https://azeriwarcrimes.org/2020/10/30/azerbaijans-army-executes-prisoners-in-hadrut-artsakh-karabakh/>

²⁰ The video of beheading can be seen here: <https://azeriwarcrimes.org/2020/12/21/18-azerbaijani-special-forces-soldier-pins-down-an-old-armenian-man-and-proceeds-to-cut-his-head/>

his legs were broken, another one was found in the city of Hadrut with her legs wrapped in rope and her skull severed from her body. Most of the civilians were killed by gunshots to the head or chest or as a result of torture, in both case, signs of torture were found on the bodies of the killed civilians. In almost all cases, those killed were elderly people who either could not leave or refused to leave their homes, and who could not have participated in the hostilities in any way because of their age or gender. Also, among those killed are many civilians with mental disabilities who could not participate in combat operations. I do not know what kind of justification there can be for such crimes, because I cannot even imagine how anyone can be killed in such a brutal way, regardless of their nationality.

The same brutality was expressed against those civilians who were not killed and were taken to Baku. Their testimonies were also reflected in the report²¹ of the Human Rights Defender of the Republic of Armenia.

Article 49 of Geneva Convention IV provides that “Individual or mass forcible transfers, as well as deportations of protected persons from occupied territory to the territory of the Occupying Power or to that of any other country, occupied or not, are prohibited, regardless of their motive.” The article also mentions that when due to material reasons it is unavoidable, “The Occupying Power undertaking such transfers or evacuations shall ensure, to the greatest practicable extent, that proper accommodation is provided to receive the protected persons, that the removals are effected in satisfactory conditions of hygiene, health, safety and

²¹ Ad hoc public report, Responsibility of Azerbaijan for torture and inhuman treatment of Armenian captives: Evidence-based analysis, (The 2020 Nagorno Karabakh war), The Human Rights Defender of the Republic of Armenia, Yerevan, September 2021.

nutrition, and that members of the same family are not separated.” They are also protected by Article 27 of the Geneva Convention mentioned above.

According to the testimonies of repatriated civilian captives, we can say that their rights defined by humanitarian law have been grossly violated.

As stated in Article 49 that family members cannot be separated, and as mentioned by The ICRC Customary International Humanitarian Law Study “respect for family life requires, to the degree possible, the maintenance of family unit, contact between family members and the provision of the whereabouts of family members,”²² captured family members were either to be kept together or to receive regular information about their family members. This does not only apply to the family members who are in captivity together, the family members of the captives who have been separated from them should have information about them as well. The captured citizens, who were captured not alone, but with another family member, testified that after the capture they were separated and had no information about each other. One of the civilians testified that after there was no information about her father for some time, she was told that he died during his captivity. Another civilian testified that he did not have any information about his son after they were separated. Civilian captives were unable to contact their family members to inform them about their whereabouts. And in exceptional cases, Azerbaijanis considered it as a privilege. Civilians being kept in captivity were subjected to constant torture and humiliation. The “proper accommodation” mentioned in Article 49 was not provided to the captives, according to their testimonies the cells where they were kept was humid and cold.

²² ICRC CIHL Study, vol 1, at 380-2.

One of the civilians, who saw two other prisoners, a young man, and an old man with a broken hand, testified that she had learned in captivity that they had been slaughtered. Another level of brutality is described in the report, according to which "Civilians were regularly beaten and severely tortured. One civilian witnessed an older man being kept naked on the floor with his hands tied. The man was sick and died as a result of the abuse, but his dead body remained in the cell for several days afterward." As can be seen from the video evidences and testimonies of civilians released from captivity, Azerbaijanis have no restrictions or exceptions when it comes to killing Armenians. There is no differentiation between the military personnel and the civilian population, between women and men, there is no mercy for the elderly people, women and the disabled persons.

International humanitarian law seeks to protect the civilian population and the normal functioning of institutions necessary for their normal existence by prohibiting attacks on civilian objects. The Geneva Conventions and Additional Protocols state that parties to a military conflict must distinguish civilian objects from military objectives and that attacks on civilian objects are prohibited. In particular, Article 48 of the Additional Protocol I stipulates that, in order to ensure respect and protection of the civilian population and civilian objects, warring parties must always distinguish between combatants and civilian population and military and civilian objects and direct their actions only towards military objects. And section 2 of Article 52 again emphasizes the fact that attacks should be limited only to military objects. Special attention is paid to medical units, personnel, vehicles etc., as stated in Article 12 "Medical units shall be respected and protected at all times and shall not be the object of attack." In addition, under the Statute of the International Criminal Court, "intentionally directing attacks against

civilian objects, that is, objects which are not military objectives," is a war crime in international armed conflicts²³.

During the 2020 war, 42 civilians, including children, were killed and 163 people received injuries of various degrees as a result of attacks on civilian objects by the Azerbaijani side. The Azerbaijani side carried out attacks on schools, hospitals, various infrastructures, such as electricity, communication, gas supply and water supply systems, etc. After an on-site investigation Human Rights Watch concluded that "Azerbaijan's forces used inherently indiscriminate cluster munitions and artillery rockets or other weapons that did not distinguish between military targets and civilian objects." In this article, Human Rights Watch confirmed the attacks on civilian objects, as well as the use of prohibited weapons. All information about these attacks can be found in the General Report²⁴ of the Human Rights Defender of Artsakh. During the war, the Azerbaijani side carried out various deliberate attacks on the hospitals located in Martakert and Stepanakert. The Human Rights Watch also confirmed the deliberate nature of these attacks²⁵. According to the General Report "Based on preliminary data, more than 7,800 privately owned immovable property (residential houses, apartments, shops, etc.), more than 1,310 infrastructure, public and industrial buildings (electricity, gas, telecommunication, water supplies, bridges, schools, kindergartens, cultural centers, factories etc.) and more than 720 cars have been seriously damaged." As we can see, the Armenian side suffered many civilian casualties and material damages.

²³ https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/customary-ihl/v1/rule7#Fn_CE51A79E_00004

²⁴ <https://artsakhombuds.am/en/general-report>

²⁵ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/02/26/unlawful-attacks-medical-facilities-and-personnel-nagorno-karabakh>

The Azerbaijani side committed many other war crimes, such as mutilation of dead bodies, the use of banned weapons, deployment, and use of terrorist group members as mercenaries, vandalism and destruction of Armenian heritage, targeted attacks on journalists, denial on fair trials etc.

The role of social media has been significant in gathering evidences about war crimes of Azerbaijani side. But at the same time it had quite negative consequences. The materials posted by the Azerbaijani side were actually available to everyone, both the Armenian and the Azerbaijani side. The murders of Armenian soldiers and civilians shown in the videos were used by Azerbaijan as a propaganda tool. But at the same time, this video was made available to the families of the said soldiers and civilians. What does this mean? That the family members of these people saw with their own eyes how their loved ones were tortured, humiliated, killed, how their bodies were mutilated, etc. And I doubt that all this corresponds to the norms of morality. There should be specific rules governing the operation of social media platforms that will limit the publication of this type of material.

Prisoners of war and civilians who returned from the Azerbaijani captivity were subjected to physical and psychological tortures, as a result of which they developed permanent health problems. Many families have not been able to return the bodies of their family members for burial. Because of the mutilation of the bodies of the dead, some received not the whole body of their loved one, but a part or its remains. One of the first victims of the war was a 9-year-old girl who died as a result of targeting civilian objects by Azerbaijan. Many prisoners of war are still being held in captivity in violation of the Tripartite Statement of November 9, and there is no assurance that they will be treated differently. Turning a blind eye to these crimes can

create dangerous consequences for the world, because if such a case becomes a precedent of impunity, it can set a bad example for other warring countries. I was surprised by a paradox, it seemed that the whole world was talking about the crimes committed by Azerbaijan, but at the same time it was silent. It is not enough that world famous media newsletters have written about it. Talking alone is not enough to stop war crimes, it is more important to take action such as sanctions to prevent future crimes or to prevent one crime from developing into another.

It is for this reason that Azerbaijan, enjoying the complete absence of punishment, created a humanitarian crisis in Artsakh by closing the only road from Artsakh to Armenia, which is used to transport people with serious health problems to hospitals in Armenia, to transport 400 tons of essential goods from Armenia to Artsakh per day, etc. As it is the only road connecting Artsakh and Armenia, people in Artsakh are completely isolated from the rest of the world, unable to exercise their basic human right of free movement.

I hope that international law will restore my lost faith in it and protect the Armenians of Artsakh who are in a difficult situation now.