

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER OF THE REPUBLIC  
OF ARTSAKH



# REPORT

ON THE VIOLATIONS  
OF INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE  
HUMAN RIGHTS AS A RESULT  
OF AZERBAIJAN'S BLOCKADE OF  
ARTSAKH (NAGORNO KARABAKH)



SIX  
MONTHS



STEPANAKERT 2023

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## Introduction

Since December 12, 2022, at around 10:30 am (GMT+4), a group of Azerbaijanis in civilian clothes, presenting themselves as alleged “environmental activists” blocked the only road, Goris – Stepanakert Highway, which passes through the Lachin (Berdzor) corridor connecting Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh) with Armenia and the outside world. The so-called “eco-protest” with the documented participation of the Azerbaijani state-sponsored special services agents has proved to be fully orchestrated by the Azerbaijani government.<sup>1</sup>

On April 23, 2023, Azerbaijan announced the installation of an illegal Azerbaijani checkpoint on the bridge over the Hakari river on the Goris-Stepanakert Highway. On April 28, after Azerbaijan completed the construction and equipped the checkpoint, the so-called Azerbaijani “environmental activists” announced that they were leaving the blocked section of the road, whilst the representatives of Azerbaijani police and other services replaced them. As a result of these developments, since April 23, the Goris-Stepanakert Highway has actually been blocked by Azerbaijan in two sections – in the area of Shushi and at the Hakari bridge. As a result of the installation of the illegal checkpoint by Azerbaijan, the communities of Yeghtsahogh, Hin Shen, Mets Shen and Lisagor of the Shushi district of the Republic of Artsakh found themselves in a double blockade.

As a result, the ongoing blockade has physically obstructed the sole road of life of Artsakh for 6 months already (182 days), leaving its entire population, 120,000 people, including 30,000 children, in a state of total isolation, facing massive violations of individual and collective human rights, as well as multifaceted existential and security threats.

Along with the ongoing blockade of the Lachin corridor, Azerbaijan has also deliberately disrupted the operation of the critical infrastructure of Artsakh (natural gas supply, electricity supply, Internet and mobile communication) with the aim to further aggravate the already dire humanitarian crisis and cause excessive human sufferings to the Artsakh people.<sup>2</sup>

Moreover, in the period after the Trilateral Statement on Ceasefire<sup>3</sup>, signed by the leaders of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and the Russian Federation on November 9, 2020, the Azerbaijani side has repeatedly grossly violated the provisions of the Statement, resorting to military escalation, disrupting the normal life and activity of the civilian

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1 “The Azerbaijani government’s “eco-activist” agents who blockaded the only road of life connecting Artsakh to Armenia and the outside world”, Center for Law and Justice “Tatoyan” Foundation, Human Rights Ombudsman of Artsakh, [https://tatoyanfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/ECO\\_ACTIVISTS\\_22,02.2023V2.pdf?fbclid=IwAR3CUadchpJxZPX51cozPuZyGoVEaP1JeNn1dRbZDigq1h0JQgs8spUNaL4](https://tatoyanfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/ECO_ACTIVISTS_22,02.2023V2.pdf?fbclid=IwAR3CUadchpJxZPX51cozPuZyGoVEaP1JeNn1dRbZDigq1h0JQgs8spUNaL4)

2 “Interim Report On The Violations Of Human Rights Of Artsakh People As A Result Of The Deliberate Disruption Of Critical Infrastructure In The Midst Of The Blockade Of Artsakh By Azerbaijan Since December 12, 2022,” Human Rights Ombudsman of Artsakh, January 23, 2023, <https://artsakhombuds.am/en/document/987>

3 Statement of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia, President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, President of the Russian Federation: <https://www.primeminister.am/hy/press-release/item/2020/11/10/Announcement/>

population of Artsakh, initiating physical and psychological attacks and violence against the population.

The ongoing blockade of Artsakh and disruption of vital infrastructure by Azerbaijan, as well as the regular and consistent armed attacks, aim at subjecting Artsakh to ethnic cleansing through physical and psychological intimidation, creating unbearable conditions and destroying the indigenous Armenian population of Artsakh.

This report comprehensively presents the constant and significant violations of individual and collective human rights as a result of the blockade of Artsakh by Azerbaijan, which were recorded during the 6 months of the blockade (182 days) as of June 12, 2023. The report has been prepared on the basis of inquiries addressed to state bodies by the office of the human rights defender (Ombudsman) of the Republic of Artsakh, conducted studies and information received from interviews and open sources.

In each right's section, certain pictures and human stories are presented with the aim to better reflect the reality. Taking into account the need to protect personal data of people, all pictures are either taken from open sources, or are used with the consent of their authors and the persons depicted on them. Following the same logic, the names of the persons represented in the human stories were changed.

This report was prepared on the basis of an update of the previous reports published on the 100<sup>th</sup> day of the blockade on March 21, 2023, on the 122<sup>nd</sup> day (4 months) of the blockade on April 12, 2023 and on the 150<sup>th</sup> day (5 months) of the blockade on May 12, 2023.<sup>4</sup>

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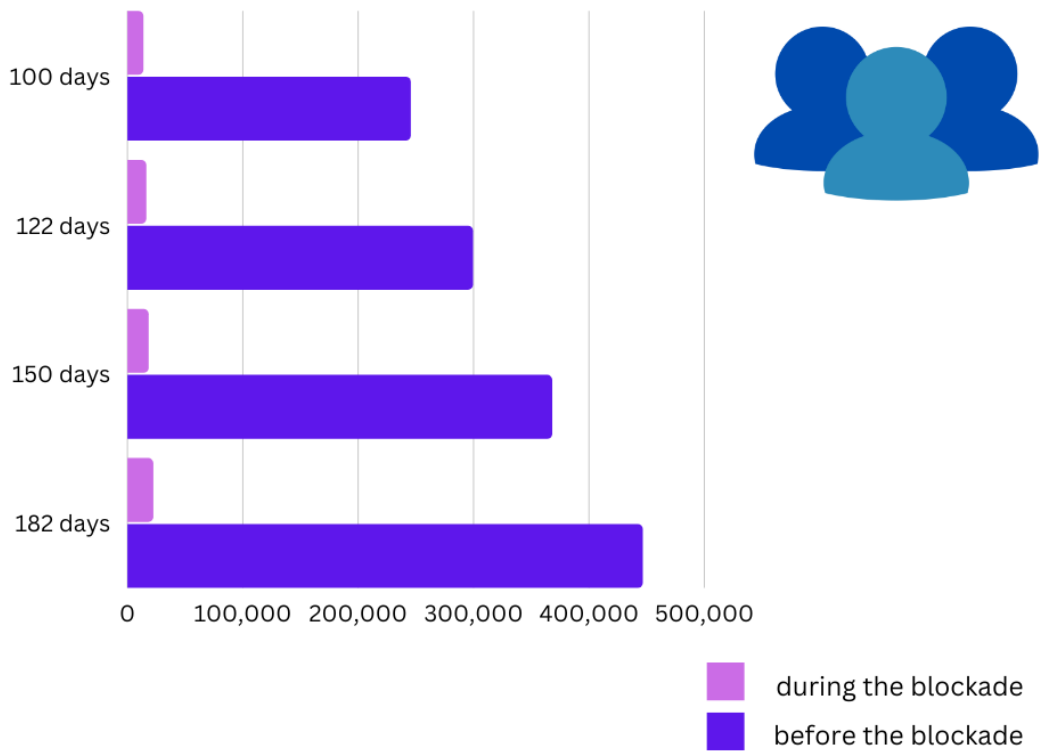
<sup>4</sup> "REPORT ON THE VIOLATIONS OF INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE HUMAN RIGHTS AS A RESULT OF AZERBAIJAN'S BLOCKADE OF ARTSAKH (NAGORNO-KARABAKH) (100 DAYS)", the Human Rights Defender of the Republic of Artsakh, March 21, 2023, <https://artsakhombuds.am/en/document/100>;  
"REPORT ON THE VIOLATIONS OF INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE HUMAN RIGHTS AS A RESULT OF AZERBAIJAN'S BLOCKADE OF ARTSAKH (NAGORNO-KARABAKH). 122 DAYS (4 MONTHS)", the Human Rights Defender of the Republic of Artsakh, April 12, 2023, <https://artsakhombuds.am/en/document/1013>;  
"REPORT ON THE VIOLATIONS OF INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE HUMAN RIGHTS AS A RESULT OF AZERBAIJAN'S BLOCKADE OF ARTSAKH (NAGORNO-KARABAKH). 150 DAYS (5 MONTHS)", the Human Rights Defender of the Republic of Artsakh, May 12, 2023, <https://artsakhombuds.am/en/document/1022>.

## **I. Individual Rights**

The main consequences of the blockade of 120,000 people, the disruption of vital infrastructure, the violation of individual rights and people's direct sufferings are presents below.

### **1. The Right to Freedom of Movement**

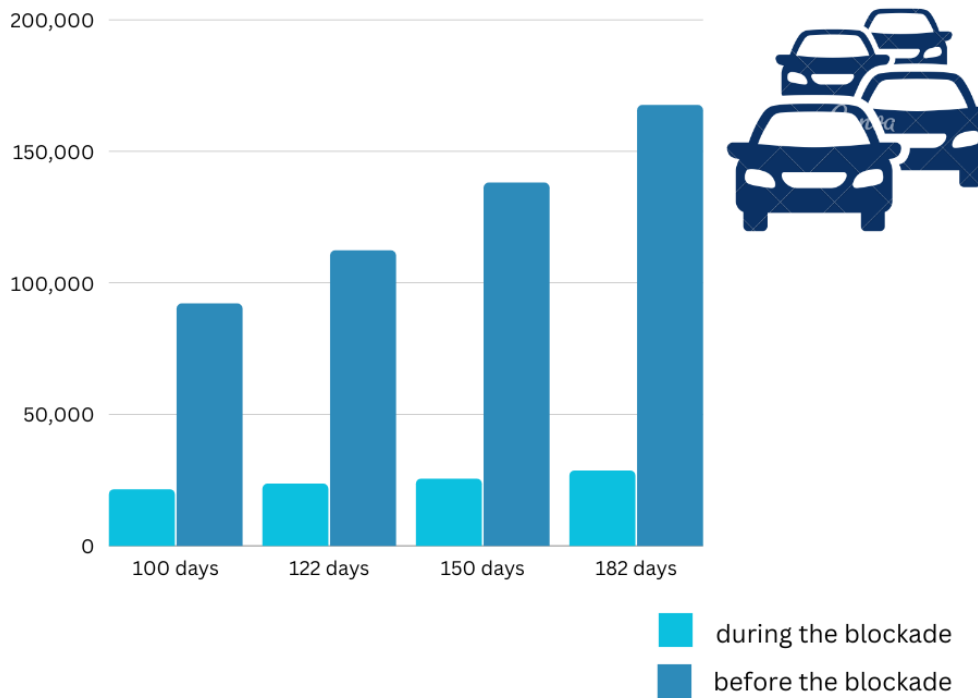
1. Restrictions on the right to freedom of movement have adversely affected almost all human rights. The illegal checkpoint set up by the Azerbaijani authorities at the Hakari Bridge since April 23 revealed the true intention and goal of the Azerbaijani authorities of blocking and isolating Artsakh from the outside world.
2. People of Artsakh are transferred to Armenia with the help of the ICRC or the Russian peacekeeping forces only in urgent cases, such as serious health issues or family reunion. Since the installation of the illegal checkpoint over the Hakari bridge, people are forced to go through various checks by Azerbaijanis, including passport control, which is fraught with the transfer of their personal data to state services of Azerbaijan against their will. Additionally, the Azerbaijani side takes videos and photos of the Artsakh people passing through the illegal checkpoint without their permission and further circulates them on the internet in order to mislead the international community.
3. Before the blockade, an average of around 2,450 people were passing through the Stepanakert-Goris highway in both directions on a daily basis, which means that in ordinary conditions during 182 days there would be 445,900 entries and departures to Artsakh. While during the mentioned period of time, 2,246 persons (1,484 – members of separated families, 762 – patients and accompanying persons) were transferred on both directions with the help of the International Committee of Red Cross (ICRC) and Russian peacekeeping mission. This means that during 182 days of blockade, the movement of people has decreased by 198 times.



### Number of Citizens Passing through the Goris-Stepanakert Highway in Both Directions

Chart 1. Number of citizens entering and exiting Artsakh during the blockade

4. Even in these conditions, sometimes issues arise in the movement of people by the Russian peacekeepers and the Red Cross. One of such cases was recorded on April 4, when Russian peacekeepers tried to transport 27 citizens of Artsakh from the city of Goris in Armenia to Stepanakert, but the Azerbaijani side banned them from entering the blocked section of the road. The five-hour negotiations did not yield any results, moreover, psychological intimidation of the waiting people led to the deterioration of well-being of 4 women, 3 of whom fainted, as a result of which they were taken to the republican medical center of Stepanakert, while the remaining 23 were forced to return back to Goris.
5. Before the blockade, an average of around 920 vehicles were passing through the Stepanakert-Goris highway in both directions on a daily basis, which means that in ordinary conditions during 182 days there would be 167,440 entries and departures to Artsakh. While during the mentioned period of time, only the vehicles of ICRC and Russian peacekeepers have passed (in total 2,867 entries and departures to Artsakh, including empty cargoes which left Stepanakert for Goris to deliver humanitarian aid). This means that during 182 days of blockade almost 58 times less vehicle movement was recorded than should have been in case of no blockade.



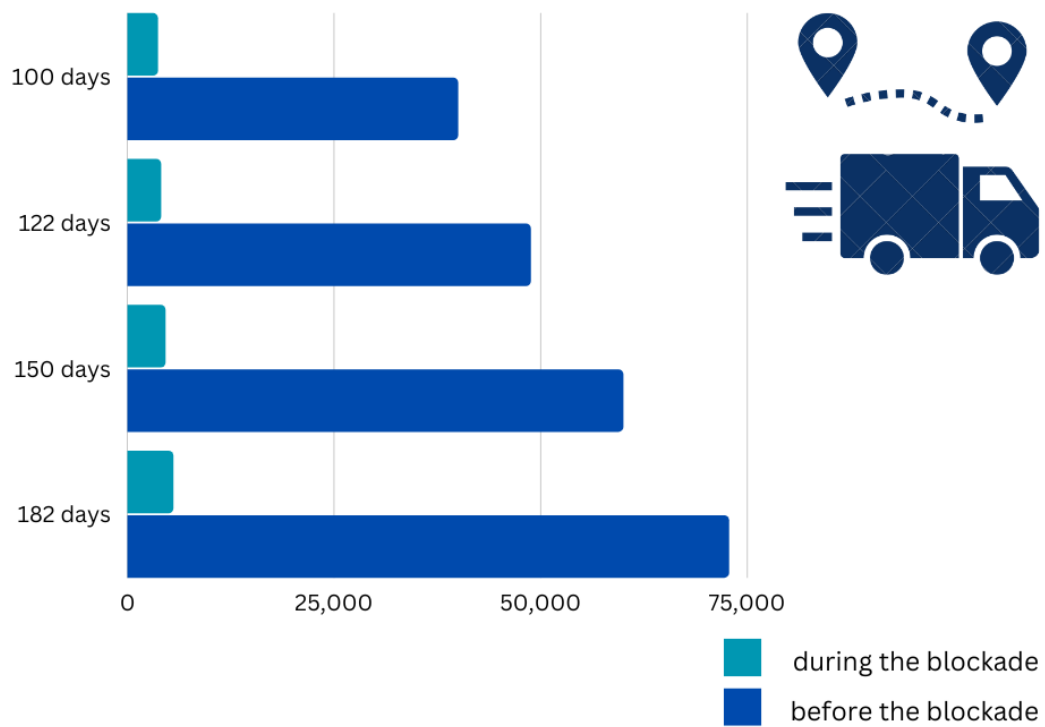
### Number of Vehicles Passing through the Goris-Stepanakert Highway in Both Directions

*Chart 2. Number of vehicles entering and exiting Artsakh during the blockade*



*Image 1: The ICRC vehicle passes through the blocked section of the road*

6. Before the blockade, an average of 400 tons of various goods were imported to Artsakh every day to meet people's vital needs. This means that during 182 days of blockade there should have been an import of 72,800 tons of goods, while during the mentioned period of time of around 5,574 tons of goods, mostly food and medicine, have been imported to Artsakh through the ICRC and the Russian peacekeeping mission, which is around 13 times less than in case of no blockade.



### Amount (per ton) of Goods Imported to Artsakh through the Goris-Stepanakert Highway

Chart 3. The amount of goods imported to Artsakh during the blockade

7. Before the blockade, an average of 201 tons goods and materials were exported from Artsakh on a daily basis, while during blockade exports have been completely suspended, which means that during the 182 days of the blockade more than 36,582 tons of goods and materials were not exported from Artsakh.
8. On the first day of the blockade, about 1,100 people (including about 270 children) were stranded on the road who had to return home immediately. A total of about 3,900 people, including 570 children, persons temporarily working in Artsakh and Armenia, students from Artsakh studying in Armenia who were supposed to visit their families for at least the New Year, Christmas and Easter holidays, were unable to return home.



Image 2: A child separated from his parents due to the blockade



9. In the conditions of severe shortage of fuel, internal movement of both public transport and private vehicles has been significantly affected. This problem has become even more acute during gas supply disruptions as more than half of the total number of vehicles in Artsakh run on gas.

**Story №1:**

**80-year-old Lida from Chartar** suffered from a terminal cancer of lungs with multiple metastases through her body. Before the blockade she was taken to Yerevan for a pre-planned chemotherapy followed by a surgery. During the blockade her health situation suddenly worsened and doctors did not manage to save her life, so she died at the hospital of Yerevan. Her only son, 50-year-old Arshak got no chance to pay his last respects to his mother, as he is currently stuck on the other side of the blockade with no possibility to move freely in or out of Artsakh. Thus, Lida's family was not able to bring her body back to Artsakh to bury her in her native land. Lida was buried in Armenia, however, her son waits for the road to open to bring her mother's remains back and rebury her in Artsakh.

**Story №2:**

**23-year-old Mariam from Stepanakert together with her 30-year-old husband Ruben** went shopping to Goris for a day on December 12, 2022, and were not able to come back home ever since. They left their newborn child, 3-month-old Sevak, with Mariam's 55-year-old mother. In an interview with the Human Rights Ombudsman Mariam said: "I couldn't even imagine in my worst nightmare that I will be separated from my baby for such a long time. Every time I call my mother and she shows me my son, I can't hold my tears and I start to cry my heart out. When I think of him out there, left without parental love, warmth and care, my heart just breaks. I feel so guilty. My mother and Sevak have been freezing out during the rolling blackouts and disruption of the gas supply by Azerbaijanis. Sevak doesn't like darkness, so he starts to cry, once the lights go out. My mother has a chronic disease, she is not able to go and queue for food for hours, nor she is able to go and search for the necessary infant formula for Sevak all over Stepanakert. I will not forgive myself if something bad happens to my baby. This whole situation drives me crazy, I am having panic attacks and mental breakdowns all the time. My husband is nervous too, he had his hair greying due to this situation. We are deprived of our basic right to go home and hug our own baby. Why did we deserve so much hatred from our neighbours?"

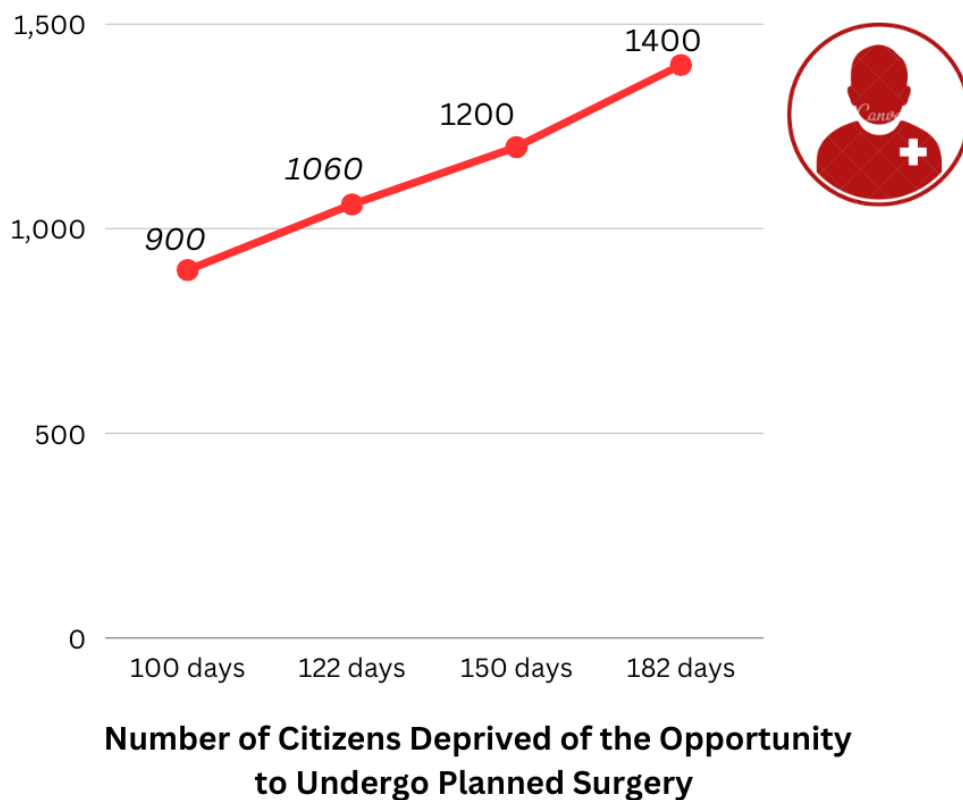
**While preparing the report the Ombudsman office was informed that Mariam and Ruben have already returned to home with support of ICRC.**

## **2. The Right to Physical and Mental Health**

10. There were great difficulties in transferring patients with severe and special health problems to Armenia, especially in the first phase of the blockade. The ICRC was able to carry out the first transfer only on the 8th day of the blockade. Since the installation of the illegal checkpoint by Azerbaijan on April 23, the ICRC stopped the regular transportation of patients from Stepanakert to

the medical institutions of the Republic of Armenia for several days in a row. From May 26, the transportation of patients accompanied by the International Committee of the Red Cross from Artsakh to the medical institutions of the Republic of Armenia was restored.

11. As a direct result of the blockade, 1 person died during 6 months of the blockade (182 days) due to the impossibility of his timely transfer to the Republic of Armenia. The issues caused by the blockade had an adverse impact also in case of other deaths, but they were not the main reason for it.
12. During 182 days of the blockade, 477 patients have been transferred from Artsakh to Armenia, 197 of whom were treated and discharged from the hospitals, while 280 still continue their treatment. In addition, it is not possible to transfer patients in a supine position, as the Azerbaijani side impedes the movement of Artsakh reanimobiles. However, the Red Cross in Artsakh does not possess reanimobiles, so it transports all the patients in a sitting position via ordinary cars.
13. 1,400 citizens were deprived of the opportunity to undergo surgeries to solve their health problems due to the suspension of the planned operations in all medical institutions of Artsakh. Since January 31, planned operations have been partially resumed at the “Center for Maternal and Child Health Care” and “Arevik” CJSCs.



*Chart 4. The number of citizens deprived of the opportunity to undergo planned surgeries during the blockade*

14. The absence or shortage of medicines and medical supplies is regularly recorded both in medical institutions, especially in pharmacies, the most acute of which is the lack of antibiotics, antipyretics, medicines for general chronic diseases and other types of medication.



*Image 3: A mother in Artsakh looking for medication in an empty pharmacy for her sick child*

15. People with chronic diseases (4,687 people with diabetes, 8,450 with circulatory diseases) are at risk of running out of supplies of drugs provided free of charge by the state. In addition, pharmacies lack medicines that these people need on a regular basis or as required.
16. There was lack and an acute shortage of infant formula throughout the blockade which led to serious nutritional problems for hundreds of newborns. Later, a limited batch of infant formula was imported through the ICRC and Russian peacekeepers, which has temporarily solved the issue.



*Image 4: Empty pharmacy in Stepanakert*

17. A number of hygiene items are constantly in short supply, such as household chemicals, soaps and toiletries, toilet paper, dental items, diapers, women hygiene items, which will increasingly lead to serious public health issues.
18. Due to the continuous stress caused by the threats posed by the Azerbaijani criminal activities and the general uncertain situation, the rates of a number of diseases and complications have increased compared to the same period last year, including coronary heart disease – 61%, cerebral palsy – 38%, complications of childbirth – 12.2%, and a number of other diseases.
19. There is an increase in neuropsychiatric problems among adults and especially children compared to the same period last year. It is evidenced by the increase in children and adults' visits to neurologists and psychologists by 47% and 51% accordingly.
20. There are problems with the food supply of the patients, especially due to the absence or severe shortage of fruits and vegetables which can lead to vitamin and micronutrient deficiencies.
21. The number of surgical interventions for intestinal obstruction increased by 25% compared to the same period last year which may be caused by the lack of fiber in people's diet.
22. Due to the lack of qualified doctors and medical equipment in Artsakh, hundreds of people could not visit Armenia or other countries for recurrent or one-time examinations and/or interventions which has led and/or continue to worsen the health of these people.
23. There were 69 cases of gas poisoning due to the series of complete disruptions of the gas supply to Artsakh from Armenia and its partial recovery.
24. Due to the problems with heating, thousands of families had to switch to wood stoves during heating season, which negatively affects people's health, as exposure to smoke is a triggering factor, especially for people with chronic respiratory and cardiovascular diseases.



*Image 5: People are forced to cook food on wood stoves*

25. Serious problems have arisen in connection with the maintenance of medical equipment since it is mainly carried out by specialists from Armenia or foreign countries.
26. As a rule, citizens with reproductive health problems received appropriate medical treatment at the medical institutions of the Republic of Armenia. Throughout the blockade, 215 couples with these problems have been deprived of receiving the necessary medical care.

### Story №3:

**45-year-old Larisa from Hadrut**, is an internally displaced person (IDP), who, having lost her husband to the April war of 2016 and her son to the 2020 war, is coping with severe psychological disorder ever since and had a serious mental breakdown during the blockade. Her daughter told that once her mother learnt that the road was blocked, she had a panic attack, cried out loud with words “Azerbaijanis will come and kill us all!” and fainted. Her family members had to hospitalize her. Her isolation, anxiety and stress due to the blockade have resulted in deep depression with a pronounced post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), generating hallucinations and suicidal tendencies. Larisa does not recognise her family members, she cries at nights, talks to herself, calls for her deceased son and husband, asking them to take her back to Hadrut. Aggression, rage, anger and loss of conscientiousness are also manifested in her behaviour. Larisa gets triggered by the news about the blockade and sometimes even gets uncontrollable. She is currently under supervision of psychiatrists at the hospital of Stepanakert, however, the necessary medication is not available at the moment, so she is treated with substitutes which are less effective.

#### Story №4:

**63-year-old older woman Nina from Stepanakert suffered a stroke**, when she learned about her beloved grandchildren, 12-year-old Aren and 15-year-old Arina, being stranded in Yerevan on their way back home due to the blockade, as they left for Yerevan together with their school teacher and classmates to watch the Eurovision song contest on December 10-11, 2022. In an interview with the Human Rights Ombudsman, Nina said: “Every time I think of my grandchildren, being deprived of parental care and their normal life, separated from their family for such a long time for the first time in their life, I start to cry. Not letting children reunite with their parents is one of the most cruel and inhumane things to do in this world. I can’t handle the suffering of children, they are innocent creatures, they have done nothing to Azerbaijan. The other day, I felt extremely bad and I had a strange pain in my chest, but I didn’t even realise I had a stroke. My daughter called the ambulance, and when the doctors came to examine me, they confirmed the diagnosis. I am just devastated. Why should we suffer so much? Why did we deserve this?”

**Aren and Arina, together with many other separated children, have returned to their homes in the end of January with the support of the ICRC and the Russian peacekeepers.**

#### Story №5:

**67-year-old Alina, a resident of Stepanakert with chronic asthma and disability, suffered gas inhalation due to the recurrent gas supply disruptions by Azerbaijan.** On February 7, 2023, when the gas supply from Armenia to Artsakh was again cut off and restored by Azerbaijan, Alina was working at the kitchen. As her daughter Maria told the Human Rights Ombudsman in an interview, at some point the older woman started to complain of dizziness and nausea. Being already deprived of nutritious food and energy, Alina was feeling very weak and went to lie down in her room. Maria got scared that her mother will lose her consciousness, and she took her to the hospital right away. As a result of the medical examination, it became clear that Alina suffered gas inhalation, as the kitchen got filled with gas from the cooker due to the gas supply issues by Azerbaijan, and the woman was poisoned. Luckily, the doctors managed to clear her airways and save her life.

#### Story №6:

**38-year-old Gevorg, a surgeon at the hospital of Stepanakert, in an interview with the Human Rights Ombudsman said:** “In the conditions of constant rolling blackouts, recurrent disruptions of the gas supply from Armenia to Artsakh by Azerbaijan, in the absence of diesel fuel supplies, stable electricity and heating commodities, it is quite dangerous and risky to conduct surgeries, especially hours-long and complex ones. Unfortunately, we have had to refuse to operate hundreds of people since the beginning of the blockade. During the winter season, we were facing a serious issue of heating the hospital wards, where we provide inpatient treatment to dozens of people. It was practically impossible to reach the required temperature (20-21 Degrees Celsius) in the wards, even when alternative sources were utilised. The blockade leaves us, doctors, in a very difficult situation, as we can no longer perform our duty to the full extent.”

### 3. The Right to Food

27. The blockade has created problems related to all four components of the right to food as defined by the UN: availability, accessibility, utilisation and stability.
28. From the very beginning of the blockade, the range of food products has sharply reduced and subsequently lacked, particularly almost all types of vegetables and fruits, as they are mainly imported from Armenia, especially in the winter season.
29. Taking into account the food shortage and the need for a proportional distribution of the existing state reserves, a special coupon system has been introduced in Artsakh since January 20, 2023, in the framework of which 10 types of top-selling products are sold in a limited quantity: pasta, buckwheat, rice, sugar, oil, fruits, vegetables, eggs, as well as laundry detergent and fuel among the non-food products.



*Image 6: Coupons introduced by the Government*

30. Before the blockade, about 90% of the food sold in Artsakh was imported from Armenia and other countries, so the blockade greatly affected the quantity and variety of food supplies. During this period, food was supplied from the state reserve and imported in limited quantities through the ICRC and Russian peacekeepers. The level of food security has dropped sharply as a result of the 2020 war, as the most fertile agricultural lands were seized by Azerbaijan.



*Image 7: People in line for bread*

31. In the context of this right, the inability to meet the special nutritional needs of various vulnerable groups (children, people with disabilities, pregnant women, older persons) with the limited amount of food available can be considered as the most acute problem, given the current challenges with regard to food diversity and nutrition.
32. On April 23, as a result of the installation of the illegal checkpoint by Azerbaijan, the communities of Yeghtsahogh, Mets Shen, Hin Shen and Lisagor of the Shushi district of the Republic of Artsakh found themselves in a double blockade, losing their connection with both the capital Stepanakert and the Republic of Armenia. Due to the current situation there have been no new supplies of food, medicines and various vital products to the mentioned communities for a long time.

#### **Story №7:**

**28-year-old Inga from Stepanakert, a young mother of 8-year-old Suren**, has been struggling during the blockade, as her son has congenital lactose and gluten intolerance, celiac disease and many other food allergies, and is now suffering from malnutrition. There is no suitable food for him available at the stores. As a result, Suren has lost 5 kg during the blockade, becoming underweight for his age category. He has also developed apathy, depression and isolation, so he is not even able to attend school anymore. His diet now primarily consists of special medicaments and dietary supplements, but this is not enough, as he does not receive the necessary vitamins, minerals and microelements from fresh food. Although being under supervision of doctors, the child is currently on the edge of severe depletion and exhaustion, which can bring to fatal outcome if the blockade continues.



#### Story №8:

75-year-old Lusine, an older person with diabetes and disability, who lives alone in Stepanakert, in an interview with the Human Rights Ombudsman said: “I need to get insulin injects several times per day, as I have the last stage of diabetes. I have to do it myself, I live alone and I have no family members by my side. My husband died in the first Artsakh war in 1993, while the family of my daughter currently lives in Yerevan. She can’t come to Artsakh and take care of me now, as we are separated by the blockade. The main problem is that there are not enough and stable insulin stocks in Artsakh and it doesn’t cover my regular dosage. There is also no food available at the stores that would be suitable for my special diet either. Besides, I am physically not able to go and queue for food anyway, as I have a disability. I have been feeling extremely weak and exhausted lately, as I practically don’t eat proper food I feel like I am slowly fading away. I can’t stand on my feet for a long time and I want to sleep all the time. Sometimes I think I may die alone in my apartment and nobody will ever notice.”

#### 4. The Right to an Adequate Standard of Living

33. As a result of the blockade and deliberate disruption of vital infrastructure, the living standard of the people of Artsakh has significantly deteriorated, in addition to nutrition and health-related problems.
34. Azerbaijan has completely or partially disrupted the gas supply from Armenia to Artsakh for a total of 117 days (on December 13-16 – completely, on January 17-29 – completely and sometimes by 50%-80%, and January 29-February 6 – intermittently and sometimes by 20%, February 8-13 – completely, February 13-16 – by 90%, March 10-13 – completely, since March 22 till today – completely) by worsening the humanitarian situation in Artsakh and further deepening the human rights violations.
35. Since about 80% of the population of Artsakh (nearly 100,000 people) are gas consumers, most of them use gas not only for domestic purposes, such as hot water and cooking, but also for heating, so the gas supply interruptions led to an additional crisis in heating and living standards of the majority of the population.
36. Due to the gas supply interruptions, gas-heated educational institutions did not operate fully or operated partially for about 4 weeks leading to mass violation of the children’s right to education.



*Image 8: A school closed due to gas supply disruption*

37. Given that in March, 2022, after Azerbaijan blew up the only gas pipeline coming from Armenia to Artsakh, the Azerbaijani side installed a valve on the pipeline and is now able to interrupt the gas supply at any time, the population of Artsakh now depends on an unreliable and uncertain gas supply, realizing that the gas interruptions can be repeated at any moment and for any period of time.
38. Since January 9, 2023, for 154 days in a row now, the only high-voltage power line between Armenia and Artsakh passing through the territory controlled by Azerbaijan (near the village of Aghavno) was damaged, whilst the Azerbaijani side does not let Artsakh specialists to the site to restore the power supply. Given that the volume of domestic electricity production is considerably less than the volume of consumption, as well as the water resources of the Sarsang reservoir are declining, the government of Artsakh adopted a 2-hour rolling blackout system starting January 10, then switched to 4-hour electricity outages since January 17, then to 6-hour power cuts since January 21, while from March 31 – to a 3-hour schedule, taking into account a significant decrease in the electricity consumption due to the weather warming. Since May 26, a new schedule of rolling blackouts is introduced, implementing 6-hour-long electricity cut-offs per day, due to the rapidly decreasing water resources of the Sarsang reservoir – the main electricity supplier of Artsakh.
39. Regular and emergency blackouts lead to deprivations for the entire population, including with regard to heating, hot water, cooking, cleaning, communications and a number of other issues.
40. Given that before the blockade, about half of the electricity consumption in Artsakh was provided by the local hydroelectric power plants, mostly by the large Sarsang hydroelectric power station, water resources of the reservoir are in rapid decline. Therefore, the government of Artsakh will soon have to increase the current 6-hour schedule of the rolling blackouts, which in its turn will further deepen the deprivations of people.



*Image 9: People are forced to use candles as the rolling blackouts continue*

41. Among the vital infrastructure attacked, Azerbaijan has also targeted telecommunication, mobile communication and the Internet infrastructure. In particular, both before the blockade (with a certain frequency) and during almost the entire blockade, the Azerbaijani side constantly causes significant disruptions in the mobile connection of Artsakh via jammers, which leads to general communication difficulties. On January 12, the only fiber-optic cable supplying Internet services was damaged in the Shushi area, at the exact same place where the road is being currently blocked. For a whole day, the Azerbaijani side did not allow Artsakh specialists to restore it.
42. The rights and opportunities of people to receive information and communication are of great importance, especially under blockade. Targeting telecommunication infrastructure not only entails disruption of a variety of works and services, but also deepens people's insecurity, isolation and mental suffering.
43. The blockade also generated issues with the access to withdrawing cash, given the behavior of people in a crisis situation, when they strive to keep their money in cash. To solve this problem, since January 11, a cash withdrawal limit of up to 50,000 AMD per day has been introduced.
44. Due to the blockade and inability to move freely, the people of Artsakh are not able to receive the necessary banking services at their banks in Armenia or abroad, which are not present in Artsakh, such as renewal of the expired bank cards, request for bank statements, cash withdrawal and deposit, and others.
45. The residents of the four communities of the Shushi region – Mets Shen, Hin Shen, Yeghtsahogh and Lisagor, which have found themselves in a double blockade being isolated both from Armenia and Stepanakert after the installation of the illegal checkpoint by the Azerbaijani side on April 23, 2023, can no longer access banking services, most importantly, withdraw cash, as there are no ATMs or bank branches available in these communities. In these conditions, residents

of these communities are not able to withdraw cash, such as their salaries, pensions and other social payments, thus facing serious financial issues.



*Image 10: Queue in front of the cash machine*

46. Although the needs for clothing tend to be of longer term and slow growing, the absence of clothing supply from Armenia to Artsakh due to the blockade have already created difficulties for Artsakh people to meet their basic needs for clothing, especially with regard to seasonal and frequently changed clothes (e.g. female and male underwear, socks, tights etc).

#### Story №9:

**28-year-old Hasmik, who works at a local bakery of Stepanakert, said to the Human Rights Ombudsman:** “Before the blockade, our bakery used to work all night to bake bread enough for the whole neighbourhood [of Stepanakert] and beyond. Our stoves operate using gas, and only during the gas supply disruption we would switch to electric stoves as an alternative source, because they are much costlier. However, now that we have neither stable gas supply nor electricity due to the scheduled power outages, including at nights, the bakery is now operating in a part-time regime. We no longer manage to cover the demand that we used to before the blockade, unfortunately. Half of our staff are now left without jobs. Besides, as you know, bread is the most basic foodstuff that people usually need to sustain, especially in times of crisis. Depriving people of bread means deliberately exposing the whole nation to hunger. This is the real intention of Azerbaijan today – our eventual collective destruction.”

## Story №10:

53-year-old Hakob, an electrician at Artsakh-Energo CJSC, in an interview with the Human Rights Ombudsman said: “Our work has become very intense and stressful because of the blockade. In the conditions of constant disruptions of the natural gas supply from Armenia to Artsakh, our domestic electricity lines have become extremely overstretched, as people rely on electricity for almost everything now. Every day we register multiple accidents on the lines in different parts of Artsakh, and sometimes this chain of accidents seems endless. Unfortunately, it brings to people’s deprivation of electricity for more than 6 hours per day. Besides, many people complain that they are no longer able to perform their daily routines properly. The biggest issue is that household appliances break down quickly due to the regular electricity outages, such as fridges, washing machines, cookers, heaters, and other essential devices that provide for the daily life of people. As in many households hot water depends on gas and electricity, people have to boil water to bathe during the outages and accidents, or have to wash their clothes by hands, often with cold water – just like in old times. In the winter season, this was the most real torture. I see how much our people suffer now due to these inhumane conditions, and I feel so sorry for them. People’s normal life is being deliberately paralyzed by Azerbaijan, making it more unbearable, day by day.”

## 5. The Labor Rights

47. Although most of the companies in manufacturing, construction, agriculture and trade sectors either completely or are currently unable to operate to a large extent due to the impossibility of importing the necessary goods, coupled with the issues of electricity and gas supply, some of them still maintain their workers. However, as the crisis deepens the number of companies suspending their activities, as well as the actual number of unemployed people is going to rapidly increase.



*Image 11: Closed store in Stepanakert*

48. Given the official cases of layoffs, based on the analysis of the reduction of the self-employed and shadow jobs, due to the blockade and disruption of vital infrastructure, an estimated 11,000 people (including the cases of job retention) have lost their jobs and sources of income since December 12, 2022, representing more than 60% of the private sector workers.

49. Due to the absence of gas supply and lack of energy carriers, persons working in the field of transport (providing taxi services, carrying out cargo transportation, etc.), facing the issue of finding enough fuel, lost their stable income.

**Story №11:**

**In an interview with the Human Rights Ombudsman of Artsakh, 42-year-old Arsen, a father of 5 children from Askeran who lost his job during the blockade said:** “I have lost my main source of income because of the blockade, as the grocery shop where I usually work has been shut down since December 2022. As the majority of fresh vegetables and fruits are imported from Armenia, the blockade hit us first and we had to close the shop almost among the first ones. Now I can’t properly sustain my big family anymore. My wife is pregnant with our 6<sup>th</sup> child, but her pregnancy is under high risk, as she is constantly stressed in the conditions of the blockade and uncertainty over our future. She needs to regularly undergo medical examinations, get good nutrition and take pills, but we can’t afford it all now. To feed our children, we had to slaughter our last cattle, which provided our daily dairy products and was supposed to be our long-term source of income. It is devastating, as our normal life is falling apart day by day of the blockade.”

**Story №12:**

**Anna is a 35-year-old woman from Martakert, who lost her job during the blockade.** She lives with her mother Anahit, an elderly woman with a disability, a 10-year-old son David with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and 5-year-old daughter Margarita. As Anna lost her husband to the 2020 war and her father 12 years ago, she has to sustain her family on her own. However, the mining company that she worked at before the blockade, Base Metals, had to shut down until further notice under the pressure of Azerbaijan, leaving Anna in a difficult financial and mental state. Now, she can no longer afford the necessary medication for her mother and has to substitute it with alternative medicines, which negatively affects the health state of her mother. She cannot continue to pay for the special treatment of her son either in the absence of which he starts to develop aggressive neurotic patterns and experiences frequent panic attacks.

## **6. The Right to Family Life**

50. More than 3,900 people have been separated from their families and stranded on both sides of the road as a result of the blockade, of which 1,669 have been reunited with the assistance of the ICRC and Russian peacekeepers, not counting the relocation of patients to Yerevan and their return to Artsakh.
51. The mental suffering of the members of the separated families is compounded by the fact that they did not spend the important holidays of New Year, Christmas and Easter together, including workers and students left on both sides of the road.



*Image 12: Separated from her children a mother cries as she is uncertain when she will be reunited with her loved ones again*

52. Around 550 children have been deprived of the opportunity to return to their family and homes as a result of the blockade, 60 of them have been left without parental care, while the rest – with one of the parents. Only on the 39<sup>th</sup> day of the blockade, with the support of the ICRC and Russian peacekeepers, it was possible to return children that were left without parental care to their families, as well as a group of children together with their parents. Many children are still left stranded away from home, hoping to return back together with their parents or with one of them.



*Image 13: A child separated from his family from Artsakh in front of the UN office in Yerevan*

53. There are still more than 1,200 children on both sides of the blockade, whose one parent is on the other side of the blockade and cannot return home.

54. As a result of the blockade, 452 people were unable to pay their last respects to their deceased relatives due to being on the other side of the blockade. This refers both to separated families and wider circles of relatives.

55. Throughout the blockade, relatives of more than 36 Artsakh people who died outside the Republic of Artsakh could not return the remains of the deceased to Artsakh and pay their last respects, so they were forced to bury them in the Republic of Armenia on the condition of the subsequent exhumation and reburial in Artsakh. The body of one of the deceased persons remains unburied and stored in the morgue, as the relatives are waiting for a possible transfer to Artsakh.
56. Hundreds of students from Artsakh who currently study in Armenia or abroad, were unable to return home and visit their families on the most important holidays of New Year, Christmas and Easter. As the educational year is over now, these students are unable to return home to Artsakh for their summer holidays due to the continuous blockade, being forced to find a temporary accommodation out of Artsakh, which, beyond the caused psychological and mental suffering, puts an extra financial pressure on them and their families.

**Story №13:**

**Lilit, a 23-year-old young mother of 4-month-old David from Stepanakert in an interview with the Human Rights Ombudsman said:** "How am I supposed to enjoy my most anticipated chapter of life as a young mother and wife, when all I can think about is how to warm and feed my new-born baby in the conditions of food deprivation, constant gas and electricity disruptions, absence of hot water and heating commodities? David and I caught a severe cold a month ago and got into hospital. I was going crazy, I was afraid of losing my child! As I am under constant stress and malnutrition, I don't produce enough of milk to feed my son properly, and there is no infant formula suitable for him at the pharmacies either. Also, my husband is a military serviceman and mostly far from us, and my parents got stuck in Yerevan during the blockade, so I am deprived of their help and support in this difficult period of my life. These are just inhumane conditions of living that Azerbaijan creates for us."

**Story №14:**

**Marine, a 38-year-old mother of 15-year-old Ani who got stranded in Yerevan during the blockade for an eye surgery and was left without parental care, said:** "Our daughter Ani was taken to Yerevan by a relative of mine for a complicated eye surgery in the beginning of December and got stuck in Yerevan due to the blockade. Unfortunately, I couldn't go with her, as I have 3 more kids here, including a 6-month-old baby. Till the very last moment, we were waiting for a New Year miracle to happen and the road to open, but we ended up being separated on our most beloved family holiday – the New Year and Christmas. Ani is now deeply depressed, she doesn't eat and sleep properly, she refuses to go out and socialise with people, and she experiences frequent mental breakdowns. And the most devastating part is that I can't be there for her. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we don't even have the basic right to reunite as a family. This is just an inhumane attitude towards us."

**Ani was reunified with her family in February with support of ICRC.**



## 7. The Right to Education

57. Due to the gas supply disruptions, all 118 schools of Artsakh were fully suspended from January 18-30, depriving about 20,000 children of the right to education. From February 7-20, the educational process of pre-school groups, 1-8 grades of the gas-heated public schools, out-of-school institutions, primary and secondary vocational educational institutions were suspended, depriving around 18,000 children of the right to education.
58. Due to the increasing shortage of food under the blockade, all 41 kindergartens and 56 pre-school groups were closed since January 9, while 20 long-day educational institutions were working partially. As a result, 6828 children could no longer attend educational institutions at all or attend it in the extended day mode, becoming deprived of the opportunity to receive appropriate care and nutrition. Since February 23, the activities of the mentioned educational institutions have been resumed as a result of the food and heating issues temporary being resolved.



*Image 14: Closed kindergarten*

59. Due to the uncertainties and threats caused by the Azerbaijani criminal activities, there is a widespread decline in attention and receptivity to education among children which will adversely affect their long-term development.
60. Specific difficulties have arisen in connection with the organisation of education of the children with separated families, and especially those left without parental care, some of whom have even long refused to attend school while being far from their families.
61. IT educational programs were also heavily impacted by power and Internet outages and have largely ceased to operate.
62. Due to the heating and electricity supply problems, there are regular interruptions and difficulties in organizing various extracurricular cultural and sports activities which negatively affects the mental and physical development of thousands of children.
63. Due to the impossibility of leaving the Republic of Artsakh and in the absence of international test centers in Artsakh, local applicants wishing to study at the

higher institutions of the Republic of Armenia or foreign universities, do not have the opportunity to pass the appropriate exams for admission to their preferred universities on time and meet the admission deadlines.



*Image 15: A 8-year-old boy forced to complete school work by candlelight due to rolling blackouts*

#### **Story №16:**

**18-year-old Mane from Taghavard, a village which is now partly occupied by Azerbaijan as a result of the 2020 war, to which she lost her father, dreams of studying at the Medical State University in Yerevan and becoming a traumatologist. However, due to the blockade, she cannot go to Yerevan to participate in the pre-entry exams of the university and apply for a budget-funded place. Her future is at risk, as she is deprived of her basic right to education due to the criminal actions of Azerbaijan. In an interview with the Human Rights Ombudsman of Artsakh she said: “I was told that my father didn’t die immediately. He was shot by an Azerbaijani sniper and bled out for hours before he died. If there was a doctor nearby, who could provide proper medical assistance to him on the spot, he would have probably survived. That’s why I decided to become a doctor to save people’s life in this cruel world. But I lose hope with every new day of the blockade. It is hard to dream or plan anything now. Everything that I ever wanted or loved.**

**Story №15:**

**A 35-year-old Marina, a teacher of history at a school in Stepanakert, said:** “The pupils of our school have become more distracted, forgetful, anxious, less receptive to new information and generally apathetic to what is happening around them. They are less energetic and lively during the classes, as they don’t receive proper nutrition nowadays. We also have children with separated families, they are exposed to depression and stress. There is 12-year-old Lusine in my class, whose father was killed in the 2020 war and whose mother is stuck in Yerevan now with no possibility to come back. She stays with her sick grandmother and often has to take care of her and do the groceries for home. The other day, she approached me in tears and asked: “Miss Marina, what if my mother never comes back home, or Azerbaijanis capture and kill her on the way back? What if I never see her again? My mom is all I have now.” I didn’t know what to answer, I’ve got a lump in my throat.”

## *II. The Rights of Vulnerable Groups*

The blockade of 120,000 people of Artsakh and disruption of vital infrastructure more acutely affect the rights of individuals of a number of vulnerable groups of the society, having both specific and general implications.

### **8. The Children's Rights**

64. Multiple rights of about 30,000 children are violated due to the blockade and disruptions of vital infrastructure, given their additional vulnerability.
65. Children's health problems form part of the issues mentioned in the section on the right to health, including lack of medicine and hygiene supplies, periodic visits of chronic patients to Armenia and other countries, suspension of scheduled surgeries, etc.



*Image 16: Mothers visiting their sick children in hospital*

66. At different times, there was a lack or sharp shortage of infant formula in Artsakh which led to serious nutritional problems for hundreds of newborns. Later, through the ICRC and Russian peacekeepers, a limited batch of infant formula was imported, which solved the issue temporarily.
67. Severe lack of various vitamin-rich foodstuffs endangers children's stable physical and mental development.
68. Uncertainties and threats arising from the criminal activities of the Azerbaijani side greatly affect the mental health and behavior, as evidenced by the 47% increase in visits to child neurologists and psychologists, as well as complaints from parents and teachers about children's behavioral problems.
69. Around 550 children have been deprived of the opportunity to return to their families and homes as a result of the blockade, 60 of them have been left without parental care, while the rest – with one of the parents. Only on the 39<sup>th</sup> day of the blockade, with the support of the ICRC and Russian peacekeepers, it was possible to return children that were left without parental care to their families, as well as a group of children together with their parents. Many

children are still left stranded away from home, hoping to return back together with their parents or with one of them.



*Image 17: Mother talking with her child stuck in Armenia*

70. More than 1,200 children are unable to see one (in few cases both) of their parents because the latter is on the other side of the blockade. As a result of the family reunification efforts, a part of parents and children have returned home, but the majority of families still remain separated, which results in a continuous mental and psychological suffering, especially for children.
71. Due to the blockade, lack of food, disruption of vital infrastructure, uncertainties and psychological terror, children's education is also greatly affected by the cancellation of classes and the conduct of classes in inappropriate conditions, which leads to the decrease in the general level of children's receptivity.

**Story №17:**

**37-year-old Venera, an internally displaced person (IDP) from Hadrut, a mother of 4 children, in an interview with the Human Rights Ombudsman of Artsakh said:** “The education of my children was already disrupted by the 2020 war and forced displacement from our native Hadrut, which affected greatly the mental and psychological state of my children. Now with this blockade, shortage of all vital necessities and food, absence of gas and stable electricity, suspension of school classes, our children are left in the state of a limbo. My children sometimes suffer post-traumatic stress disorder, which got deeper due to the uncertainties and fears caused by the blockade. They started often talking about the war and our forced displacement, resulting in their aggressive and depressed behavior. Azerbaijanis’ hatred towards us knows no bounds. What have these innocent children done to them even? Why did we deserve so much hatred and inhuman treatment? These are just kids, they are not responsible for anything, but they suffer the most in this situation.”

### Story №18:

Every day, 5-year-old Kristina wakes up early in the morning, starts to dress and asks her grandmother to take her to the kindergarten, as she misses her friends and desperately wants to play with them. She was left in the care of her sole grandmother Eliza, since her parents left for Yerevan for a medical examination before the blockade and did not manage to come back ever since. Every day, little Kristina asks her grandmother when her parents will return home and when she will go to kindergarten. Kristina misses her parents a lot, so every day she asks her grandmother to call them. However, as a result of Azerbaijan's criminal actions, the Internet is being constantly disrupted, and from time to time the service is completely unavailable in Artsakh. Coupled the electricity supply disruption and 6-hour-long scheduled outages, it is sometimes impossible for the separated family of little Kristina to talk to each other. As per the grandmother, once she got heavy sick and the little one cried and said: "If my parents never come back home and my grandma dies, what will I do? Will I stay all alone? I am afraid."

## 9. The Rights of Persons with Disabilities

72. Around 9,000 persons with disabilities face additional violations and restrictions on a number of rights due to their disability.
73. The general lack of medicines and hygiene items has a specific negative impact on the persons with disabilities, as it harms their health.
74. Most of the persons with disabilities have special nutritional needs that cannot be adequately met due to the food supply issues under the blockade, which also negatively affects their health.
75. In order to purchase goods (including food) available in limited quantities, persons with disabilities, as well as other citizens, have to queue up in long lines, which generates additional problems of availability and accessibility.



Image 18. A person with disabilities queueing in front of a shop

76. Due to the supply shortage of necessary goods and heating issues, the only rehabilitation center for people with disabilities in Artsakh was unable to provide its services to approximately 1,200 people throughout the blockade which led to further deterioration of their health.
77. On top of the already existing hardships in their daily lives, the uncertainties and threats arising from the actions of Azerbaijan, the isolation and psychological state of the majority of the persons with disabilities have further worsened which in its turn leads to new violations of their rights.

#### Story №19:

**Grigory is a 25-year-old person with disabilities from Martuni**, who got severely injured during the 2020 war and luckily survived. Before the blockade, once a month he went to Yerevan to undergo a rehabilitation course in a specialised institution of Yerevan. Currently, he is not only deprived of the opportunity to continue his treatment, but he is also unable to purchase new prosthetic legs and an arm prosthesis, which he lost to the 2020 war, as well as a new wheelchair from Armenia. As a result, he is deprived of the opportunity to lead his normal life, to get out of the house, move around and do the groceries on his own. Without the necessary equipment, he needs special care and constant physical support of someone. In an interview with the Human Rights Ombudsman of Artsakh, he said: “During the war, I thought it was the worst experience of my life. However, the terror and torture continue every day. We live in a hell now thanks to Azerbaijan, but the world continues to ignore that. I want to live on and recover from the horror I went through almost 3 years ago, but the stress of the blockade is not letting me do that. I don’t know if people realise how hard it is for a person with disabilities to live under the blockade and struggle to do even the most basic things. And there are over 9,000 people like me in Artsakh. Sometimes, I think I would rather die than live a life like this.”

### 10. The Rights of Older Persons

78. Around 20,000 older persons of Artsakh with various special needs and problems live under blockade.
79. Most of the older persons have chronic diseases and need constant medical care which is significantly hampered by the lack of medication and no access to specialists from Armenia or abroad.
80. Due to the already existing health problems, a significant part of older persons has special nutritional needs that cannot be adequately met due to the food supply problems which also negatively affects their health.



*Image 19: As a result of the blockade, the older persons face various problems*

81. In particular, special needs and problems have become more pronounced in case of 163 lonely older persons, to whom special state and social care is provided. Nevertheless, the blockade and the disruption of vital infrastructure deepen their deprivations and violate their rights due to the additional pressure created by the difficult access to food, medicines, services and other necessary goods.
82. Due to the additional deprivations, uncertainties and threats arising from the Azerbaijani actions, the isolation and psychological problems of a part of the older persons have deepened which naturally leads to new violations of their rights.



*Image 20: Isolation and psychological problems severely effect the mental state of the elderly*



#### Story №20:

**88-year-old Rita is an internally displaced elderly from Shushi with multiple chronic diseases and health issues, who currently stays at the nursing house of Stepanakert.** She has been deprived of the necessary and sufficient blood pressure and diabetes medication, as it is now in shortage in Artsakh. The doctors had to switch to alternative medication for a time being. However, the organism and immune system of Rita is so sensitive that it did not accept the alternative medicines, as she suffered a severe allergy. In the conditions of malnutrition, cold and deprivations, her health state has significantly deteriorated during the blockade. Every new day of the blockade is a life-and-death struggle for Rita. Her psychological and mental state has also significantly suffered, once she found out about the blockade. She starts to cry every time she hears the news about the ongoing blockade of her Homeland by Azerbaijan.

### 11. The Women's Rights

83. Approximately 60,000 females (women and girls) live in Artsakh, a significant part of whom also have special needs. Their rights are manifestly violated by the blockade and the disruption of the vital infrastructure.
84. Given the stresses and fears caused by the blockade, as well as hypothermia and malnutrition, there are significant reproductive health risks for adolescent girls.
85. Women face a sharp shortage of hygiene items and medicines which leads to emergence and/or worsening of their health problems.
86. Due to the spread and deepening of social and psychological problems among the population, the risks of domestic violence cases have significantly increased. However, due to their largely hidden nature, it is impossible to provide accurate numbers at the moment.

#### Story №21:

**30-year-old Anush is an internally displaced person (IDP) from Shushi, who lost her younger brother to the 2020 war, while her father was heavily injured to the first Artsakh war of 1990s.** She has suffered serious psychological trauma and stress ever since. She recently got married and at the onset of the blockade she was in the fourth month of her first pregnancy. Due to the blockade, she got separated from her husband, who has been stranded on the other side of the blockade. Her mother, Armine told in an interview to the Human Rights Ombudsman of Artsakh that Anush had tried to commit suicide on February 1, 2023, as she had a miscarriage and lost her long-awaited firstborn due to the increased level of stress, anxiety, depression and malnutrition under the blockade. Now Anush is undergoing a recovery treatment at the hospital and is under supervision of psychologists and neurologists, as her mental and physical state health is very fragile.

### Story №22:

**Astghik, 25-year-old young woman from Martuni, in an interview with the Human Rights Ombudsman of Artsakh said:** “As a person with allergy and specific needs, I need specialised hygiene items, for example, antiallergic cotton sanitary pads. Under the blockade, there is not only absence of those specialised items at the pharmacies and shops of Martuni, but also in general sometimes there is no possibility to find any sort of personal hygiene products. I am embarrassed to say, but women of Artsakh now have to use different rags, napkins, bandages or even cotton wool for their female hygiene. What is this if not a violation of our basic women rights? Just for being an Armenian, we are deprived of the most essential things that all women in the world should have an unhindered access to.”

## 12. The Rights of the Internally Displaced Persons

87. The blockade has also violated a number of additional rights of about 40,000 citizens displaced as a result of the 2020 war, of which about 15,000 are currently living in Artsakh under blockade and in the conditions of the vital infrastructure’s constant disruption.
88. Among the large-scale construction works carried out in Artsakh, the construction of about 3,700 apartments envisaged for the IDPs has also been halted, of which about 300 would have already been put into operation if not for the blockade.
89. Given the significant problems that the state budget of Artsakh faces due to the blockade, more than 29,000 IDPs in Artsakh and Armenia in need of temporary accommodation have not received their 3-month-long housing rent compensation under the state program, which has led to a significant deterioration of their social situation and housing conditions.
90. Due to the uncertainties and threats arising from the Azerbaijani actions, the psychological problems of the IDPs have further deepened, given their already existing psychological issues and fears resulting from the 2020 war.

### Story №23:

39-year-old Aida, an internally displaced woman from Talish village of Martakert region, a mother of 4 children, including one with disability, in an interview with the Human Rights Ombudsman of Artsakh said: “By the end of 2022, we were supposed to move into our new house provided by the government under the state housing program for IDPs. However, due to the blockade, the construction of our house has been suspended until further notice, leaving us in a state of total uncertainty. We have to live in a shelter for now, which is very cold and small for our family. We live for today and don’t know what to expect tomorrow. It is simply impossible to plan for the future. As a mother of 4, I am extremely worried and stressed about the mental state and final destiny of my kids. Their education has been repeatedly disrupted – first by the war of 2020 and the pandemic, then by the gas cut-offs in February-March 2022 and now with the 3-month-long blockade. This is not normal. We are missing our native village and there is no single day that we wouldn’t remember and talk about it. Sometimes I feel like we do not belong anywhere anymore. I feel homeless, and this prolonged uncertain situation gives me anxiety. All I wish for my kids is to live peacefully in their Homeland. Is it too much to ask for?”

### *III. Collective Rights*

A number of collective rights have also been violated due to the blockade of 120,000 people of Artsakh and the disruption of vital infrastructure, which, while having a specific impact on the rights of each person, are nevertheless manifested and affected collectively given their very nature.

#### **13. The Right to a Healthy Environment**

91. Due to the recurrent gas supply disruptions and scheduled electricity outages, Artsakh people were forced to use wood stoves during heating season for heating purposes which led to unplanned deforestation (about 8,200 trees) which in its turn will create additional long-term issues in ensuring a healthy environment for the population of Artsakh.
92. Sarsang reservoir’s water resources have reached a critical point of about 88 million m<sup>3</sup> in May (about 15% of the total tonnage), approaching a dead (unused) volume of about 70 million m<sup>3</sup>. This situation not only threatens the prospects of further electricity supply to the population of Artsakh and aggravates the suffering of people, but has already led to a great negative impact on the environment, including the depletion of sources, deterioration of the microclimate, the decline of the plant and animal species, etc. The failure to immediately regulate the situation and restore the normal electricity supply to Artsakh will inevitably lead to a sharp aggravation of the above-mentioned energy, economic, humanitarian and environmental problem, ultimately, resulting in a humanitarian catastrophe in a short time. It is noteworthy that the water of the Sarsang reservoir throughout the entire period of independence, unlike Soviet times, was used exclusively for irrigation of the agricultural lands of Azerbaijan (about 96,000 hectares), since Azerbaijan has always blocked the

irrigation canal of Artsakh lands. Nevertheless, by deliberate and criminal acts of disrupting Armenia's electricity supply to Artsakh, provoking an artificial energy crisis and forcing the Artsakh side to actively use the extremely limited water resources of the Sarsang reservoir, Azerbaijan, in fact, deprives its own people of the opportunity to receive a sufficient amount of irrigation water from Sarsang reservoir in the hot summer months, in addition to exposing the people of Artsakh to energy, economic and environmental terrorism.



*Image 21: Sarsang Reservoir*

#### Story №24:

**46-year-old Armen, a resident of Martakert with 3 children, like tens of thousands of people faced serious difficulties of heating his apartment due to gas supply regular interruptions.** Armen's family had to switch to the wood stove to heat their apartment. However, they had hardship to find wood during the winter. Armen said following to the Human Rights Ombudsman: "In the beginning of gas supply disruptions under the blockade by Azerbaijan, we tried to use electricity for heating, but since January 10 rolling blackouts started and we had to switch to wood stove. I made heavy efforts to find enough wood, because it was almost impossible to enter into forests with tracks due to snow. It is painful to see how people have to cut many trees in this situation, which will negatively affect our environment in long-term period. I saw such volume of tree cutting only in 1991-1992 winter – under war and blockade."

## 14. The Development Right

93. One of the objectives of the blockade is to restrict and limit the opportunities for collective and individual development of the people of Artsakh, preventing the import and export of goods, and the movement of specialists and operation of vital infrastructure.

94. As a result of the blockade, 48 spheres of economic activity, constituting 83% of the total number, have been negatively affected.
95. During the blockade, the economy of the country suffered a direct loss of about USD 346 million, leading to a decline of about 38.3% in the projected annual GDP (USD 903 million).
96. State budget revenues have decreased significantly. For example, in 2023 within 5 months, 11,893.9 million drams of tax revenues and duties were entered into the state budget, which was 30 percent less than the planned 17,000.0 million drams, and 25.8 percent less than the same period last year.
97. In the absence or acute shortage of seeds, fertilizers, pesticides, fuel and other necessary items, as well as due to the targeting of civilians working in the fields with small arms, large-scale agricultural activities that are not carried out negatively affects the level of development, employment and food security, especially given the urgent need to increase and diversify the local production under the blockade.
98. The construction of 32.6 km road, tens of kilometers of water pipeline, irrigation systems for thousands of hectares of land, 3,717 apartments, more than 40 social and industrial infrastructural facilities has been stopped.



*Image 22: The construction of the apartments for the displaced people are suspended*

99. Due to the blockade and power outages, more than 85% of production and 100% of exports have been stopped.
100. Due to the targeting of the Kashen copper and molybdenum mine of the Base Metals mining company – the largest producer and taxpayer of Artsakh, the mine site is currently closed and its almost 2,000 permanent employees, together with the service personnel of the mine, are currently at risk of unemployment.

## Story №25:

36-year-old Smbat, a resident of Stepanakert, is a textile entrepreneur who had over 30 employees and was exporting before the blockade. Now his business is collapsed, because there is no opportunity to import raw materials and export the products. In an interview with the Human Rights Ombudsman Smbat said: “For years I had built my successful business with advanced equipment and capacities. I had reached sustainable production and was negotiating a large contract with over USD 7.5 millions. However, the blockade collapsed everything and I lost all my existing and planned contracts, because I cannot import raw materials and export my products. Besides, the regular interruptions of electricity supply also made any production impossible even if import and export were possible. I kept the employees for a month hoping that the blockade would be lifted soon, but then had to fire them due to the future uncertainties and lack of financial reserves. Now I’m thinking of doing agricultural business but the blockade hinders it, too, with serious shortage of fuel and machine parts.”

### 15. The Right to Freedom from Discrimination

101. The blockade, the disruption of vital infrastructure and other crimes are committed based on the logic of the state policy of racial discrimination (Armenophobia), aimed at physical destruction and/or depatriation of Armenians.
102. The Azerbaijanis blocking the road and their political-public supporters frequently use slogans and calls manifesting Armenian hatred and threats of force, such as, for example, the symbol of the Turkish terrorist organization “Grey Wolves”, Armenophobic expressions of the perpetrators of the Armenian Genocide, insults directed at Armenians as a collective, etc.
103. The president of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev openly adheres to this policy, too. Thus, in his interview of January 10, 2023 he stated that the exit from Artsakh was open and everyone could leave, and that no one would interfere. This blockade is another proof that the main goal of Azerbaijan is the ethnic cleansing of the Armenians of Artsakh.
104. On February 22, 2023 the International Court of Justice (ICJ) of the United Nations (UN) adopted a decision to indicate a provisional measure to Azerbaijan on the immediate lifting of the blockade of the Lachin corridor within the framework of “Armenia vs. Azerbaijan” case and thus recognised the blockade as a manifestation of racial discrimination against Armenians. However, the Azerbaijani side does not fulfill the decision of the international supreme judiciary to this date.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> “Application of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (Armenia v. Azerbaijan): The Court indicates a provisional measure to ensure unimpeded movement of persons, vehicles and cargo along the Lachin Corridor,” UN International Court of Justice, February 22, 2023, <https://www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/180/180-20230222-PRE-01-00-EN.pdf>

105. Furthermore, on March 5, 2023, the Azerbaijani side resorted to a new terrorist act, in particular, an ambush group of the Azerbaijani armed forces crossed the line of contact and attacked the car of the Police of the Republic of Artsakh in civilian duty, driving from Stepanakert along a road about 1km away from the contact line. As a result of the attack, Artsakh three policemen were killed and another one was wounded. This attack and other violations of the ceasefire regime aim at making physical and psychological terror against the Artsakh people under blockade, which is also a clear manifestation of the Azerbaijani state policy of racial discrimination against Armenians.<sup>6</sup>



*Image 23: The sight of the terrorist attack of the Azerbaijani Ambush against the Artsakh policemen on duty on March 5 2023*

#### **Story №26:**

**13-year-old Lilit fainted when Azerbaijani military forces illegally broke into the bus, transferring Artsakh children back home on January 19, 2023, who got stranded in Armenia due to the blockade. When recalling the incident, she said: “I got terribly afraid of the Azerbaijanis when they approached our car. My tears came on their own, although I tried to hold on. They were screaming, swearing and shouting at us. At that moment, I thought we will be captured, tortured or killed. That was my worst nightmare. At some point they started to film us, even though we tried to hide our faces. My whole body was shacking and I started to feel nauseous. From that moment on, I can’t remember anything – I fainted.”**

<sup>6</sup> “Report On The Terrorist Act Carried Out By The Azerbaijani Armed Forces Ambush Group On March 5, 2023,” Human Rights Ombudsman of Artsakh, March 8, 2023, <https://artsakhombuds.am/en/document/1000>

### Story №27:

16-year-old Mariam is a member of the group of children, who returned to Artsakh on January 19, 2023, and got harassed by a group of Azerbaijanis along the way. Remembering the incident, she said: “All of us froze in fear. Although I was trying to stay calm and hide my anxiety from my friends, my hands were sweating and my legs were shaking. I didn’t know what to expect from the group of Azerbaijanis that approached us or what to do in case they try to harm us. I felt so miserable at that moment. And there was only one question in my mind: why do they hate us so much? For just being Armenians?”

## 16. The Right to Self-Determination

106. All Azerbaijani violations against the people of Artsakh are deeply directed against their right to self-determination and the fact of its realisation, in order to finally resolve the conflict to their advantage through ethnic cleansing based on the “no people, no rights” logic.



*Image 24: Rally of thousands of people in Stepanakert for the right to self-determination and against the discriminatory policy of Azerbaijan*

107. The systematic and consistent policy of ethnic hatred led by Azerbaijan, manifested both during the military aggression unleashed against Artsakh in 2020 and after the establishment of the ceasefire by the Tripartite Statement of November 9, 2020, proves that any status of Artsakh under Azerbaijan’s rule is equal to ethnic cleansing and genocide of the Artsakh people. Therefore, in the context of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the right to self-determination is equal to the right of the people of Artsakh to live in their native land.

The fundamental right to self-determination of the people of Artsakh and the Azerbaijani encroachments and threats against their physical existence on the basis of the racial discrimination are more than sufficient grounds for the protection of the people of Artsakh by the international community, as well as the international recognition of the Republic of Artsakh based on the principle of “remedial recognition”.



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