



**Statement by the Delegation of the Republic of Azerbaijan
1116th Meeting of the Permanent Council,
27 October 2016**

In response to the President of the ICRC, Mr. Peter Maurer

Mr. Chairperson,

The Delegation of the Republic of Azerbaijan warmly welcomes Mr. Peter Maurer, the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) back to the Permanent Council and thanks him for the comprehensive presentation.

Over many decades, the ICRC has been a symbol of hope for millions of people suffering from conflicts and disasters in various parts of the world. Acting upon the principles of impartiality, neutrality and consent of the affected country and adherence to humanitarian nature of its activities, ICRC is a reliable partner in addressing the plight of those affected by armed conflicts and other crisis situations.

Mr. President, Your focus on the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict is due to lack of resolution and continued occupation of Azerbaijani territories. The conflict led to the deaths and wounding of thousands of people; hundreds of thousands of people were forced to leave their homes; thousands of people are reported missing in connection with the conflict; one fifth of the territory of my country is still under unlawful occupation. The conflict was accompanied by the notorious practice of ethnic cleansing and other flagrant violations of the peremptory norms of international law. In this regard, we attach great importance to cooperation with ICRC and highly value the noble humanitarian mission of the ICRC with regard to alleviating dire humanitarian consequences of the conflict.

One of the issues that Azerbaijan has been actively cooperating on with ICRC throughout the years has been fate of the missing persons. The State Commission for Prisoners of War, Hostages and Missing Persons was set up in Azerbaijan in 1993 to deal directly with the search for missing persons and hostages as well as seeking their release. It regularly collects and analyses relevant information and established a special comprehensive database on missing persons. The State Commission had also established close contacts with relevant international organizations, especially the ICRC.

As you, Mr. President, stated during your last presence at the Permanent Council in January 2014 “[a]cross Armenia and Azerbaijan, including Nagorno-Karabakh, the families of more than 4,500 people are still without news of their loved ones”. We fully share your assessment that “expediting resolution of the remaining cases of missing persons is vital for reconciliation and stability”. The right to know the fate of missing relatives is a fundamental right of the families concerned and must be guaranteed. Humanitarian issues, such as the issue of missing persons should not be treated as a political tool or a bargaining chip and consequently, should not be dependent on the political settlement of the conflict.

It is with this understanding that Azerbaijan continuously calls for swift implementation of the agreement on exchange of data on persons that went missing in relation to the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict. Almost all of the Azerbaijanis went missing in the territories currently beyond the control of Azerbaijan. We welcome the role and contribution of ICRC to practical implementation of the said agreement. We call on Armenia to constructively engage on clarifying whereabouts of those missing.

We are grateful for the ICRC's efforts in facilitating the release of Azerbaijani citizens held in captivity by Armenia. We regret that two Azerbaijani civilians, Mr. Dilgam Asgarov and Mr. Shahbaz Guliyev still remain in captivity. They were unlawfully captured while visiting the graveyards of their relatives in the occupied Kalbajar district of Azerbaijan in July 2014 and since then have been subject to cruel, inhumane and degrading treatment. Azerbaijan appreciates the attention of ICRC to their fate and efforts to facilitate their contact with their families. At the same time, more concrete steps are needed to achieve their release and we reiterate our appeal to the OSCE participating States to persuade Armenia to release them.

The Republic of Azerbaijan has presented to the international community well-documented evidence, also confirmed by OSCE fact-finding missions and a variety of independent sources, attesting to unlawful activities undertaken by Armenia's natural and legal persons in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan, which include implantation of settlers from Armenia and abroad, illegal economic and other activities, exploitation and pillage of and illicit trade in assets, natural resources and other forms of wealth across the occupied territories, accompanied by substantial and systematic interference with the public and private property rights of the Azerbaijanis forcibly expelled from their homes.

ICRC's efforts should not be confined only to dealing with missing persons or prisoners of war. Promoting and strengthening compliance with international humanitarian law, especially by Armenia as the occupying power, is a key component of ICRC's declared mission. Thus being said, we expect that ICRC will ensure that the fundamental norms of international humanitarian law, laid down in the Hague Regulations (1907), the Geneva Convention IV and Additional Protocol I are duly respected and adhered to by Armenia and its armed forces.

In conclusion, we thank once again Mr. Maurer for his presence at today's discussions and wish him every success in his future endeavors.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.