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Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict: War Crimes Should Be Prevented

Baku Human Rights Club (BHRC) condemns the rocket fire on a densely populated area in the city of Ganja, resulting in death and injury of civilians. As of now, at least 10 people have been killed, 34 are wounded in the overnight attack in Ganja, the second biggest city of Azerbaijan situated 360 km away from capital Baku. BHRC also expresses its grave concern of systematic and continuous rocket and artillery shelling of civilian population and facilities in Mingachevir city, which is far away from military operations theatre (appr. 120 km), as well as in the frontline regions (Aghdam, Aghjabedi, Barda, Goranboy, Tartar, Yevlakh).

Along with the reports of local and international media, as well as official statements of the government agencies, the BHRC's monitor based in Ganja recorded rocket fire in the city at around 2 am on October 11. Our colleague's house is located a few hundred metres away from the place of fire. Our monitors also observed the results of attacks by missiles targeting the Hydroelectric Power Station in Mingachevir, and the targeting of various civilian objects, such as schools, kindergartens, clinics, executive offices, courtyards and buildings, and civilians in the above-mentioned regions at different dates.

BHRC's monitors who are based in these regions conducted general research through visiting areas where the strikes took place to determine the facts and collected information from the relatives of the killed civilians through short interviews. At the same time, the authenticity of the official information or media reporting was checked by comparing it with information obtained on the ground. As of today, the BHRC estimates that 42 civilians were killed and more than 200 civilians were wounded in rocket and artillery strikes between 27 September 2020 (start date of escalation) and 12 October 2020 in Azerbaijan. Among the residents killed and wounded were minors and women. Due to a large number of demolished civilian objects, it was not possible to hold accurate statistics by our organization.

The BHRC states that the continuous and systematic firing of non-military targets is a serious violation of international humanitarian law and a war crime. The fact that the hit areas are far from the theatre of actual military operations demonstrates that these violations were intentional, and were carried out consciously against civilians.

The BHRC declares that the principle of non-targeting of civilians and civilian objects and vital civil infrastructure, enshrined in the Geneva Conventions and the Protocols annexed to them, which constitute the basis of international humanitarian law, must be ensured. Both Armenia and Azerbaijan ratified these international legal documents.

The BHRC calls on the international community to respond adequately, impartially and without delay to violations of the norms and principles of international humanitarian law.

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