

Comments of the Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan to the Report of the UNEP Environmental Scoping Mission to the Conflict-Affected Territories of Azerbaijan Undertaken from 9 to 19 March 2022

The Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan extends its gratitude to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) for undertaking a scoping mission to its conflict-affected territories from 9 to 19 March 2022, based on the request of and cooperation with the Government. The Government also thanks UNEP for presenting the report as an outcome of the mission, describing the key findings of the visit and recommendations for strengthening the environmental recovery in reconstruction planning of the liberated territories of Azerbaijan.

In particular, the Government welcomes the documentation in the report of significant environmental impacts suffered during the conflict, including: the collapse of irrigated agricultural schemes and the degradation of agricultural land; deterioration of the water management system; deforestation, including in protected forest areas; land disturbance as a result of military activities; and land degradation and pollution due to mining and quarrying operations. The Government also welcomes the UNEP mission's specific recommendations to help strengthen the integration of environmental rehabilitation, management and protection into the Government's reconstruction plans.

The Government wishes to convey the following information regarding its understanding of certain geographical names and formulations appearing in the report:

- The "Karabakh region" encompasses the Karabakh and Eastern Zangezur economic regions of Azerbaijan;
- "adjacent districts" refers to the Aghdam, Fuzuli, Jabrayil, Gubadli, Zangilan, Lachin and Kalbajar districts of the Republic of Azerbaijan;
- "Karabakh lowlands" refers to the Tartar, Aghdam, Barda, Goranboy, Yevlakh and Aghcabadi districts of the Republic of Azerbaijan;
- "the conflict period" refers to the conflict period of over the last 30 years, during which time Armenia occupied and controlled almost one-fifth of Azerbaijan's sovereign territory;
- "settlements that were unoccupied for 30 years" refers to uninhabited settlements belonging to Azerbaijanis, who were forcefully expelled from their homes and properties during the aggression of Armenia against Azerbaijan;
- "Bargushadchay" is the recognized Azerbaijani name of the river referred to as "Ishkhan" on page 10 of the report.

The environmental destruction in the liberated territories during Armenia's nearly 30-year occupation and control of Azerbaijan's territory is extensive, and the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources' assessment, restoration and remediation efforts are ongoing. In particular, based on the Ministry's current estimates:

- Prior to the occupation, there were approximately 1 250 000 mulberry trees in Jabrayil District (page 9);
- Prior to the occupation, the extent of the forests in the Forest Fund was 260 311 hectares; approximately 54 000 hectares were destroyed during the occupation period, accounting for 23% of the Forest Fund size (page 12);
- Prior to the occupation, 167 mineral and quarrying deposits had been identified (page 20);
- In addition to the information provided in the UNEP report, the Ministry estimates that more than 200 groundwater well complexes and numerous subartesian wells in the Karabakh economic region, as well as a thermal-mineral water field in the Kalbajar district, were destroyed during the occupation period.

The Government thanks the UNEP Mission for its assistance and looks forward to continued collaboration between the Government and UNEP.