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**CONCLUDING REMARKS**

**by H.E. Mr. Artak Apitonian, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs**

**at the 35th session of the Working Group on Universal Periodic Review of Armenia**

*Geneva, 23 January 2019*

Madam President,

It has been an honour and privilege to present Armenia’s third cycle UPR report today. It was encouraging to see many colleagues here in this hall, with whom we were working on HRC institution building package 12 years ago and, particularly, establishment of the UPR. I remember some doubts shared then on the success of the mechanism. Now we all can proudly state that the UPR is indeed one of the strong successes of the UN system aimed to promote and protect human rights universally.

I would like to thank all delegations for participation in this interactive dialogue, which touched upon a wide range of human rights issues. We also thank all delegations and colleagues who acknowledged Armenian successes in ensuring democratic development of the country. I would like also to use this opportunity to thank all our international partners whose support was, is and will remain crucial for the success of our transformation to make our democratic path irreversible and tangible.

I would like to reiterate that the UPR recommendations will receive careful attention of the Government of Armenia. My apologies to all delegations whose comments we had no chance to reply to, our delegation stands ready to provide further explanations on our practices and developments on bilateral level through diplomatic channels. We are confident that the outcome of today’s review will contribute towards further strengthening the promotion and protection of human rights in my country.

Meanwhile, I would like to underline that as a strong advocate of the UPR, Armenia opposes any politicization of the UPR procedure by trying to distort the essence of the review, which should “be conducted in non-politicized manner”. We reject any attempts to use the UPR trying to divert the international community’s attention from the continuously deteriorating human rights situation in some countries by shifting it to the issues that are out of the scope of today's discussion. In full compliance with UPR modalities and spirit we reserve our comments on the human rights performance of those countries to their UPR sessions.

Madame President,

It is regrettable that Azerbaijan ignores your call to not politicize this exercise. We have to briefly respond. The UN Security Council resolutions to which Azerbaijani delegation makes excessive references recognize Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh as a direct party to the conflict. Those resolutions contain only calls to Armenia only to exercise its influence on Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh with the aim of resolving the conflict. Such a misinterpretation by Azerbaijan of the UN SC resolutions is completely false and constitutes a blunt manipulation of their content.

When it comes to agreed language the United Nations fully supports efforts of the Co-Chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group that on numerous occasions reiterated that the Nagorno Karabakh conflict should be resolved on the basis of the norms and principles of international law, including the right of people to self-determination. Furthermore, as Co-Chairs have stated the free expression of will of the people of Nagorno Karabakh should have a legally binding nature.

As on another recommendation from one delegation on false allegations on glorification of certain historical figures in Armenia, I would like to state that a country that, on state leader’s level, glorifies and decorates convicted murderers, most notable of which is Ramil Safarov, should remain silent on such matters.

It has become a practice for more than 10 years that with Azerbaijan we are not cooperating with UPR process, and that hasn’t started by our initiative. But it might be if we would have cooperated, we would have exchanged our best practices and promoted free and fair elections, freedom of assembly, expression, and media, fight against hate speech and repression of minorities. Hopefully, as a result of this cooperation, our region would have been much better place than it is now.

Finally, I would like once again to thank all the distinguished delegates for comments, questions and recommendations received today. During the period under review Armenia underwent profound changes, which the UN Secretary General qualified as a fantastic example of a peaceful transition of power. Our country has intensified its efforts towards further promotion of human rights, including implementation of gender equality policy, strengthening the rights of more vulnerable groups of population. Various laws, action plans, strategies and mechanisms have been adopted and established. My Government has also given priority to the issue of judicial reforms, independence of judiciary and equality before the law. With this in mind, I would like to state that this UPR session provided us with another opportunity to continue realization of reforms in the country with the aim of further strengthening of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. At the same time, we recognize that despite our progress in many areas there are challenges that we have to meet.

In closing, I would like to thank you, Madam President, and the Secretariat for successful completion of this UPR cycle.