

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, dear colleagues,

It is my great pleasure to address the Assembly of States Parties to the Rome Statute on behalf of the Center for Truth and Justice and the International Partnership for Human Rights. CFTJ is a US based international human rights organization, documenting atrocity crimes and pursuing accountability for perpetrators of grave human rights violations.

Soldiers and civilians crawling on the floor like animals, slapped, kicked and beaten on their faces, stomachs and backs with sharp metal rods and heavy weapons. An entire population trapped in a territory for nine months through a blockade, that prevented the flow of essential goods, including food, water, medical supplies, and humanitarian aid crucial for their survival; no electricity, no access to medicine, hospitals and emergency facilities - imprisoned in an "open" cage to starve to death. Women tortured so badly that death must have felt like a gift. Naked bodies on the streets, the rest of what was left, eyes gouged and replaced with stones, legs and ears cut off, and severed fingers shoved in their mouths. Hours of inhumane and humiliating treatment in prisons, the loss of consciousness due to the torture and the awful fear that every second could be the last of their lives. Murdered people, beheaded by Armed Forces, placed on a dead pig while jokingly stating, "See the pigs next to each other!". Ultimately, 120,000 people forced to flee, coerced by destruction, torture, and killings to abandon their homes and lands, leaving behind all their possessions.

It sounds like a horror movie, but it's not. Imagine these terrible atrocities are happening right on your doorstep, right in your town, to your fellow citizens. Tragically, we are "only" talking about the Armenians, who have been systematically persecuted and expelled for decades by the autocratic Republic of Azerbaijan. This dictatorship disregards orders and judgements of the ICJ and ECHR and talks about the Armenians as rats, devils, barbarians, and viruses.

Most importantly: An autocratic dictator who openly proclaims his hegemonic aspirations by threatening the Republic of Armenia with statements such as: "I said that [Armenia] is the land of our ancestors, that we must return there, we will return and we are already returning there. No one can stop us."

This might sound familiar, especially with regard to the aggression by Russia.

The crimes committed against Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh and within the sovereign territory of Armenia, have been extensively analysed by numerous organizations, including the CFTJ, Freedom House, fact-finding missions, UN Special Rapporteurs and others.

This analysis has been based on a substantial body of evidence collected over a number of years. The evidence is irrefutable and overwhelming: Since 2021, Azerbaijan has perpetrated war crimes and crimes against humanity, including persecution and deportation. For crimes against humanity, the case may be considered analogous to the Myanmar/Bangladesh situation, where the ICC ordered an arrest warrant against Myanmar's acting President. Our database contains a plethora of evidence, and a comprehensive legal analysis of the alleged crimes is available for immediate dissemination. We have already submitted a communication to the ICC. But it is not on us.

It is your responsibility, Delegates of the Member States.

In your capacity as State Parties to the ICC, it is incumbent that you fulfil your obligations as set forth in the Rome Statute, which includes the referral to the Office of the Prosecutor for the initiation of a preliminary investigation. It is similarly incumbent upon the distinguished

Prosecutor Khan to initiate an investigation. However, the OTP is overwhelmed by the number of cases, as widely acknowledged.

For this reason, dear delegates of the Member States, we would like to urgently reiterate that it is imperative that impunity for those who initiate aggressive warfare, who orchestrate blockades and starvation, and who are responsible for the perpetration of unspeakable heinous crimes, has to end. This impunity is contrary to all principles of criminal responsibility. Only the deterrent effect will prompt autocrats and criminals to reconsider their actions, deterring them from committing or continuing these crimes.

Have we become so desensitized to these daily harrowing images from Gaza, Ukraine, and other conflict zones to the point where we have accepted war as “daily business”? Please be reminded: War Crimes, and Crimes against Humanity are not daily business and never will be. It is on every one of us to stop that.

How many more times will we repeat the same mistakes by turning a blind eye, effectively condoning the atrocities of these criminals through our silence? With Russia’s ongoing war of aggression and its brutal strategy of retribution against those who oppose it, we already have a clear understanding of what awaits us in the situation with Azerbaijan.

Even now, the oppressor is torturing POWs and civilians in their dungeons while trying to greenwash their terrible reputation by building alliances through the hosting of the recent COP29.

In light of the aforementioned circumstances, we are compelled to urgently request that you, as State Parties, fulfil your obligations and make a collective state referral to the ICC for the Prosecutor to initiate preliminary investigations. It is only through this referral that the path of justice and accountability can be created, thereby preventing the autocratic state of Azerbaijan from continuing its Armenophobic policy and destroying further potential evidence.

If we continue to deliberately ignore the situation, there’s a significant risk of another war of aggression on Europe’s eastern border which could lead to an additional 3 million refugees for Europe to address. Unlike other ongoing conflicts, this one is distinctly foreseeable.

Time is now!