

Ecoterrorism

Ecoterrorism, also called ecological terrorism or environmental terrorism is a destruction, or the threat of destruction of the environment, flora and fauna, natural resources of one country by another particular country, groups or individuals.

Having started with territorial claims and ethnic terrorist attacks of Armenia to the historical lands of Azerbaijan in 1988, the conflict resulted in military aggression and occupation of 20% of Azerbaijan territory. It is known, that in the absence of certain components of ecosystem, it begins to collapse, destabilizing the natural balance. The flora is gradually declining in productivity, and fauna species are migrating to other areas with better natural conditions for life. Recognizing this, Armenian vandals have been deliberately trying to destroy our nature for almost 30 years.

After a long occupation, the Glorious Azerbaijani Army defeated the Armenian army and liberated our lands in 44 days. However, the enemy has left behind ruins and environmental disasters in the territories we liberated from occupation. For decades, the enemy has been able to keep the occupied territories out of the control of not only Azerbaijan but also the international community. The territories beyond the control of the world community, became a secret haven of Armenian criminals, which has provided opportunities for their illegal activities contrary to international conventions, including the plundering of natural resources, pollution of water resources, and destruction of flora.

In his address to the nation on December 1, 2020, President Ilham Aliyev pointed out the facts of Armenia's barbarous form of exploitation of the occupied lands: "... According to the information available to me, wheat was sown on tens of thousands of hectares there, in particular in Agdam, Fuzuli, Jabrayil, and Zangilan districts. I am told that Armenia harvested 90,000 tons of wheat in the occupied lands every year. The total volume of Armenia's wheat production, together with what was grown on these occupied lands, amounted to 190,000 tons. Half of this harvest came from our lands. This is illegal exploitation of our lands... Now they have lost it all. How will they ensure their food security now? There were large vineyards there. On the way to Agdam, Fuzuli, Jabrayil districts, I saw that most of our vineyards had been destroyed. Old trellises remained there. But grape plantations have been preserved in many places. They used them, our water, they generated electricity..."

In Lachin district, we have large forest areas – 22,000 hectares of its territory is covered by forest. This is also our great asset. Kalbajar district has 24,000 hectares of forest. In Zangilan and Gubadli districts, there are 12,000 hectares. At the same time, Hadrut district and a part of Khojavand district liberated from occupation have large forest areas too. Forests are the lungs of our planet. The despised and savage enemy had been cutting down and plundering our forests for 30 years and most recently set them on fire. Despite this, most of our forests remain intact because the enemy could not get into those forests, as they are located in remote mountain ranges. Of course, the restoration of destroyed and ruined infrastructure, including the chop down trees, will also be in the spotlight."

After a brilliant victory in the Patriotic War, President Ilham Aliyev started his visits to the liberated territories. Due to these visits, not only Azerbaijan, but the whole world once again have witnessed the atrocities committed by the Armenian vandals. The President once again witnessed that the Armenian fascists were not satisfied with killing people and committing genocides, destroying cities and villages. As a result, the environmental terrorism in the occupied territories was perpetrated in such a cruel, cold-blooded and merciless way for so many years.

During the occupation, they also cut off course of the rivers, and in several regions, more than 100,000 hectares of land were burnt because of the drought. This opinion was reiterated by the President Ilham Aliyev when he visited Fizuli, Zangilan, Lachin and Jabrayil districts on February 14, 2021, while visiting the Basitchay State Nature Reserve: "The Basitchay is also a beautiful river. In general, this region is rich in rivers. The Tartarchay, the Khachinchay, the Basitchay, the Bazarchay, the Hakari, and other

rivers will serve the people of Azerbaijan from now on. During the occupation, the enemy cut off the water of the Tartar River, and more than a hundred thousand hectares of land in several of our districts were left without water. Environmental terror has been committed.”

During the occupation, Armenian invaders committed environmental terror in the Basitchay State Nature Reserve in the Zangilan district, and indeed in all other areas. They destroyed almost half of the forest area of the reserve and burned the roots and firewood of the trees. The environmental balance of the natural ecosystem which had formed here over the years has been seriously undermined as a result of Armenian vandalism.

The Basitchay Reserve was established under the Order of national leader Heydar Aliyev in 1974. Rare plane trees were protected by the state on more than 100 hectares. It was a forest of rare plane trees. The age of the fallen trees here was about 200-300 years. After the occupation, the hated enemy cut, chopped, looted, and burned most of the plane trees. This is another sign of Armenian vandalism.

The full picture of the ecological terror committed in our occupied lands for many years emerged as a result after the complete liberation of our territories. Chairman of the Milli Majlis Committee for Natural Resources, Energy and Ecology, Doctor of Philosophy in Technology, Sadig Gurbanov in his article “Ecological review of the liberated territories” (Milli Majlis. - 2021.-№1.-P.44-47.) remarked that Azerbaijan 43,000 hectares of liberated territories (Basitchay State Nature Reserve - 107 hectares, Garagol State Nature Reserve - 240 hectares, Gubadli State Nature Reserve - 20,000 hectares, Dashalti State Nature Reserve - 450 hectares, Arazboyu State Nature Reserve - 2,200 hectares and Lachin State Nature Reserve - 20,000 hectares), 24 fauna and more than 70 species of flora included in the “Red Book of the Republic of Azerbaijan” were in specially protected natural areas, most of which have already been destroyed.

More than 460 species of wild trees and shrubs grow in these areas. 70 of them are endemic plants that do not grow in natural environment anywhere in the world. Hundreds of species of trees and shrubs (hazelnuts, Araz oak, linden, Oriental plane, Hirkan beech, Eldar pine, willow pear, Caucasian snowdrops, Karabakh mountain tulip, Schmidt mountain tulip, etc.) were destroyed during the Armenian occupation and have been razed to the ground throughout Azerbaijan territories. The treasury of the world flora faced with danger. There are more than 2,000 species of plants in Karabakh, which is 42% of the flora of Azerbaijan. 127 species of fauna and 72 species of flora in the region are rare and endangered and are included in the “Red List” of the International Union for Conservation of Nature and the “Red Book” of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

152 trees qualified as nature monuments (Oriental plane, oak, azat, pear, etc.), 8 specially valuable forest areas (Oriental plane, pistachio, hazelnut, juniper, azat, Araz oak, sea buckthorn, pirkal), 6 geological-paleontological objects (“Azykh”, “Taglar”, “Khan”, “Gakhal”, “Divlar Sarayi” cave, “Columnar separation of basalt”), 145 certified Oriental plane trees and other natural resources aged 120 to 2000 years faced unprecedented plunder. Bear hazelnut trees included in the “Red Book” covering an area of 968 hectares in the Kalbajar region have been also cut down.

7 relict lakes of ecological importance in the liberated nowadays territories of Azerbaijan (Boyuk Alagol, Kichik Alagol, Zalkhagol, Garagol, Janligol, Ishigli Garagol and Garagol in Toragachay, a tributary of Tartar in the pastures of Kalbajar and Lachin regions) and 10 reservoirs were seriously exposed to anthropogenic impact during Armenian occupation.

Most rivers flowing through Azerbaijan rise in Armenia and Karabakh. Long-term pollution of water sources running and located in the occupied territories has led to the extinction of vulnerable fish species and the depletion of fish stocks.

10 reservoirs with a total volume of 631 million m³, including the Sarsang reservoir, built on the Tartar River with a capacity of 560 million m³ and designed for irrigation of more than 100,000 hectares of arable land, have become a potential source of danger for the surrounding population due to lack of maintenance. 400,000 people living in the foothills and lowlands below the reservoir are at risk.

Taking into account the above-mentioned facts, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe adopted Resolution No. 2085 in 2016 on deliberate deprivation of the residents of Azerbaijan's border regions of water. Lack of control over occupied territories made it difficult for Azerbaijan to fulfill its obligations under international conventions. The failure of Armenia to comply with the UN Convention on Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes has made it impossible to resolve the problems of transboundary watercourses within the framework of international law.

Recent years have seen a growth of mining products' export in Armenia achieved by the plundering of natural resources, belonging to Azerbaijan. Thus, 167 gold, silver, copper, lead, mercury, coal, various construction materials and other mineral resources, including underground sources of mineral waters (Shirlan, Turshsu, etc.), mattered to the country's economic potential, were illegally exploited by Armenia with the participation of foreign legal entities and exported to foreign countries.

One of the factors aggravated environmental problems today is security issues in the field of nuclear energy production. In this regard, end-of-life Metsamor Nuclear Power Plant (NPP), located in Armenia, represents a major risk for public health, safety and security of the entire region. The specific role of Armenia in nuclear and other radioactive material smuggling, nuclear fuel waste and the dumping of radioactive wastes in the liberated territories of Azerbaijan during the occupation remain a serious threat in the region. Thus, the Metsamor Nuclear Power Plant, which is a major source of disaster for the region, is still operating posing a serious threat to regional security of neighboring countries. An accident that could happen at any moment would cause radioactive contamination in the region.

This station is located 16 km from the Turkish border, 60 km from the Iranian border, 120 km from the Azerbaijani border, 110 km from the Georgian border, 28 km from Igdır and 25 km from the city of Historical Iravan. Metsamor Nuclear Power Plant reactor brought into operation in 1976, consists of two blocks. Each power unit of a nuclear power plant uses one VVER-440 reactor. These reactors are old and do not have a protective enclosure.

It should be reminded that in 1982, there was a massive fire in the engine room of Metsamor NPP. Construction of the 3rd and 4th blocks began in 1983, but stopped in 1986 after the Chernobyl accident. After the Spitak earthquake in 1988, the former USSR leadership decided to suspend the operation of the Metsamor NPP in January 1989, for fear of repercussions of both the Chernobyl accident and the Spitak earthquake. The first block malfunctioned and the second block was stopped.

Vandals blew up a 400-year-old natural monument in the occupied Aghdam region. A few years ago, personnel of the Department "The National Operation Centre on Detection of the Destructive Impact on the Environment and Natural Resources in the Occupied Territories of Azerbaijan" of the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources examined the video footage taken after the occupation of Aghdam and revealed the facts of horrendous looting of natural resources. From the result in observation campaign of the unoccupied villages of Aghdam's residents, it had been disclosed that the Armenians blew up a sycamore tree, which was about 400 years old and took it to Armenia. Thus, 14 140-150-year-old Eastern plane trees in the city of Aghdam and 71 plane trees up to 400 years old near the village of Boyahmadli were registered as protected natural monuments. As a result of fires committed by bloodthirsty neighbors in Gulluja, Garvand, Goytepe, Papravand, Galaychilar and Boyahmadli villages, the vegetation was completely destroyed. There are relevant acts on these facts.

The cities of Shusha, Aghdam, Fuzuli, Jabrayil, Zangilan and Gubadli were completely destroyed and looted by the Armenian armed forces. Lachin and Kalbajar were inhabited by Armenians deported from Armenia, Syria and Lebanon, who, knowing full well that they were temporary in these territories, destroyed local environment.

There were 152 certified natural monuments in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan, consisting of Oriental plane, stone tree, azat pear, oak and pistachio trees, 45 meters high, 6-8 meters in diameter and 120 to 2000 years old. Of these trees, 10 are in Nagorno-Karabakh, 4 in Aghdara, 2 in Khojavand, 85 in Aghdam, 14 in Jabrayil, 6 in Zangilan, 10 in Gubadli, 10 in Lachin and 11 in Fuzuli.

Illegal activities alarming environmental security with the direct participation of the Armenian state constitutes a flagrant violation of many international conventions, including the obligations of UN Convention on Biological Diversity, the Convention to Combat Desertification and other international agreements, where Armenia is a member

Armenia commits terrorist activities in water and land use fields for many years, which have led to land degradation.

Resolution No. 2085, adopted in 2016 by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on deliberate deprivation of the residents of Azerbaijan's border regions of water, reflecting the demand of immediate withdrawal of the Armenian armed forces from the mentioned region and ensuring investigation of independent engineers and hydrologists on the spot, has not been implemented. However, Armenia ignored this. For this reason, farmers in Barda, Tartar, Goranboy, Beylagan, Bilasuvar and Imishli regions of Azerbaijan could not use the water resources formed in the occupied territories before the Second Karabakh War, and the lands were degraded due to drought. For example, being under the control of the Armenian armed forces the Giz Galasy and Khudaferin reservoirs built on the Araz River were operated in the reversed regime and misused. Thus, in the design of these water complexes, it is indicated that water should be stored in reservoirs in winter and spring and the accumulated resources should be used to maintain the stability of the river in late spring and summer. However, in winter and early spring, the Armenians filled the reservoirs with not enough water and in summer, on the contrary, they began to fill them. Therefore, the Azerbaijani farms of downstream reaches of rivers, suffered from drought. During these 26 years, the enemy achieved his goal, farms in the Aran regions of the country suffered from a lack of water, artificial and natural forests in these territories were seriously damaged.

One of the main tasks facing the government of Azerbaijan now is to identify all the damage, including the quantities of hazardous wastes, located in our territories and to achieve international recognition. Azerbaijan may also seek reparation for the injury caused by Armenia side and then to be compensated through the International Court of Justice. It is imperative to ensure full removal of hazardous waste buried in our territories to Armenia. To this end, as mentioned above, international experts must work in this area to assessment.

It is confirmed by the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources that flora and fauna in the occupied territories were destroyed by the country-aggressor Armenia, the region's natural resources, environment and biodiversity have been severely damaged. Thus, according to the results of monitoring of liberated territories, it was established that 2000-year-old Eastern plane trees (*Platanus orientalis*), which are considered natural monuments were cut down in Jabrayil, Zangilan and Gubadli. Beyond this, Armenians used prohibited white phosphorus extensively to burn the Topkhana forest around the city of Shusha. There are red oak trees, which are endemic species of the Kalbajar forests and the most valuable tree types in the world in the area of reserve. The material of this tree, spread only in that reserve of Azerbaijan, is used for making precious furniture. According to European media reports, nowadays red oak trees (and the furniture made from it) and other types of rare trees are cut off savagely by Armenians and sold abroad for a million dollars.

According to official data of the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources, the environmental terror committed by the enemy in the occupied territories was monitored from space and there is evidence of this crime. The information also stated that the international monitoring and evaluation groups would be invited to Azerbaijan for assessing and approving all the facts.

Continuing its efforts to assess the environmental terrorism, the Ministry has already begun work on restoring the ecological balance in the liberated territories. Since November 11, there are various tree seedlings have been planted in the liberated territories. Moreover, measures have been taken for the rehabilitation of forest cover and vegetation.

The Ministry also reported that during some separate online meetings with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in Azerbaijan, the country office of the United Nations

Development Program (UNDP) in Azerbaijan and the European Regional Office of the United Nations Environment Program once again, foreign representatives were informed about the damage caused to natural resources, the environment and biodiversity of the Karabakh region, the purposeful destruction of forests rich with valuable species of trees and shrubs.

At the same time, the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of Azerbaijan Republic appealed in total to 31 international organizations working in the field of ecology and environmental protection, with a request to stop the environmental genocide committed by the Armenian aggressors.