

**The Text of the Speech made by Mr. Ali Hasanov,
Deputy Prime Minister of the Republic of Azerbaijan,
at the 68th session of the UNHCR Executive Committee**

Geneva, 2 October 2017

Mr. High Commissioner,

Excellences, Ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of the Government of Azerbaijan, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the High Commissioner Mr. Filippo Grandi for his very interesting opening speech which clearly illustrates the causes of an increase in the number of forced migration in the present day world.

As we all know, refugees and IDPs are among the most complicated and urgent issues on the agenda of the international community. However, as it was also stated by UN Secretary-General honorable Mr. Antonio Guterres at the 72nd Session of the General Assembly, “refugees, internally displaced persons and migrants are not the problem; the problem lies in conflicts, persecutions and poverty”.

Over the past 25 years, Azerbaijan has also been confronted with the unresolved Armenia-Azerbaijan Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Violating the binding resolutions of the UN Security Council adopted in 1993 that call for an immediate, complete and unconditional withdrawal of Armenian troops from the occupied territories, Armenia still keeps the 20 % of the Azerbaijani territory under occupation, and as a result, there are over one million refugees and internally displaced persons in the country.

Azerbaijan has been looking for too long for a just and peaceful solution to this conflict and is still rendering assistance to more than 640,000 IDPs. The solution to their problem of displacement, i.e. the return to their homes under peaceful and secure conditions, remains to be the first priority of my Government.

The fact that the country’s President Mr. Ilham Aliyev has managed to ensure the sustainable economic development of Azerbaijan over the past 14 years, the level of poverty has been reduced from 49% to 5%, 1.6 million new jobs have been created, has formed favorable conditions for achieving certain progresses in this area.

So far, 96 modern residential facilities have been built, 250,000 refugees and IDPs have been provided with housing. Among the IDPs, the poverty level has dropped from 75 % to 12 %. On the whole, approximately 6-billion-dollar worth of resources has been spent over the last 20 years to solve the social problems of refugees and IDPs.

In doing so, we believe that the complexity and seriousness of the humanitarian situation connected with the IDPs requires international support to the national efforts.

The full restoration of human rights of IDPs is directly connected with the settlement of this conflict, and activities of the UN and its human rights mechanisms needs to be strengthened in this respect. Azerbaijan's position on this issue is definite and transparent. All of the occupied Azerbaijani territories should be liberated, and conditions for the return of IDPs to their native lands must be ensured.

With this in mind, the Government of Azerbaijan has developed together with international organizations a comprehensive repatriation program called the "Great Return" for the safe and dignified return of IDPs to their lands.

So, in April 2016, as a result of a just another violation of the ceasefire by Armenian armed forces, the regions of Agdam and Tartar were under an intensive artillery shelling. As a consequence, 34 Azerbaijanis got wounded, and 6 people died, including a child; 232 private households were destroyed; a serious damage was caused to public and private properties, including civil infrastructure facilities. As a result of the targeted and deliberate shootings with heavy weapons by the Armenian armed forces, which were not satisfied with it, a 2-year old child and her grandmother were murdered in the Alkhanli village of the Fizuli region on 4th July 2017, and a 13-year old resident of the Tovuz region was seriously wounded on 7th August 2017.

In fact, this conflict is not a frozen one. Daily violations of the ceasefire, selection of local residents as targets have become a normal state of things. Over the past years, 34 Azerbaijani children have become the victims of the Armenian occupation army.

At his address made from the high tribune of the UN General Assembly during the 72nd session, the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan drew the world community's attention to a just position of Azerbaijan, territories of which have been under occupation for the last 25 years, that is based on an international law.

In April 2016, to ensure the safety of Azerbaijani civilians, the armed forces of Azerbaijan carried out counterattack activities; silenced the firing points and liberated from the occupation a number of strategically important locations. This created conditions for a safe living in the Jojug Merjanly village of the Jabaryil region. At the order of the country's President, restoration works of the village were started; 50 houses and a school were built and commissioned for operation; a part of IDPs were returned to their native villages. At the moment, the construction of 100 houses and social infrastructure facilities is being continued.

The problem confronting Azerbaijan is not just a problem of this region, but it is a global one. Misusing the financial support of certain donor countries and international organizations, Armenia carries out propaganda for the illegal forcible settlement of the Syrians of Armenian ethnicity and others on these territories. Narcotics are being cultivated in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan; they are being processed in special laboratories, and are shipped by the Armenian military servicemen and narcomafia to Europe and other

regions of the world. These territories have also turned into a new transit route for the narcotics from Afghanistan.

Therefore, the world community ought to demonstrate a more decisive and consistent position on the issue of a just settlement of this conflict, and compel Armenia to start working on the peace agreement.

The main obstacles to the solution of the problem are the non-constructive position taken by Armenia, and its demonstration of disrespect to the resolutions of the Security Council of UN, OSCE, and European Council. That's why, the long-lasting activity of the Minsk Group of OSCE, which is trying to achieve a peaceful settlement for this problem, has remained unsuccessful.

Mr. High Commissioner,

The cooperation between the Government of Azerbaijan and UNHCR remains to be solid and productive. Azerbaijan is committed to the obligation of aligning its legislative practices to the international standards. A working group consisting of the representatives of relevant governmental agencies to improve the protection and asylum mechanisms for refugees has been established. Legislative amendments to ensure that all persons who are in need of international protection could benefit from a relevant legal status are being considered by the Government of Azerbaijan.

Mr. High Commissioner,

We believe that only genuine, combined international efforts can lead to the settlement of conflicts that exist in the world, and also confront Azerbaijan.

Azerbaijan stands ready to extend full support to the Agency under Your leadership, and wishes You success in the exercise of your noble mandate.

Thank you very much for your attention.