

**Statement delivered by Mr. Emil Hasanov, Deputy Permanent Representative, Permanent Mission of the Republic of Azerbaijan to the UN Office and other International Organizations in Geneva**

**Side event on Human Rights and Cultural Diversity: Solidarity, dialogue and tolerance in a diverse world. Towards a culture of peace**

27 February 2018

Geneva, Palais des Nations, Room XXII

Mr. Minister,

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to thank the delegation of Venezuela for organizing this important event and timely discussions. In the modern world of growing intolerance, discrimination and violence based on religion or belief, intercultural and interreligious dialogue has become one of the most important tools in promoting tolerance, peace and better understanding across countries, cultures and civilizations.

Ensuring cultural rights and the protection of cultural rights and property have always been among priorities of Azerbaijan's state policy. Azerbaijan as a historically multi-ethnic and multi-confessional country attaches primary importance to the promotion of intercultural and interreligious dialogue at all levels. Located at the crossroads of the East and the West and thus maintaining the values of both civilizations, Azerbaijan is playing not only the role of a geographical bridge, but also acts as an intercultural bridge between civilizations. We consider our country's cultural diversity as an advantage, which provides great opportunities to contribute to the promotion of interreligious and intercultural dialogue and mutual understanding.

It is not a coincidence that the year 2016 was proclaimed as **“The Year of Multiculturalism”** in Azerbaijan. Two years earlier in 2014 the Baku International

Multiculturalism Center was established to introduce Azerbaijani model of multiculturalism to the world, and to carry out research of existing multicultural models. One of the mainstream projects of the Centre, which has several branches around the world, is promoting a special university course of “Azerbaijani multiculturalism”. This course has already been incorporated into the teaching programs of some leading universities across Europe and Asia.

With the aim to promote the ideas of multiculturalism at the international level Azerbaijan has build a strong partnership with some international organizations. Azerbaijan is a member of both the Council of Europe and the Organization of the Islamic Cooperation, which bring together more than 100 countries. Taking this advantage, in 2008, Azerbaijan initiated the establishment of relations between these two organizations by inviting ministers of culture of the OIC countries to the Baku forum of the ministers of culture of the CoE member states. That initiative was called the “**Baku process**”, which has become a platform that enables people worldwide to support intercultural dialogue and peace building enhancing cross cultural understanding for building strong societies. Furthermore, in 2009 Baku hosted the conference of the ministers of culture of the OIC and invited the ministers of culture from Europe to that event. Thus, a very important new process was launched by the initiative of Azerbaijan.

Countering the trends of religious, cultural and social intolerance and building solid platforms and opportunities for dialogue, intercultural competencies and cultural literacy - all these are topics for discussions during the **Baku International Humanitarian Forums** and **World Forums on Intercultural Dialogue** initiated in 2010 and 2011 respectively by the Government of Azerbaijan, offering new opportunities for articulating academic knowledge with policy-making. Azerbaijan organized these events in close partnership with UNESCO, Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO), UN Alliance of Civilizations and the Council of Europe.

Azerbaijan now traditionally hosts the Baku International Humanitarian Forums and World Forums on Intercultural Dialogue. The last Baku International Humanitarian Forum held in Baku in 2016, has brought together over 400 representatives from almost 80 countries, including 13 Nobel Prize winners.

**The Seventh Global Forum of the UN Alliance of Civilizations** was held in Baku in 2016 with extensive discussions on international humanitarian cooperation, multiculturalism and other important issues. By using the UN platform, Azerbaijan has once again demonstrated its multiculturalism traditions, and urged the world community to fully respect principles of tolerance, intercultural and inter-civilizational dialogue.

In recent years, Azerbaijan has also played host to big sporting events. **The first-ever European Games** held in Baku in June of 2015 have been a symbolic indicator because the first European event of this kind was organized in a Muslim-majority country. In 2017, the **4th Islamic Solidarity Games** were organized in Baku as well. Thus, one city at the crossroads of the East and West has hosted European and Islamic Games over the course of two years.

We strongly believe that opting for promotion and protection of multiculturalism rather than cultural and ethnic isolation is the best way to pursue for the prosperity of our societies.

Thank you.