

## **Address**

**by Ambassador Vaqif Sadiqov, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Azerbaijan to the UN Office and other International Organizations in Geneva**

### **Sport Integrity Global Alliance (SIGA)**

#### **Special Session**

**Geneva, Palais des Nations, 28 November 2017**

Mr. Chairman,

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

At the outset, I would like to thank H.E. Minister Franco Frattini and H.E. Ambassador Maurizio Enrico Serra for organizing this important meeting. The main topic of today's discussions, which is the role of sport in contemporary society and global economy, is very timely in view of a global need for dialogue, cooperation, unity and integrity. The current state of affairs in an interconnected and turbulent world demands joint actions, and the contribution of each and every country is very important. At a global level, the role of the United Nations in strengthening international cooperation is indispensable.

Azerbaijan believes that a continuous global dialogue should deserve our greater attention to provide global leadership, promote good governance and safeguard the integrity of sport through a set of universal standards shared by governments, sport, business, academia and civil society. My country firmly believes that due to its invaluable social, educational and cultural functions, sport is one of the major tools to address modern challenges and to ensure peace, human rights and sustainable development.

Due to its history and geography, Azerbaijan has always been at the crossroads of continents and civilizations. Located in the South Caucasus, Azerbaijan has been a natural political, economic and cultural bridge between the East and West. For many centuries, the historic Silk Road originating in the northern Italy was passing through Azerbaijan further to China, and this road served as an important channel for sharing culture, knowledge and skills that has significantly shaped the identity and history of my country.

Cherishing its centuries' long multi-ethnic and multi-confessional environment, Azerbaijan as a member of both the Council of Europe and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, has been striving to strengthen dialogue, partnership and cooperation among civilizations through many important initiatives and activities. In recent years, my country hosted the 7th Global Forum of the UN Alliance of Civilizations, World's Religious Leaders

Forum, four International Forums on Intercultural Dialogue, five Baku International Humanitarian Forums, as well as many other meetings of the UN, UNESCO, OSCE, Council of Europe, NATO, etc.

Sport has historic roots in my country and today it has become a state policy in Azerbaijan. Despite the fact that in recent years many countries around Azerbaijan have been facing political instability, financial crisis and civil wars, Azerbaijan has been developing its policy of initiating and hosting major sport events for solidarity and cooperation.

After restoration of its independence in 1992, Azerbaijan first participated at the Olympic Games as an independent nation in 1996 in Atlanta, and has sent its athletes to compete in every Games since then. In Atlanta, we won only one medal. Twenty years later, at the Olympic Games in Rio in 2016, Azerbaijani athletes won 18 medals and took the 14th place for the number of medals in team standings.

In 2015, Azerbaijan was proud to host the first-ever European Games attended by 6,000 athletes from 50 countries. Two years later, in 2017, Azerbaijan hosted the 4th Islamic Solidarity Games with almost 4,000 athletes from 54 countries. Since 2016, Azerbaijan's capital Baku has been annually hosting Formula 1 "Grand Prix of Azerbaijan".

In order to create favourable conditions for further promotion of sport in the country, my Government has significantly invested in the major infrastructure projects across the country in public-private partnership. More than 50 modern Olympic class sports centres in all regions of Azerbaijan have been built in recent years. Modern sports facilities in Baku include several large stadiums, among them the National Gymnastic Arena, the Aquatic Palace, the Baku Shooting Centre and the Baku Olympic Stadium with a seating capacity of about 70,000 spectators. This venue is intended to host the quarterfinals and three of the group games for UEFA Euro 2020.

Based on its positive experience of hosting major international political, cultural and sport events, the Government of Azerbaijan has nominated Baku to host the World Expo of 2025 under the theme of "Developing human capital, building a better future", because we firmly believe that similarly to sport, world exhibitions also serve as major international platforms for building cooperation and dialogue.

In conclusion, I would like to ensure you that while sharing with SIGA the same commitment to the highest role of sport in society, Azerbaijan will continue to make its modest contribution to global efforts to build a peaceful and better world for all citizens and future generations.

Thank you.