

**Address by Yusif Huseynov,
Permanent Mission of the Republic of Azerbaijan to the UN Office and other
International Organizations in Geneva**

**Human Rights Council 37th Session – Side event
Hosting mega sport events: Strengthen the respect of human rights
Geneva, Palais des Nations, 26 February 2018**

Mr. Chairman,

Dear Colleagues,

First of all, I would like to thank Permanent Mission of Qatar 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 respect to human rights. 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.

My country 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. Azerbaijan 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.

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. Despite some attempts of smear campaign and unfounded criticisms against my country, Azerbaijan successfully hosted all the mega sport events in highest level.

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 confirm that 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.