



**UN Human Rights Council  
Forty Sixth Session**

**Agenda item 3**

**Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights**

**Right of Reply**

**exercised by Ms. Marziyya Vakilova-Mardaliyeva**

**First Secretary of the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Azerbaijan  
to the UN Office and other International Organizations in Geneva**

**3 March 2021**

Madam President,

I am exercising this right of reply to the statement made by the delegation of Armenia.

Distortion of facts has become a tedious habit of Armenian delegation. The destructive reconstruction of the Yuxarı Gövhər Ağa Mosque in the Şuşa city of Azerbaijan, which was built by the ruler of Qarabağ khanate İbrahim Xəlilxan's daughter Gövhər Ağa in XIX century, is a vivid example of Armenia's barbarian cultural heritage policy, intending to erode their authenticity and historical value and claiming that they had never belonged to Azerbaijan. By so-called restoration of the mosque in Şuşa Armenia is only desperately trying to demonstrate its alleged respect for religious and cultural values, which is nothing but hypocrisy.

As for unfounded claims by Armenia that Azerbaijan does not allow UNESCO to visit Qarabağ region, we remind that it was Armenia that prevented international missions to visit then-occupied territories of Azerbaijan for decades. This fact is even clearly reflected in the UNESCO Activities Report published in 2005 stating that Azerbaijan expressed concern about the protection of cultural heritage in its occupied territories and requested dispatching of a fact-finding mission to these territories, however, this mission was prevented due to the occupation of these territories by the Armenian military forces.

The Azerbaijani side brought to the attention of UNESCO its response in connection with the organization of the mission. In general, no third party can interfere in the dialogue process between Azerbaijan and UNESCO.

Madame President,

Unlike Armenia, which has committed cultural genocide against Azerbaijani heritage not only on then-occupied Azerbaijani territories, but also in Armenia itself, Azerbaijan, as a proud multicultural society with strong centuries-long traditions of tolerance and cultural diversity, has for centuries been protecting its diverse cultural and religious heritage. Preservation of the Armenian Saint Gregory Church in downtown Baku, fully refurbished and remaining under the state protection is a bright example to that policy.

Over the last 20 years, the Russian Orthodox Church (The Church of the Jen-Mironosits Cathedral), the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Baku or Baku Church of the Savior, and the Alexander Nevsky Russian Orthodox Church in Gəncə have been renovated by the state, and the Orthodox Religious and Cultural Centre of Baku and Azerbaijan Eparchy has been built. Moreover, the restoration of the Chotari Albanian-Udi Church in Gabala and the Orthodox Church in Baku, and the construction of the Church of the Virgin Mary's Immaculate Conception in Baku were carried out as part of the Heydar Aliyev Foundation's project "Azerbaijan – the land of tolerance". In 2020, within the framework of this project, the Albanian Church of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Nij settlement of Gabala was thoroughly restored. The Synagogue of Mountainous Jews was built in Baku in 2010 under the patronage of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan. The Ashkenazi Synagogue was built in 2002 with the financial support of the Caucasian Muslims' Board and Baku and Azerbaijan Eparchy.

Azerbaijan has also contributed to the protection of the Christian heritage worldwide: the restoration of the St. Sebastian catacombs at the initiative of the Heydar Aliyev Foundation, including the restoration of the catacombs of Saints Marcellino and Pietro in Vatican, Rome, which was carried out as part of a bilateral agreement between the Heydar Aliyev Foundation and the Holy See on the restoration of Roman catacombs, as well as the erection of a monument to Prince Vladimir in the square in front of the St. Vladimir's Church dedicated to the 1025th anniversary of the adoption of Christianity in Russia and the 455th anniversary of the founding of Astrakhan, are among these projects.

The Government of Azerbaijan also financed reconstruction of Saint Petka Church in Novi-Sad, Serbia. Heydar Aliyev Foundation reconstructed "Trapezitsa" Reserve in Bulgaria, including three churches dated XIII-XIV centuries within the territory of the historical site. In addition, assistance was provided in the restoration of seven churches of the X-XII centuries in the settlements of Saint-Hilaire, Fresnaye-au-Sauvage, Saint-Hilaire-la-Gérard, Tanville, Courgeoût, Réveillon and Mâle in the Orne department of France, as well as XIV century stained-glass windows of Notre Dame Cathedral of Strasburg portraying Virgin Mary and Jesus Christ.

Azerbaijan reiterates that there should be no doubt that Azerbaijan will continue protecting all cultural and religious heritage in its territory, including by restoring all cultural and religious objects destroyed and vandalized during Armenian occupation. Moreover, Armenians are provided with unhindered access to the cultural and religious sites in the liberated territories of Azerbaijan.

I thank you.