

Mr. President,

We thank the delegation of Pakistan in its capacity as the coordinator of the OIC Group for organizing this timely and important panel discussion.

Using this panel discussion, Azerbaijan as multi-ethnic and multi-religious society would like to share its experience with a view of contributing to strengthening the concerted international efforts for the promotion of a culture of tolerance in all countries.

Throughout its history, Azerbaijan has distinguished itself by its high-level of tolerance towards various groups and religions. Since 2007, Azerbaijan has been a member of the Alliance of Civilizations Group of Friends established by the initiative of Turkey and Spain.

Azerbaijan currently has more than 1.800 mosques, 5 Orthodox churches, 1 Catholic church, 1 Lutheran church, 1 Albano-Udi, 4 Greek Orthodox churches, 6 synagogues and other houses of worship in operation. The Government is utterly committed to the restoration and reconstruction of the monuments reflecting the cultural heritage and historical past of the Azerbaijani nation and other national minorities residing in our country with a view of preserving them for future generations.

In accordance with the National Action Plan for the protection of human rights in the Republic of Azerbaijan approved by the Presidential Decree in December 2006, awareness-raising measures are taken for the strengthening intercultural dialogue and interfaith cooperation, protection and further development of cultural heritage of ethnic minorities, prohibition of discrimination, promotion of culture of peace and tolerance in the districts and regions of the Republic of Azerbaijan. National Security Concept of the Republic of Azerbaijan determines the protection and development of national and religious tolerance established in the country as one of the major duties of the state.

At the same time, it should be noted that, trainings in different spheres of human rights, including elimination of all forms of discrimination were organized for judges, public prosecutors and lawyers within the framework of cooperation between the Ministry of Justice and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. Recently, our country joined UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, which came into force on 15 May 2010.

On 26-27 April 2010, Baku hosted World Religious Leaders Summit. Leaders of different confessions and related delegates of various international organizations participated at the very Summit.

On 17 March 2011, a conference entitled “European Union-Azerbaijan relations: intercultural dialogue” was held at the European Parliament. Participants of the conference were members of European Parliament, media and public figures and religious officials from Azerbaijani Islam, Orthodox, Jewish and Albanian-Udi confessions.

In 2008-2010 the Ministry of Education in collaboration with International Red Cross Committee organized number of seminars and round-tables which conducted trainings on national minorities, respect to people representing different cultures, races, nationalities, languages and religions, tolerance and mutual understanding among people, representing different cultures and religions, development of cultural heritage of national minorities.

“Baku Process” initiated by the Government of Azerbaijan in 2008 for the promotion of intercultural dialogue proved its consistency and permanence by the 2 major events organized in Azerbaijan. On 13-15 October 2009, the Government of Azerbaijan invited more than 10 states from Europe to participate at the 6<sup>th</sup> Conference of Ministers of Culture of Islamic countries. On 7-9 April 2011 the World Forum on Intercultural Dialogue took place in Baku. 2 sessions of the Forum were devoted to the intercultural understanding and cultural diversity to achieve peace, development and dialogue between and among the world religions.

However, against the background of the successful and constant promotion of inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue and tolerance, Azerbaijan is still faced by the ongoing armed aggression by the neighboring country results of which left the religious and cultural monuments in the occupied territories of our country destroyed and burned.

Thank you very much for your attention.