

The 3rd session of the United Nation Minority Forum

Effective participation of national minorities in economic life

December 14-15, 2010 Geneva

Madame Chairperson,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Distinguished Delegates,

First of all, Madame Chairperson, allow us to join the congratulations addressed to you on your election as a Chairperson of the 3rd session of the UN Minority Forum. We are confident that under your able stewardship, the UN Minority Forum will have a smooth session running and will end up with useful and guiding conclusions on the very topic dedicated to Effective participation of national minorities in economic life.

Let me also extend the apologizes and regrets of Mr. Ali Hasanov – Head of the department of socio-political affairs of the Presidential Administration of the Republic of Azerbaijan, who was to participate in this important meeting, but could not due to excused reasons.

We consider the UN Minority Forum as an important event for promotion and protection of the minority rights, for exchange of views on the existing challenges as well as best practices in the very sphere. Let me stress that the Delegation of Azerbaijan has actively participated in the first and second sessions of the Minority Forum dedicated to the subjects of “Minorities and the right to education” and “Minorities and Effective Political Participation” respectively and has presented broad information on existing constitutional and legal framework, as well as practical measures realized by the Government on the protection of rights and freedoms of minorities living in Azerbaijan.

According to 2009 census returns various national minorities and ethnic groups constitute 8.1% of the total population of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

The Constitution of Azerbaijan ensures personal inviolability of all citizens living in the country and provides individual rights and liberties. Due to time constraints and to avoid repetition I won't dwell upon on all legal measures taken by the Government of Azerbaijan on the protection and promotion of minorities rights, but nevertheless I would like to stress that the Government of Azerbaijan along with other universal human rights conventions has ratified the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities in 2000, which we believe to be an important legal tool for guidance in the promotion and protection of national minorities rights.

We are of a view that, the integration of national minorities into socio-political, socio-economic and cultural life is closely connected with the effective participation of national minorities in the economic life. We believe that the full participation in economic life as well as economic prosperity is a credible guarantee of enjoyment of human rights and main freedoms.

We want to stress that the military aggression of neighboring Armenia against Azerbaijan, the presence of over a million Azerbaijani refugees and IDPs in the country, continued occupation of 20% of our territories, and difficult wartime conditions, hamper the full size economic growth, but despite all these impeding facts a national human rights policy pursued by Azerbaijan brought important accomplishments in protecting rights and freedoms of national minorities in many spheres including the participation in economic life.

Along with legislative reforms, the Government of Azerbaijan has realized the following programs and actions which are being positively contributed to the promotion and protection of human rights, like "The state program on socio-economic development of regions in the Republic of Azerbaijan (2004-2008)" endorsed in 2004, "The action plan

on acceleration of socio-economic development in the regions of the Republic of Azerbaijan, including the town of Lankaran, regions of Astara, Lerik, Masally and Yardimly”, “On additional actions to speed up socio-economic development in the town of Shaki, regions of Balaken, Gakh and Zagatala” on June 1, 2006, “The action plan on acceleration of socio-economic development in the regions of the Republic of Azerbaijan including the regions of Guba, Gusar, Khachmaz, Siyazan and Shabran” on August 3, 2005 and etc.,. Let me stress that all mentioned regions are where the national minorities live in compact.

“The state program on socio-economic development of regions in the Republic of Azerbaijan in 2009-2013” endorsed by Azerbaijan Republic’s presidential decree of April 14, 2009 envisages concrete directions of the government’s activity in the regions in the new stage.

On the basis of these programs, hundreds of new schools, hospitals and diagnostic centers, sport and health complexes, tourism and recreation facilities, industrial and manufacturing enterprises were constructed, modern roads and bridges were built, land-improvement and repair work had been done across the country, including in the regions where national minorities live in compact communities. This is an ongoing process.

In the last seven years, up to 900,000 new jobs were created and more than 35,000 new were businesses established in Azerbaijan. National minorities have a considerable share in these figures.

The intended projects and programs are being implemented with the funding from the state budget, as well as state affiliated loan organizations and various international financial institutions.

The National Fund of Support to Entrepreneurship under Azerbaijan's Ministry of Economic Development, State Agency on Agricultural Credits under the Ministry of Agriculture, "Agrarkredit" Joint-Stock Company, "Agrolizing" Open Joint-Stock Company, Azerbaijan Investment Company, Azerbaijan Export and Investment Promotion Foundation and other state bodies deal directly with this issue. Due to financial support from the World Bank, Islamic Development Bank and International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) various projects covering agricultural sector are effectively being carried out in rural regions where national minorities are settled compactly.

The National Fund of Support to Entrepreneurship under Azerbaijan's Ministry of Economic Development alone allocated – in 2003-2009 and in the past period of 2010 – AZN 115,200,000 worth of soft loans to 2,444 entrepreneurship subjects in the economic regions where national minorities live in compact communities including in the Lankaran economic region (the Lankaran, Astara, Lerik, Masally and Yardimli regions), the Shaki-Zagatala economic region (Shaki, Zagatala, Balaken, Gakh, Oghuz and Gabala regions), the Guba-Khachmaz economic region (the Guba, Khachmaz and Gusar regions) and the Daghlig Shirvan economic region (the Shamakhy and Ismayilli regions). It should be noted that the above-mentioned economic regions cover almost the whole colorful spectrum of national minorities living in Azerbaijan (Lezgis, Talyshs, Avars, Sakhurs, Georgians, Ahiska Turks, Udins, Tats, Lahijs and others).

The State Agency on Agricultural Credits under the Ministry of Agriculture and "Agrolizing" Open Joint-Stock Company are closely involved in developing the agricultural sector, farm businesses and local entrepreneurship in the regions populated by national minorities. Several micro-projects envisaging reconstruction of schools and roads, improvement of irrigation system, and construction and repair of health facilities were implemented as part of the "Rural Investment" project in over 20 villages inhabited by national minorities.

Currently, up to 50 non-governmental organizations, cultural centers, charities and other civil associations working on minority issues operate in the country.

The non-governmental organization of National Confederation of Business Associations plays an important role in successful economic policy being carried out in Azerbaijan. National minorities and their business subjects are represented in the top management and local structures of this organization, which unites more than four thousand legal and physical entities. The Confederation has ten regional offices, including in Lankaran, Khachmaz and Shaki, where national minorities live compactly. The organization carries out important work, as well as holds trainings and exhibitions and carries out awareness campaigns to build trade-business relationship, to establish internal and external partnerships and to coordinate activities of businessmen.

In conclusion, I would like to note that national minorities are broadly represented in Azerbaijan's parliament, central and local executive bodies, including agencies dealing with economics. Today in Azerbaijan, representatives of national minorities, who are engaged in business, own leading private companies and enterprises, big commercial and business facilities. They are making great contribution to development and progress of our country by using the legal-democratic atmosphere in Azerbaijan.

On the basis of norms and principles of international law, the Republic of Azerbaijan continues its multilateral and systematic activities to strengthen the protection of national minorities, to develop their language and culture, to preserve their ethnic peculiarities, customs and traditions, as well as to improve their socio-economic living conditions. Using this opportunity let me assure you that the Government of Azerbaijan will always demonstrate care and attention to this important issue.

Thank you for attention.