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Speech entitled “Implementation of Declaration on the Rights of Persons belonging to
National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities in the Republic of Azerbaijan”

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Dear Chairman!

Dear members of the Forum!

First of all, let me express my gratitude to the United Nations Human Rights Council for organizing and hosting this Forum. I also would like to thank you for this opportunity to inform you on measures taken by the Azerbaijan government in the realm of protection of national minority rights.

This meeting takes place on the 20th anniversary of the Declaration on the Rights of Persons belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities. It is truly historic document, which serves as an authoritative guideline and contains the main norms on minority rights.

Turning to the topic of this session, I would like to note that Presidential Decree dated September 16, 1992 “On the protection of rights and liberties, and state support of the linguistic and cultural development of national minorities in the Republic of Azerbaijan” became the first alike in the post-soviet area. By comparing two mentioned documents we can notice that they share the common methodological and legal approach to national minority issues. This fact evidences that the Republic of Azerbaijan pays attention to the minority issues from the first days of its independence, and also serve as a bright example of state’s adherence to the principles of international law.

National minorities constitute 8.4% of the country’s population in accordance to the population census in 2009. Ethnical and religious multiplicity in Azerbaijan is still preserved. Being a multinational and poly-confessional state Azerbaijan advocates for the implementation of the “unity in diversity” principle. We can also be proud of the fact that no act of intolerance or discrimination was registered in Azerbaijan at any stage of its history.

Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan and relevant legislative acts reflect the provisions which guarantee to every member of minority living in the country the right to use his or her native language, enjoy the culture and education, the freedom of religion, and other human rights and fundamental freedoms.

It is to be highlighted that Azerbaijan is a party to more than 50 international conventions and other international law instruments on human rights, including those relating to national minorities.

Protection of the cultural heritage of national minorities and its development is among the main vectors of governmental activity set forth in "National Action Plan on the protection of human rights" and "National Programme on the protection of human rights and liberties in the Republic of Azerbaijan" adopted by the relevant Decrees of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

National minorities got wide representation in both the Parliament and executive authorities of Azerbaijan. Representatives from national minorities hold high-ranked posts in the Administration of the President, the Cabinet of Ministers, all Ministries and other central bodies of the executive branch. Such representatives also hold key posts in the cities and regions, towns and villages densely populated by national minorities.

National minorities participate actively in the cultural life of the Azerbaijan via their non-governmental organizations - cultural centres, charitable foundations and other associations. The number of the officially registered organizations exceeds 50. Established in 2007 Council for the governmental support of non-governmental organizations under the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan provides financing to the various projects of cultural centres aimed at the preservation and development of ethnical, cultural and linguistic distinctiveness of the minorities.

Support of the language and culture of all minorities in Azerbaijan is one of the main policy priorities of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Native languages of minorities are taught in the primary schools on the territories densely populated by national minorities. Nowadays schools with Russian and Georgian teaching language, together with international schools with teaching in three languages, namely – Azerbaijani, Russian, and Georgian, function in Azerbaijan. A special Council was created under the Ministry of Education for the purpose of preparation and publishing teaching programs, manuals and textbooks necessary for teaching languages of national minorities. Teaching programs, ABC books and other manuals, and various dictionaries for pupils were published in these languages at the expense of the state.

Branches of many universities and colleges were opened in regions densely populated by national minorities. The State University operates in one district of the south region.

Radio programs in six languages (Russian, Lezghin, Kurdish, Talysh, Georgian, and Armenian) are broadcasted on the Republican radio and programs in Avar, Lezghin, and Tat are transmitted by local radio in regions. Five local TV-channels broadcast in regions densely populated by national minorities. More than 15 newspapers and magazines are published in the languages of national minorities (Lezghin, Talysh,

Georgian, Kurdish, Khinalug, Bulgarian, Russian and Ukrainian etc.). Overall more than 40 newspapers and magazines in Russian are published in the Republic of Azerbaijan.

Department for reporting on the ethno-cultural life of national minorities was created on the Community TV-channel. At the same time media coverage of the culture, ethnography, customs and the way of life of minorities in Azerbaijan is ensured by TV, radio channels, and mass media.

Coordination Committee of national minorities functions under the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. Since 2006 traditional music festivals devoted to arts of national minorities and various exhibitions showing minorities' ethno-cultural life are organized every two years.

Russian, Lezghin, and Georgian state drama theatres function in the Republic of Azerbaijan and are financed from the state budget. In addition, national theatres and folklore bands are set up.

Special department for studying language, culture, history, and ethnography of the national minorities was created within the Azerbaijan Academy of Science. This department prepared and published books about the ethnography and culture of Talishi, Udis, Germans, Russians, Jews, Lezghins, Khinalugs, Tat people and other nationalities. Moreover, collections of poems and folklore are published in the languages of the smaller peoples.

During centuries all religions co-existed in peace and mutual understanding in Azerbaijan where ethnical and religious tolerance reigned. Today Azerbaijan adheres to its national and historical traditions. Favourable conditions for ensuring the freedom of conscience and religion are created in the Republic. State constantly directs financial and material support to the religions communities. In 2011, 400 thousand euro was allocated from the state budget to 18 religious communities of national minorities for the support of their activity.

A Catholic church and two new synagogues were recently build in the capital in addition to many restored and renovated churches and synagogues of the Russian, Georgian, German, Udis and Jewish communities in the capital and regions.

To conclude I would like to stress that norms and principles of the Declaration on the Rights of Persons belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities are implemented in the Republic of Azerbaijan in accordance with this document. Tolerance is a historical heritage of Azerbaijan and can serve as an example for democratic societies. The government is determined to continue this policy in future as it develops even further the equality of all citizens regardless of their nationality, language and religion.

I thank you for your attention.