

Statement by the Delegation of the Republic of Azerbaijan

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Tolerance and non-discrimination II, including:

- *Combating racism, xenophobia and discrimination, also focusing on intolerance and discrimination against Christians and members of other religions*
- *Combating anti-Semitism*
- *Combating intolerance and discrimination against Muslims*

Thank you Madam Moderator,

I would like to speak about the Jews in Azerbaijan.

The Jews are one of the main national minority groups in Azerbaijan. There are 3 main Jewish groups in Azerbaijan:

1. The Mountainous Jews (they are called also as Caucasian Jews). They mostly reside in Baku, Guba (Krasnaya Sloboda- Red settlement), Oguz, Goychay. Krasnaya Sloboda- is the second place in the world after Israel where Jews reside compactly;
2. The Ashkenazi Jews (the European Jews). They reside in cities (Baku, Sumgait).
3. The Georgians Jews. They mainly live in the north-west, particularly in the border regions of Azerbaijan with Georgia.

The Jews are also one of the most ancient ethnic groups in Azerbaijan. They, notably the Mountainous Jews came here from Israel about 2500 years ago. It was the time of their exodus from Israel when Jerusalem's first temple was destroyed. The Jews were deported to Azerbaijan by the order of the Babylon king. There is also another theory on origin of the Mountainous Jews. According to this theory they are descendants of the Khazars who were Turkic peoples worshipping to Judaism.

There were no cases of anti-Semitism in Azerbaijan. Historically the Jews have considered Azerbaijan as a place where could find a safe place.

The Jews played very important role in the development of political, economic, intellectual, scientific and cultural life of Azerbaijan. There were 4 Jewish ministers in the government of Azerbaijan Democratic Republic which was established on May 28-th, 1918 and which was the first democratic state in the whole Muslim world. Among the most famous representatives of the Jews from Azerbaijan I can note Lev Landau, a Nobel prize winner in

physics; Mstislav Rostropovich, a well-known cellist and conductor, Albert Agarunov a National hero of Azerbaijan who defended Azerbaijani territories from the Armenian aggression during the Karabakh war.

During the Soviet period Azerbaijan lost its independence. However, the Azerbaijani people preserved and developed their historical traditions of tolerance and non-discrimination attitude toward national minorities.

The restoration of the political independence of Azerbaijan on October 18, 1991 created favorable conditions for conducting independent national policy based on development of the policy of multiculturalism and tolerance.

The principle of tolerance finds its expression in the following articles of the Constitution of Azerbaijan Republic: Article 25 "Equality right", Article 44 "Right for nationality", and Article 45 "Right to use mother tongue".

There are 8 synagogues in Baku and in other regions of Azerbaijan. In 2002 and in 2003 the Azerbaijani government built two synagogues. There are two Jewish schools in Azerbaijan. Furthermore, the biggest Jewish educational and cultural center in the Caucasus was built here.

There are evidences of increase in number of Jews in Azerbaijan for the last 10 years. According to the official censuses until the end of the demise of the USSR there were 35000 Jews in Azerbaijan. The collapse of the repressive soviet regime and difficult socio- economic situation in the country forced many Jewish people to leave the Soviet Union for Israel and other Western states. This process led to decrease in number of Jews in all soviet republics including in Azerbaijan. If by the end of the collapse of the Soviet Union there were 35000 Jews in Azerbaijan by the end of 90's there were 8900 Jews. However, now there are 12000 Jews in Azerbaijan. This figures show some increase in number of Jews in Azerbaijan. It is a sign of tolerant nature of the Azerbaijani people and multicultural policy of the government.

Thank you.