

Address by Jewish Communities of the Republic of Azerbaijan

Dear brothers, shalom!

The Jews of the Republic of Azerbaijan, who are around 30 thousands, have the honour to inform the participants of the OSCE Conference on anti-Semitism and on Other Forms of Intolerance (Cordoba, 8-9 June 2005) about the life of Jewish communities in the sovereign Azerbaijan. There are few countries in the Euro-Atlantic area, where the attitude towards the Jews is so friendly and loyal. At no time in the whole history of Azerbaijan there have been recorded cases of oppression and persecution of Jews on their ethnic and religious affiliation. It should be pointed out that Jews have been living in Azerbaijan for a long time. After release of our ancestors from the Babylonian captivity in 538 B.C. many of them had stayed in the territory of Parthian (Persian) State, wherefrom they moved to neighbouring countries, including Azerbaijan.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union the new independent States were established. This period of time was characterized by the break of stable economic relations, the collapse of national economy, full chaos and political instability. Moreover, Armenia began aggression against Azerbaijan with a purpose to seize Azerbaijan's historical land of Nagorno-Karabakh. All these reasons led to mass departure of Jewish population. Many of them immigrated to Israel, part of them to the USA and Canada. It should be mentioned that in this period of time the Jews of Azerbaijan were actively fighting for freedom and independence of Azerbaijan. In bloody events of 20 January 1990 when the Soviet army entered Baku, in a result of shooting of innocent and peaceful people by the Soviet soldiers not only Azerbaijanis were killed, but also the representatives of other nationalities, including the Jews – Y.Meerovich, L.Bessantina, doctor A.Markhevka, who did his duties rendering assistance to wounded people.

Many of Jews were bravely fighting against Armenian aggression in Nagorno-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan, and one of them Albert Agarunov posthumously was honoured with the title of the National Hero of Azerbaijan. It has been done without any compulsion, but from the bottom of the heart, as we could not be indifferent to the destiny of our Motherland.

The new Constitution was adopted in 1995, which guarantees the rights to all nationalities and ethnicities, regardless their race, religion and language. The Republic is in the way of construction of a really democratic and secular state. The different religious confessions peacefully coexist in Azerbaijan. The President is the guarantor of the rights and freedoms of all citizens irrespective of their national grounds.

Azerbaijan – one of the few Muslim countries, which maintains close friendly, economic and political relations with the State of Israel. Referring to the new democratic Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan the Jews freely use their native language, study Hebrew, culture, history and traditions of the Jewish people. There are 5 synagogues, the Jewish kindergarten and two schools of general education.

Being anchor of democratic stability in the region, Azerbaijan actively opposes to all manifestations of fundamentalism and anti-Semitism and seriously regards commitment to global democracy and freedom. It is the common understanding in Azerbaijan when anti-Semitism and other forms of ethnic and religious intolerance are not confronted, democracy cannot take root and flourish.

We would like to draw your attention to the following figures: as mentioned above in Azerbaijan are living about 30 thousands of Jews, in Georgia – around 9 thousands, in Armenia – no more than 100 persons. Moreover many businessmen – Jews from the USA, Canada, Great Britain and Israel regularly make visits to Baku.

The Jewish Diaspora of Azerbaijan has broad contacts with international Jewish organizations like “Sokhnut”, “Aghudat Israel”, “Tshuva Israel”, “Joint”, “Vaad” and etc. In short, in Azerbaijan where the manifestations of anti-Semitism have never taken place, all opportunities have been created for Jewish population.

We may note with confidence the high level of tolerance of Azerbaijani people and their ability to peacefully coexist with the representatives of all nationalities and ethnicities residing in the country. Underlying the importance of the OSCE Cordoba conference we believe that in partnership with the world community, we all must redouble our efforts to foster respect, mutual understanding, and compassion for all people.

In this light we, Jews should contribute to the promotion of solid peace, understanding and blessing in the world, including in the second holy Azerbaijani Motherland in the spirit of our eternal Book of Books Torah! Amen!


On behalf of the Jewish communities of Azerbaijan,

**Chairman of the community
of Ashkenazi Jews**



Gennadiy Zelmanovich

**Chairman of the community
of mountainous Jews**



Semyon Ikhiilov

Baky, 3 June 2005