

**Statement by Mr. Hidayat Orudjov
State Counsellor of the Republic of Azerbaijan on Ethnic Policy Issues
at the OSCE Conference on Anti-Semitism**

Vienna, 19-20 June 2003

Dear Mr. Chairman,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me first of all to express my gratitude to the OSCE and the OSCE Chairmanship-in-Office for initiative to hold this Conference and given opportunity to inform you on the measures undertaken by the Government of Azerbaijan for the protection of persons belonging to national minorities and promotion of tolerance in the country, as well as to share with some thoughts in this regard.

As result of transformation of the political and economical structure of the country, the Government of Azerbaijan consider as the one of its priority issues to undertake the necessary measures to establish conditions for ensuring equality of all citizens and their active participation in all spheres of vital activity in the country irrespective of nationality, religion or ethnic origin.

In our country various national minorities have been living together with Azerbaijanis for centuries in peace and harmony. The ethnic multiplicity has been preserved in Azerbaijan to the present day. **As** a multiethnic, multilingual and multi-religious state, Azerbaijan is committed to the assertion of the principle of "unity in diversity". And we may proudly say that at no time in the centuries-old history of Azerbaijan the intolerance or discrimination on ethnic, religious, language and cultural grounds have not taken place.

During the past eleven years since the restoration of the state independence the crucial changes in political, economic and humanitarian fields have taken place in Azerbaijan. The necessary measures have been taken for democratization of the society, promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Support for the national languages and cultures of all national minorities living in Azerbaijan is one of the important directions of the Azerbaijan State's national policy. In this regard, the provisions guaranteeing for all national and religious minorities the rights to freely use of native language and culture, freedom of religion and other human rights and fundamental freedoms are being reflected in the Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan and in relevant legal acts.

The Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan conducts the policy of active cooperation with various international organizations in the field of the protection of

human rights and fundamental freedoms, including of persons belonging to national minorities.

In this context it should be pointed out that Azerbaijan has already joined to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious or Linguistic Minorities, the Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, International Convention on elimination of all forms of racial discrimination and many other international legal instruments in the field of protection of human rights.

Mr. Chairman,

By virtue of historical reasons Azerbaijan is the country where during the many centuries the several tens of different national minorities and religions peacefully coexist. The high ethnic tolerance of Azerbaijani people has facilitated to preserve their cultural and religious identity, successful integration to the society. The striking example of the tolerance existing in my country was establishment of the "Forum of three religions" (Islam, Christianity and Judaism) under the auspices of the Spiritual Board of Caucasian Muslims. The recent visit of Rome Pope John Paul II in May 2002 to Baku was the other evidence proving the existence of the atmosphere of tolerance and inter-religious harmony in my country.

In this connection it should not be surprise for us the centuries-old history of inhabitation of the representatives of Jewish people in the territory of modern Azerbaijan, which is about 2600 years. At present 5 religious Jewish communities are functioning in Azerbaijan: religious community of European Jews of Baku (Ashkenazi), religious community of mountainous Jews of Baku, religious community of mountainous Jews of Guba region of Azerbaijan, religious community of mountainous Jews of Oguz region of Azerbaijan and religious community of Georgian Jews. All these Jewish communities maintain close contacts with Jewish societies in USA, Europe and Israel,

I would also like to mention that about 20 Jewish non-governmental, cultural and charitable organizations, including the agencies of international Jewish organizations such as "Sokhnut", "Vaad L'Hatzolos Nichei Yisroel", "Hershon" and "Joint" are functioning in our country.

5 Jewish synagogues are functioning in the country and in early March of this year the new synagogue was opened, which is the largest in the Caucasus. It is notable that in the process of construction of this synagogue were used the financial recourses not only of Jewish Communities but also of the Spiritual Board of Caucasian Muslims and Baku Eparchy of Russian Orthodox Church.

It should be also pointed out that in 2 schools of general education in Baku the daily courses of Hebrew, organized by Jewish organization "Vaad L'Hatzolos

Nichei Yisroel” are being conducted. Recently the new educational complex “Khabad Or Avner” has been opened, where Hebrew and Jewish culture is being taught. The Sunday school, where are being conducted the courses of Hebrew and Jewish culture is operating with the support of Jewish youth organization “Alef”. The Society “Azerbaijan-Israel,” established in 1990 publishes the newspaper “Aziz”.

Taking this opportunity, I would like to confirm once more that the Government of Azerbaijan will further carry out a consistent policy aimed at assistance in strengthening of mutual understanding, tolerance and respect between all persons living in its territory regardless of their ethnic, cultural, linguistic or religious identity;

Mr. Chairman,

Regarding the subject of this Conference, it is necessary to emphasize its importance and urgency, taking into account that the manifestations of anti-Semitism and other forms of intolerance took place not only in the past but also are being observed to the present day.

Today the global challenges, accompanied by acts of violence, manifestations of intolerance, and as a consequences, aggressive separatism, extremism and international terrorism represent a serious threat to peace, security and stability in the world.

Azerbaijani people fully understand the sufferings and troubles that fell to Jewish people’s fate as we have experienced ourselves the horrors of mass killings, ethnic cleansing and forcible expulsions in the beginning and at the end of the last century. As a result of continued military aggression of Armenia, the Azerbaijani people faced great injustice and losses, one fifth of its territory was occupied and is still under the occupation, tens of thousands of people died, became disable and hostages, more than one million people became refugees and displaced persons, among whom there are persons belonging to various ethnic and religious minorities, who are living in unbearable conditions and have faced cruel realities of nowadays life. Thus, genocide against thousands of Azerbaijanis, carried out by the Armenian military forces in the town of Khojali in February 1992 became one of the most terrible crimes of the 20th century due to its cruelty and inhuman nature.

Although since 1992 the activities of the OSCE Minsk Group has not yet yielded tangible results in the settlement of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, our country still remains committed to the peaceful settlement of the conflict on the basis of the commonly recognized norms and principles of international law, the relevant UN Security Council’s resolutions and the appropriate OSCE documents and decisions.

Mr. Chairman,

I would like to touch upon the extremely important issue like inter-religious and intercultural dialogue. In this regard it is necessary to mention that the success of struggle against the manifestation of anti-Semitism, xenophobia and aggressive nationalism depends not only on legal, political, military and other measures undertaken currently by the international community but also on spiritual consolidation of the international community, in particular on the perspectives of such dialogue in the OSCE region.

Situated on the historical crossroads between the West and the East, Azerbaijan absorbed the values of both civilizations. Taking into account the significant role and useful historical experience in carrying out the inter-religious and intercultural dialogue, Azerbaijan more than once has confirmed his adherence to this dialogue. The obvious and bright example is holding with the support of the OSCE the Conference on role of religion in a democratic society: searching for ways to combat terrorism and extremism in October 2002 in Baku. The one of the working sessions of this Conference had been devoted to the role of inter-religious and intercultural dialogue in fighting against extremism and intolerance. In the final document adopted in Baku Conference had been reflected the items concerning the importance of such dialogue in the OSCE region for establishment of mutual trust and consolidation in the fight against terrorism, extremism and other manifestations of intolerance.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate the role we feature to the OSCE, as a unique pan European organization, in establishment of the new architecture of Euro-Atlantic security, including in strengthening of the atmosphere of respect and tolerance among people of different beliefs and among confessions in general, in putting the wide intercultural and inter-religious dialogue in order, that would lead to the attainment of unity of our societies and elimination of the distrust and the lack of understanding.

Thank you for your attention.