



**Statement by the Delegation of Azerbaijan
Human Dimension Implementation Meeting
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As delivered by Fidan Mahmudova
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Protection of children rights remains high on Azerbaijan's agenda. Issues concerning social and legal protection of children are regulated by the Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan and number of other laws.

Azerbaijan ratified the UN Convention on the "Rights of the Child" in 1992 and eight years later, ratified its two Optional Protocols, including "Involvement of children in armed conflicts" (*and "Sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography"*). In accordance with the commitments coming from the mentioned documents, Azerbaijani Government submits periodic reports to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (UNHCR) for the implementation of Convention and its two Optional Protocols. Azerbaijan is also a party to the Universal Declaration on "Survival, protection and development of children". A number of national legislative acts have been adopted in the on protection of child rights.

The main executive body of the Republic of Azerbaijan implementing child policy is the State Committee for Family, Woman and Child Issues, established in 2006. The Committee is responsible for protection of children, improvement their welfare, provision of their rights and freedoms as well as coordination of state policy in this sphere.

Future steps in the field of protection of child rights have already been defined by the Government. In this regard, as stipulated in "Azerbaijan 2020: Look into the Future" Concept of Development, Family strategy, Child Strategy, and Child Code will be adopted. The National Child Strategy is currently being reviewed by the relevant state bodies, and is to be adopted soon. The Strategy will play a key role in implementing the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in Azerbaijan.

The Ombudsman institute's capacity has been further strengthened, thereby independent monitoring of child rights violations in public settings have been improved. There is also a special Counselor on child rights in the Ombudsman office.

The Government of Azerbaijan and the State Committee for Family, Woman and Child Issues, collaborates with international organizations in the field. We have close cooperation with UNICEF in the field of education, health and other social issues (children with disabilities, street children, preventing violence against children, early marriages, child mortality, and preschool education) with regard to children.

Reforms have been carried out aiming at establishing a system for the effective inclusion of children with disabilities into mainstream education. It is important to note that government financing is being provided for teacher salaries and adjustments in schools to provide access to children with disabilities. By the end of 2015, national and local authorities provide child-care services and associated mechanisms that meet international standards, thereby ensuring and strengthening 17 the social protection of orphans and children deprived of parental care, as well as street children.

The increase in the legal age of marriage for girls from 17 to 18 years old was another bold step by the Government towards the prevention of child marriage.

The Government of Azerbaijan has also taken important measures in the sphere of juvenile justice with the support of international organizations. Living conditions of juveniles offended against law have become better during last years. There were held competitions and tournaments of juveniles in conflict with the law and students of secondary schools with the support of public patrons' councils acting in prisons for juveniles.

Series of events are being organized with a special focus on children from vulnerable groups, such as children deprived of parental care, with disabilities, from national minorities, as well as refugee and IDP children.

It is with deep regret that more than 250 thousands of Azerbaijani children undergo continued violations of their basic human rights and fundamental freedoms. As a result of the ongoing occupation by Armenia 20% of Azerbaijani territories, since 1992 hundreds of Azerbaijani children were killed by Armenian soldiers, 92 children taken hostage, 3393 children lost one parent, 120 children lost both parents, hundreds of thousands of children became refugees and IDPs. Thousands of children have been forcefully expelled from their homes, and the whereabouts of some of them are still unknown.

In the course of military operations hundreds of schools, kindergartens, boarding schools for orphans, medical and cultural institutions were completely destroyed. Moreover, almost on a regular basis children residing in the vicinity of the conflict zone fall victim to deliberate attacks of the armed forces of Armenia, including by traps, mines, snipers and shelling on civilian objects.

9 year-old boy Fariz was shot in his head by Armenian military sniper and 13 year-old girl Aygun fell victim to Armenia's inhumane and immoral policy and tragically died as a result of the explosion of a toy with an explosive device, which the Armenian side deliberately dropped into the river flowing to the village, over 310000 signatures of school children from Azerbaijan were collected and sent to UN Secretary General Special Representative for children in armed Conflict.

In April this year, as a result of artillery shelling by Armenian armed forces in Tartar, 15 year-old Turana Hasanova was killed. She was an IDP from the occupied region of Kalbajar.

In this regard, we recall the OSCE commitments regarding the protection of children. In particular, in 1999 in Istanbul, the OSCE participating States agreed to regularly address the issue of rights of children, especially in conflict and post-conflict situations, including refugees and internally displaced children in the work of the OSCE. The protection of children in armed conflicts should be regarded as an important aspect of any comprehensive strategy to resolve conflicts and thus, should be properly addressed within the OSCE.

In light of the above-mentioned, we call on all OSCE participating States to pay close attention to the issue of the protection of the children in the OSCE area, in particular in the context of armed conflicts.