

**Speech of H.E. Mr. Ilham Aliyev,  
the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan  
at the UNESCO Leaders' Forum  
UNESCO House  
17 November 2015**

Madame Director-General,  
Mr. President of the General Conference,  
Excellences,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, I would like to congratulate Mr. Stanley Mutumba Simataa on his election as the President of the 38<sup>th</sup> Session of the General Conference and wish him every success in his new duties. I also want to thank Madame Irina Bokova for her strong leadership as the Director-General.

It is my great pleasure and honor to participate in the Leaders' Forum dedicated to the 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. UNESCO plays a vital role in the development of humanity, encourages intellectual discussions, coordinates and promotes cooperation among member states and essentially contributes into the activities of the United Nations Institutions.

The United Nations set the "quality education" among the recently adopted Sustainable Development Goals with the aim of achieving a better and safer world. Moreover, Sustainable Development Goals related to education, sustainable cities, food security, the environment, economic growth, sustainable consumption and production patterns, peaceful and inclusive societies, now make a reference to the "culture". All this means that UNESCO will be one of the most important institutions to contribute to the achievement of these ambitious Goals.

Ladies and gentlemen,

It has been already 23 years since the Republic of Azerbaijan started its active cooperation with this Organization. Azerbaijan signed and ratified almost all of the Conventions and other legal instruments of UNESCO.

Our relations with UNESCO reached a qualitatively new phase when Mrs. Mehriban Aliyeva, the First Lady of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the President of the Heydar Aliyev Foundation, has become a UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador. Since then the cooperation with UNESCO became broader, stronger and more dynamic. Another historic and landmark moment was signing of the Framework Agreement on the cooperation in the fields of science, education, culture and communication between the Republic of Azerbaijan and UNESCO in 2013. As a result, Azerbaijan joined the family of donor countries and started to actively support UNESCO's programs and projects in the least developed countries.

Dear participants,

Nowadays, the world witnesses the rise of extremism, radicalism, discrimination and racism, religious and ethnic intolerance, islamophobia and the spread of terrorism. All these manifestations of negative and dangerous phenomena are a clear threat to peace and security, safety and sustainable development. We face armed conflicts around the world and see their devastating outcomes in terms of loss of human life, as well as economic and social vulnerability. The international community's commitment and responsibility for the resolution of these dangerous developments should also be accompanied by more support and trust to UNESCO. More time and resources should be invested into the spread of culture of peace. UNESCO has appropriate mandate, genuine experience, and rich assets such as education, culture, sport, communication and science to serve as one of the most effective and shortest ways to prevent conflicts and wars.

In this regard, I would like to emphasize the role of intercultural dialogue. I believe that the multiculturalism, among others, is an appropriate solution for the above-mentioned diseases. In the world of growing negative ideologies some are becoming more pessimistic about peaceful coexistence of the various cultures. But we have to believe in multiculturalism, which creates unique opportunities for correlation and mutual respect for the diversity. Each culture is rich and unique and should be respected and preserved. Multiculturalism is the one which provides for prosperous development of different cultures together.

Azerbaijan has a lot to offer to international community in terms of intercultural dialogue and tolerance. We are on the crossroads of civilizations, cultures and religions with strong inherited traditions of cultural and religious diversity and multiculturalism. These positive ideals and values became even stronger after we regained our independence and we don't see any alternative to it.

Today, we try to share our experience with other members of international community. Experience, where different ethnic groups, cultures and religions peacefully coexist for centuries. We perceive the notion of "unity in diversity" as an asset which contributes to the development of our country.

There is a comprehensive policy and concrete actions behind our vision and commitments. Since 2008, we have initiated the Baku Process, which is a unique experience to bring together the ministers of culture of the Islamic Cooperation Organization and the Council of Europe member states. We were able to launch discussions on tolerance and dialogue among representatives of different regions and cultures. As a part of this Process we hosted in Baku three World Forums on Intercultural Dialogue, which involved representatives from all over the world, and it is worth mentioning that UNESCO, alongs with other international organizations, is an official partner of this Forum.

As far as sports and culture are concerned, Azerbaijan has hosted the first ever European Games in June of this year and in 2017 Islamic Solidarity Games will take place in Baku.

The other important area of UNESCO's competence is education and science. Education is a key and fundamental basis for building a successful society. Modernization and development comes through education. It is an important tool in preparing professionals for future contributions to the country's sustainable development. The educated young generations can promote the values of dialogue, tolerance and mutual respect, as well as defend themselves from the negative ideologies such as extremism, radicalism and others. In short, education is future! I am proud to tell that Azerbaijan is continuing its successful reforms in the field of

education. We have almost one hundred percent of literacy rate. Government invests in young people through building better universities, schools and other educational institutions, and provides full support, including financial aid, for the study abroad. We are confident that investment in human capital is the most efficient and rational one, as the human capital is essential in creation of strong economy and sustainable development. We attach high importance to the development of science in our country and a lot of work has been done to create better conditions in this field.

As mentioned before, Azerbaijan, as a donor State, also supports providing quality education in developing countries. The relevant projects, on the initiative and under the supervision of the UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador Mrs. Mehriban Aliyeva, in the field of supporting girls' education in Africa and Asia, have been successfully launched recently.

We live in the information age. High Technologies became an irreplaceable integral part of sustainable development in the modern societies. Azerbaijan too continues its reforms in the area of information and communication technologies. As a part of policy on diversification of economy, we heavily invest in ICT to provide an easy access to internet for the population. According to the World Bank, the number of Internet users in Azerbaijan soared from 17% in 2008 up to 75% in 2015. By 2014, wireless penetration per capita had grown to over 100%, while every third person in the country had gained access to mobile broadband, and 30% of the households had subscribed to fixed (wired) broadband Internet. This is our big success showing that we are on the right way. And we will continue our efforts to achieve even better results. I am proud to tell that we have already successfully launched our space satellite and the Government currently working on the implementation of the project to launch the second one. Of course, all these facts prove once again that, today, Azerbaijan has become an active player in ICT and our society immensely benefits from our achievements.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As I mentioned earlier, the cultural and natural heritage is being deliberately destroyed during the armed conflicts and we witness it in the Middle East and other regions. We fully understand the pain and sufferings of the people as we in Azerbaijan also fell victim to such barbaric acts for more than twenty years.

The illegal military occupation by the neighboring Republic of Armenia of almost 20 percent of the internationally recognized historic territories of Azerbaijan, including Nagorno Karabakh and adjacent seven regions, continues regardless of four United Nations Security Council resolutions adopted in 1993, which demand immediate, unconditional and complete withdrawal of Armenian troops from Azerbaijan's territories.

More than one million Azerbaijanis became refugees and internally displaced as a result of this occupation. Along with the military occupation and ethnic cleansing on these occupied lands, the cultural property of the Republic of Azerbaijan has also incurred irreplaceable losses. Numerous historical, cultural, religious monuments and pieces of arts have been looted and removed from the occupied Azerbaijani territories by the Armenian armed forces. Many of them were put on sale in the auctions and shops throughout the world. Armenia is trying to change the attributes of Azerbaijani cultural heritage, toponyms of Azerbaijani origin and identity. The Museum of History of Kalbajar region with its unique collection of ancient coins, gold and silver wares, rare and expensive stones, carpets and other handicraft wares, the Museums of History in Shusha region, the unique Bread Museum of Agdam region,

the Stone Monuments Museum of Zangelan region, as well as many others were plundered and destroyed. 500 historical, architectural and more than 100 archeological monuments, 22 museums (40 thousand museum pieces and exhibits), 9 historical palaces, 44 temples, 10 mosques, 4 art galleries have been looted and heavily damaged. Hundreds of ancient mausoleums and fortresses have been destroyed. In Shusha city, the 18th century Govhar-Aga mosque has been heavily damaged, other mosques in the occupied regions have been destroyed and burnt down. Many mosques have been turned into the ammunition warehouses and depositories. The occupation caused the leveling to the ground of the Khojaly Barrow Field, with unique monuments of the Bronze Epoch, which covered 50 hectares of land with more than 100 barrows. The Republic of Azerbaijan is deeply alarmed by the transformation of the Azykh Cave, a precious human prehistoric monument, which is one of the oldest cradles of the human civilization, into an ammunition dump. The faith of the Caucasian Albanian Round Temple and Khojaly Mausoleum of the 14th century also remains uncertain. These are obvious acts of cultural terrorism with the aim to wipe out the evidences of the historic roots of Azerbaijanis in these areas. They destroyed our heritage but they cannot destroy the memory of the people who lived there for centuries. Such acts are directly violating norms and principles of international law, including aims and principles of UNESCO.

This conflict contains the most serious threats and challenges to the region. The only way to restore a full-fledged peace and security is the resolution of this conflict on the basis of the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

UNESCO is our common house which is built upon a spirit of peace. For already 70 years world leaders, experts, artists, scientists and other intellectuals come together under these roofs to discuss and find out solutions for better life for the citizens of the earth through education, culture, science, sport and communication. Each and every guest of this house affiliates himself or herself with the noble values of this Organization and should spare no efforts to do his or her best in order to contribute to and support the missions of UNESCO.

I would like to congratulate UNESCO with its 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary and wish this Organization every success on its important mission.

Thank You!