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Speech of H.E Mr. Elnur Sultanov, Ambassador-at-Large, Secretary-General of the National Commission of the Republic of Azerbaijan for UNESCO, at the General Policy Debates of the 39th session of the General Conference of UNESCO

UNESCO Headquarters

04 November 2017

Dear President of the General Conference,

Dear President of the Executive Board,

Dear Madame Director General,

Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the outset, I would like to congratulate Madame Zohour Alaoui on her assumption of the presidency of the General Conference at its thirty-ninth session and to wish her every success in fulfilling that highly responsible duty. We are also grateful to Mr. Stanley Mutumba Simataa for all his hard work in presiding over the Conference at its thirty-eighth session.

Using this opportunity I would like to thank Director-General of UNESCO, Madame Irina Bokova for her able leadership during past eight years and congratulate Madame Audrey Azoulay for her nomination as the new Director-General of this Organization.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Against the background of various threats and challenges facing the world nowadays, it is critical to persistently stress the importance of concerted actions aimed at promoting cultural diversity, enhancing the quality of education and encouraging dialogue and mutual respect. In these circumstances, we all recognize the relevance of our Organization. We all have to be united around the soft power of UNESCO in order to struggle negative tendencies.

It is important to ensure much stronger coherence and cooperation among member states and Director-General and the Secretariat for the sake of addressing crucial challenges ahead of us. UNESCO as a laboratory of ideas should be genuinely multilateral and inclusive environment where all member states should stand together for culture of peace.

The way to success in increasing efficiency of the Organization lies with the tangible reforms. And we are of the strong view that these reforms should be in line with United Nations reform process. We have to avoid duplications within UN Agencies. And the main guide for us is the core mandate of UNESCO clearly outlined in its Constitution, which is education, science, culture and communication.

Two years ago, the United Nations has adopted SDGs with the aim to achieve better and safer world built upon sustainable economic and social development. In the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development education is set as a one of the SDG Goals and UNESCO is actively involved in implementation of SDG on Education. My Government has been realizing targeted measures to attain this goal. We call upon Member States to further support UNESCO in implementation of this goal, particularly to foster the role of education to prevent violent extremism and radicalization.

Unresolved armed conflicts, terrorism, violent extremism, aggressive separatism, intolerance and discrimination on ethnic and religious grounds continue to represent the most serious challenges and are among the main obstacles to peace and development.

It is with a profound regret I must underline that UNESCO values and principles remain blatantly violated by the ongoing military occupation of the territories of Azerbaijan by the armed forces of Armenia. As a result of cultural cleansing carried out by Armenia, all historical and cultural monuments, heritage sites, schools, mosques and cemeteries have been barbarically destroyed or desecrated in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan and in Armenia itself.

It is important for international community to redouble its efforts for protection of cultural heritage in the armed conflicts and in this regard Azerbaijan welcomes the adoption in March 2017 the UN Security Council Resolution 2347. Obviously, UNESCO as a main UN agency is entitled to contribute more to the implementation of this Resolution.

Azerbaijan actively supports the Strategy for Reinforcing UNESCO's Action for the Protection of Culture and the Promotion of Cultural Pluralism in the Event of Armed Conflict. Moreover, Azerbaijan as a member of UNESCO Committee on Protection of cultural property in the event of armed conflicts and World Heritage Committee efficiently contributes to this issue. Among others, I would like to emphasize that with our financial contribution the Military Manual for protection of cultural heritage was prepared by UNESCO and San Remo International Institute for Humanitarian Law.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to say few words about the cooperation between the Republic of Azerbaijan and UNESCO. This year we celebrate the 25th anniversary of relations between UNESCO and Azerbaijan. My country is fully committed to the ideals and values of this Organization. Thus, the Framework Agreement on Cooperation between UNESCO and Azerbaijan signed in 2013 is yet another proof of this commitment. This includes supporting UNESCO in such priority areas as education for all, girl's education, safeguarding tangible and intangible cultural heritage, science and innovation technologies, and disaster risk preparedness in least developed countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Several projects have been successfully implemented through the Fund-in-Trust and we are keen to continue in the same spirit.

Located between the two great continents of Asia and Europe, Azerbaijan is a unique place, where the East and the West meet, where the world's main religions peacefully coexist and where the values and traditions of different cultures harmoniously complement each other. As a strong advocate of intercultural dialogue and multiculturalism, which is a state policy priority in Azerbaijan, my country spares no efforts in sharing its rich experience with other members of international community.

We are proud to state that the Baku Process, launched in 2008 by the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, His Excellency Mr. Ilham Aliyev has become a globally recognized platform for promotion of intercultural dialogue. As a part of this process this year Azerbaijan hosted the fourth edition of Baku World Forum on Intercultural Dialogue where UNESCO was a main partner along with other UN and relevant international agencies. It is not a coincidence that the 7th Global Forum of the UN Alliance of Civilizations was also held last year in Azerbaijan.

In the context of relationships between UNESCO and the Republic of Azerbaijan, I am delighted to underline the valuable contribution of Her Excellency Mrs. Mehriban Aliyeva, First Vice President of the Republic of Azerbaijan and UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador, to bringing this cooperation to even more intensive and dynamic level, reaching new horizons of partnership for advancement of ideals of peace and security.

Distinguished delegates,

Azerbaijan spares no effort to bridge different continents politically, economically and culturally. Just a few days ago we have inaugurated the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railroad, which connects Asia with Europe as a part of restoration of the ancient Silk Road, providing more opportunities for rapprochement of cultures as well. All this derives from our vision and inspires us to further promote the UNESCO values and ensure peace and development in the region. Thank you.