

**Statement by Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Mr. Khalaf Khalafov at the
review of the 3rd periodic report of the Republic of Azerbaijan to the
International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
3 May 2013, Geneva**

Dear Mr. Chairman,
Dear Committee Members,

I greet you on behalf of the delegation of the Republic of Azerbaijan and reaffirm our readiness to present the 3rd periodic report by the Republic of Azerbaijan on the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and to provide information on the measures taken in our country since 2004 in the field of implementation of economic, social and cultural rights. We view an interactive dialogue to be held with the Committee members as an important mechanism for evaluation of measures taken in order to realize and provide the economic, social and cultural rights in our country, as well as for an exchange of views on the ways to solve the problems we are faced with in this field.

The Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan is a party to all of the fundamental international documents in the field of promotion and protection of human rights, and we are taking necessary efforts to implement the obligations proceeding from these documents in full and in time. We place high emphasis on international cooperation on human rights, especially on cooperation with the UN treaty bodies. We are convinced that this cooperation provides a constructive discussion of problems existing in the field of realization of human rights, as well as exchange of best practices.

In general, the year 2013 for the Republic of Azerbaijan turned out to be quite a busy one in terms of submission of reports on human rights. Two weeks ago there has been a review of our country's second periodic report on International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families. Just two days ago there was a second review of Azerbaijan's report under the Universal Periodic Review of the UN Human Rights Council. This year we also submitted our fifth periodic report on the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women. Later this year we will submit our reports to the Committee on Civil and Political Rights, Committee on Elimination of Racial Discrimination, and Committee against Torture. Our fourth periodic report to the

Committee against Torture will be prepared in accordance with the new rules, namely the optional reporting procedure.

Being a party to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol since 2009, the Government of Azerbaijan has already submitted its first report to the respective Committee.

We are following closely the process of reforms in the UN treaty bodies, which is one of the outstanding issues in the agenda of the UN mechanisms on human rights protection. We believe that these reforms constitute an essential and important process necessitated by the requirements of present stage from the point of view of the sequence for submission of reports to the treaty bodies, prevention of duplication and overlap of information in the reports submitted to various treaty bodies, coordination of information in the submitted reports on measures taken in the field of promotion and protection of human rights.

The Republic of Azerbaijan conducts an ongoing cooperation with the Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council, and this cooperation will be further continued. The Government of Azerbaijan has been receiving all Mandate Holders under the UN Special Procedures, which sent us letters requesting to visit our country. The latest visit took place on 16-23 May 2012, when the Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health visited Azerbaijan. I have an honour to declare that the Government of Azerbaijan has already sent a standing invitation to the special procedures mandate holders.

As mentioned in paragraph 2 of our third periodic report, it has been prepared and presented to your attention by a prominent Working Group comprising the officials from relevant state agencies. To save time, in my opening remarks I would like to focus largely on the most significant measures taken in the field of provision of the economic, social and cultural rights.

Azerbaijan's economy is developing dynamically, and this development and its positive implications are aimed at provision of implementation of the economic, social and cultural rights of the citizens of Azerbaijan. For four years in a row the World Economic Forum recognizes Azerbaijan as the country with the best economic competitiveness in the post-Soviet area. Today Azerbaijan is 46th in the world ranking for economic competitiveness. In the last 10 years the poverty dropped from 50% to 6%. The GDP grew 6% in the 1st quarter this year. The economic diversification is a key priority for the Azerbaijani State, and the non-oil sector grew 11.4% in the 1st quarter this year. Last year's inflation rate was 1.1%.

Promotion and protection of human rights constitutes an important priority of domestic and foreign policy of the Government of Azerbaijan. Human and citizen's rights and freedoms have direct force in the territory of the Republic of Azerbaijan. The Constitution of Azerbaijan plays a role of a reliable and strong guarantor for provision of all rights reflected in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Our third periodic report also contains sufficient information on existing legislative basis on provision of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

As I mentioned earlier, despite the indicators of economic development, the aggression by Armenia against Azerbaijan, ongoing since the first days of our independence, and the grave consequences of this aggression remain as of the major obstacles for promotion and protection of human rights in our country. This point was reflected in paragraph 11 of the conclusion by the Committee after consideration of the second periodic report of the Government of Azerbaijan on the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Regretfully, 20% of the territory of the Republic of Azerbaijan (the Nagorno-Karabakh region and 7 adjacent districts) remain under occupation by the Republic of Armenia, as a result of which more than a million of Azerbaijanis became refugees and IDPs. Realization and provision of economic, social and cultural rights of this vulnerable segment of population is constantly on top of agenda of the Azerbaijani State. The fact that every 9th person is either a refugee or an IDP affects the process of solution of economic and social problems, and realization of economic, social and cultural rights in the country in general. The Government in a consistent manner takes necessary measures in the framework of the relevant State Programmes in order to provide a well-deserved life quality for the refugees and IDPs. The shut-down of 12 refugee camps was completed in December 2007 as a result of implementation of the "State Programme on improvement of living conditions and raising employment for the refugees and IDPs". Between 2004 and 2011 45 settlements and individual houses with total area of 830 thousand square meters were built for 15 thousand of the IDP families comprising more than 68 thousand persons. 109 schools, 5 musical schools, 24 kindergartens, 22 medical facilities and 22 communication facilities were also built and commissioned at the expense of 863.4 million Manats. 140 thousand IDPs were resettled to the new houses and apartments so far.

Two days ago there was a second review of Azerbaijan under the Universal Periodic Review of the UN Human Rights Council. We consider the Universal Periodic Review as an important mechanism for interactive dialogue and elaboration of recommendations. We have accepted the most part of the recommendations addressed to us as a result of the first periodic review, the implementation of which will undoubtedly contribute to promotion and protection of human rights in our country. I

want to stress that the National Action Programme on raising efficiency of the human rights protection was adopted in 2011 with a view to implementing the recommendations addressed to our country as a result of the first consideration back in 2009.

The Action Programme envisages such issues as improvement of the normative-legal basis (including through definition of human rights and fundamental freedoms as a major criterion for drafting the laws), improvement of activities of the state agencies, training, research and awareness-raising measures on human rights and cooperation with international organizations in the field of human rights.

In course of implementation of the National Action Programme the relevant bodies of power closely cooperate with civil society. The working group, which coordinates the implementation of the Programme, submits reports on its activities to the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan on a regular basis.

With reference to paragraph 43 of the conclusions of the Committee regarding the consideration of the second periodic report by the Government of Azerbaijan on the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, I would like to note that implementation of the two State Programmes on social and economic development of the regions of Azerbaijan, adopted in 2004 and 2009 respectively, played significant role in the overall development of our country. The second State Programme on regional development is being successfully implemented at present. As a result of this Programme, more than 1 100 000 jobs were created in the country, with 30 000 jobs in the first quarter of this year. This indicator is directly linked to the success achieved in the non-oil sector since the bulk of jobs were created in the non-oil industry and agriculture. The Regional Development Programme provided a significant contribution to the overall economic development of Azerbaijan. The first Programme adopted in 2004 played an important role in diversification of our country's economy.

The "State Programme on social and economic development of the regions of the Republic of Azerbaijan for the years 2009-2013" also defines major directions of the governmental activities at the next stages in the regions with compact residence of national minorities.

In course of last 7 years more than 35 000 new enterprises were created in Azerbaijan, significant portion of them created in the regions with compact settlement of national minorities. More than 77% of the new jobs were created in the regions, with more than 20% of them being created in the regions with compact settlement of national minorities.

The State Programme on the Dramatic Art Development for 2009-2019, the State Programme on Improvement of Activities of Children's Musical and Artistic Schools for 2009-2013, the State Programme on Development of the Cinematography for 2008-2018, the State Programme on the Development of Libraries for 2008-2013, the State Programme on the Development of Museums for 2009-2014 were adopted in the field of culture. The adoption of these Programmes facilitates creation of favourable conditions for realization of rights in the field of culture.

In May 2010 the Republic of Azerbaijan acceded to the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions. In a context of implementation of the provisions of the said Convention, the Government is elaborating an action plan, which envisages a project "Cultural Diversity – Cultural Unity". The project includes seminars on national and cultural solidarity in the regions of compact settlement of national minorities, training events for regional figures of culture and persons with special cultural expressions and talents, research of situation on intercultural dialogue, publication of brochures on cultural heritage and diversity of the country, exhibitions, concerts, competitions and other events.

The Republic of Azerbaijan also acceded to the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage and the Council of Europe Convention for the Protection of the Architectural Heritage of Europe, in 2006 and in 2009 respectively.

The Law on Education was passed in 2009. Some 70 documents, including sample statutes on all levels of education, were adopted in the framework of application of this Law. The State Programme on educating the Azerbaijani youth in foreign countries for 2007-2015 was adopted, in the framework of which thousands of Azerbaijani students study in the world's leading universities at the expense of the Azerbaijani State. The projects on construction of the infrastructure of the educational facilities in accordance with modern standards were carried out in the Republic of Azerbaijan. 2000 school buildings were either built or completely renovated, and provided with modern equipment. This constitutes about 50% of all schools in Azerbaijan. In the field of education the investment projects on provision of the education system with means of information and communication technologies and application of the e-education are also carried out.

Since 1 July 2006 the State has been providing address social aid to the people with low income. 180 million Manats are allocated from the state budget for this purpose annually. The Programme on "Pensions and Social support", started in 2009 and covering a time period until 2013, has to be mentioned in particular. This Programme envisages strengthening of institution-building, conduct of greater awareness raising

activities for the employees of the relevant state bodies, improvement of services related to labour market and social protection.

Protection of the labour rights of the citizens of Azerbaijan, continuation of efficient measures in the field of labour, employment and social protection of population, improvement of the labour legislation, addressing the material, social, moral and other vital needs of the working population constitutes a priority direction of the social and economic policy carried out in the country. In the framework of implementation of the “State Programme for 2008-2015 on Poverty Reduction and Sustainable Development in the Republic of Azerbaijan” and the “State Programme for 2007-2010 on implementation of the Employment Strategy of the Republic of Azerbaijan” the relevant measures were taken with a view to improving the well-being of the people, reducing poverty, increasing employment, protecting and developing the human potential in the country in general. Furthermore, providing the consistency of the state policy on the population’s employment, the “State Programme for 2011-2015 on implementation of the Employment Strategy of the Republic of Azerbaijan” was aimed at the implementation of the second phase of the Employment Strategy for 2006-2015 of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

The Law on fight against domestic violence was passed in 2010. The Family Code was amended in accordance with this Law and the minimal age of eligibility for marriage was set up at the level of 18 years both for men and women. The amendments introduced into the Family Code in 2011 prohibit early and forced marriages, and strengthen punishment for such acts. In 2011 our country ratified the International Labour Organization Convention 156 concerning Equal Opportunities and Equal Treatment for Men and Women Workers: Workers with Family Responsibilities and the ILO Convention 183 concerning the revision of the Maternity Protection Convention (Revised), 1952.

Regarding the comments on insufficient representation of women in political and social life, reflected in the reports of the Office of the UN High Commissioner on Human Rights and the civil society institutes, I would like to state that one of the major goals of the State Programme for 2008-2015 on eradication of poverty and sustainable development is to enlarge participation of women in the decision-making process before the end of 2015. Additional measures on provision of equal representation of men and women in all state bodies are being considered at present.

Increase of transparency and fight against corruption play important role in the implementation of the adopted development programmes, promotion and protection of the economic, social and cultural rights, and provision of efficiency in this field. In 2011 our country joined the Open Government Partnership with a view to raising

transparency and promoting the open government practices, exchanging positive international experience and providing a contribution to global efforts in this field. The National Action Plan for 2012-2015 on promotion of the open government was adopted.

Taking into consideration the need to raise transparency in the activities of state bodies, to provide services for citizens with higher quality and comfort through the innovative methods, to adhere to the norms of ethics and polite communication with citizens, to address their needs and queries, to improve the services by the state bodies and to speed up transition to the E-services the State Agency on Services for Citizens and Social Innovations was established. A special ASAN Service (Azerbaijan Service and Assessment Network) was established within this Agency. At the ASAN Service centers 9 state bodies (Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Ministry of Taxes, State Committee on Property Issues, State Customs Committee, State Migration Service, State Committee on Land and Cartography, State Social Protection Fund and National Archive Department) offer 25 types of services (including registration of births, deaths, marriages and divorces, adoptions, affiliation, notary acts, issuance and replacement of the ID cards and common citizen's passports, excerpts from the state registration of property right to the residential houses and apartments (with exception of initial registration), registration of the subjects of commercial law and taxpayers, definition of labour pensions, etc.). The ASAN Service centers facilitate cutting the costs and saving time of the citizens, building up trust for the state bodies, raising transparency, fighting against corruption and a wider using of E-services.

In Azerbaijan the year 2013 has been proclaimed a year of the information and communication technologies. The relevant Action Plan adopted in April 2013 envisages a greater use of such technologies in the electoral process, raising the quality of internet connection, creation of the online data base, continuation of measures on establishment of the E-government and development of the online media. There are no restrictions on the use of internet technologies in Azerbaijan and today more than half of Azerbaijan's population are internet users. We believe that internet constitutes an important tool for realization of freedom of expression in society and in state.

An objective study and analysis of the changes in the society can be ensured by a credible statistical information. The State Programme on for 2013-2017 on development of official statistics was adopted to this end.

This Programme will provide for an application of new methods in collection of data on population's employment and unemployment, with due account of monitoring of

the quality of life and living conditions, as well as international standards and recommendations.

In order to obtain information on child mortality in accordance with methodology of the World Health Organization, a statistical survey of registration of death cases among children below the age of 5 will be undertaken and a relevant database created under this Programme.

Provision of access to health care services for the population is one of the priorities for the state activities and significant measures are taken in this dimension. For the last 10 years some 500 health care facilities, 70% of which are located in the rural areas, were fully equipped with modern medical technologies. These facilities also undergone renovation and construction works.

According to an agreement concluded between the World Bank and the Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 17 health care facilities were constructed in the rural areas of the country.

Raising the quality of medical services for the mothers and children is one of the priority directions of the socially-oriented State policy. Significant measures were carried out in this field with direct support of the country's leadership. Action Programme on Protection of Health of Mother and Child, planned for 2006-2010, became an important step in intensification of work in this dimension. The goals of the Programme include strengthening of health of mothers and children, protection of reproductive health of population, setting up necessary conditions for birth of healthy children, reduction of cases of illness and mortality cases among mothers and children. In the framework of the Programme seven perinatal centers provided with advanced technologies, medical equipment and high-quality medicines were established, measures to improve knowledge of the medical personnel were taken both inside and outside of the country on a regular basis, clinical protocols were elaborated in the field of protection of health of mothers and children. The taken measures raised the quality of services provided to children and pregnant women.

Reaffirming our readiness for a constructive interactive dialogue with you today on the topic of implementation of the economic, social and cultural rights in Azerbaijan I would like to express our gratitude to you in advance for participation in this dialogue.

Thank you for your attention.