

The 146th IPU Assembly

**“Promoting peaceful coexistence and inclusive societies:
Fighting intolerance”**

11-15 March, 2023

Excellencies,

Dear participants,

Ladies and gentlemen.

On behalf of the parliament of the Republic of Azerbaijan, I greet you all at the General Debate of the 146th Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union. Today’s global challenges underline the utmost importance of the theme of our discussions.

Dear participants,

Because our world is too interconnected and complex, the issue of peaceful coexistence and inclusive societies can not be regarded as a mere domestic social process. They have long surpassed this substance and have become an important factor globally. They are also closely interlinked with our hopes for a better world of peace, justice, stability and sustainable development.

Ladies and gentlemen.

In the past, we have witnessed rejection of the ideas of multiculturalism and description of it as a failure by some political leaders. And what we have today? The rise of radicalism, xenophobia, racism, Islamophobia, discrimination and hatred. The world has become more divided, less tolerant and peaceful. It shows that those political leaders, who rejected multiculturalism, were wrong.

But what should we do to overcome intolerance, achieve peaceful coexistence and inclusive societies? First and foremost, accept diversity as an enriching factor rather than a divisive one. Provide equal rights and equal opportunities to all without any discrimination. Promote dialogue between the members of different cultures, ethnicities and religions. These are basic preconditions for democratic, just and peaceful societies.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to share with you the experience of my country Azerbaijan. Today, Azerbaijan is regarded as one of the world centers of intercultural and interreligious dialogue, multiculturalism.

Looking at the factors underpinning this achievement, it should be noted that our society is guided by the moral values that have been formed throughout the centuries. Located at the crossroads of East and West in the South Caucasus region, Azerbaijan has been home to various ethnic and religious groups that have coexisted together in dignity, peace and friendship. Cultural diversity is our strength, not a weakness. Different religious and cultural monuments, mosques, churches and synagogues are located side by side. Multiculturalism is a way of life for our people.

At the same time, it is a state policy. Besides protecting and further developing these values, our government also promotes multiculturalism, tolerance and interreligious dialogue through organizing numerous international events under the patronage of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, His Excellency, Mr. Ilham Aliyev.

Dear participants,

Nowadays, one of the main and worrying problems is the issue of refugees and Internally Displaced Persons.

In many cases, this issue is related to violation of peace and security. Thus, my country Azerbaijan witnessed it 30 years ago, when 20 percent of its internationally recognized territories became under occupation by our neighbor Armenia. As a result of ethnic cleansing and occupation policy of Armenia, more than one million Azerbaijanis became Internally Displaced Persons from the occupied territories and refugees from Armenia. During the years of occupation, Armenia razed to the ground all our cities and villages, vandalized all historical, cultural and religious sites of Azerbaijan. As in the occupied territories, Armenia also destroyed all historical and religious monuments of the Western Azerbaijanis, who lived in present-day Armenia for centuries. This is a clear demonstration of intolerance and hatred by monoethnic state of Armenia.

Despite the years of occupation, it is Azerbaijan that has initiated a peace agenda and normalization of relations between Azerbaijan and Armenia, right after liberating its territories in 2020. This agenda is based on 5 principles of international law.

However, Armenia, along with misleading international community with false information, still does not fulfill its undertaken obligations and continues illegal transportation of weapons, military personnel and landmines to the territory of Azerbaijan. We have witnessed yet another manifestation of such falsification and misleading by Armenian representative in the framework of this very Assembly.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I regret that the first statement in this Assembly on such an important topic as peaceful coexistence and inclusive societies was delivered by a representative of a country that is one of the most mono-ethnic countries around the globe well-known with its aggressive, discriminatory and intolerant policy.

Armenian Speaker enumerated national minorities living in his country and so-called rights granted to them. Quite surprisingly he has not mentioned about multi-phased forceful expulsion of Azerbaijanis from his country where they had been living for ages, the last phase of which resulted in more than 300 thousand Azerbaijanis expelled from Armenia in late 1980s.

They have the right to return, which is enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international law treaties. Armenia should enable the safe and dignified return of ethnic Azerbaijanis to their homes and the realization of their collective and individual rights after their return.

Armenian representative shamelessly claimed that his country has no territorial claims against any other country. However, as I mentioned earlier, besides holding the significant part of Azerbaijan under occupation for about 30 years, Armenia continues to keep its armed formations in the internationally recognized territories of Azerbaijan in breach of Trilateral Statement of 10 November 2020.

Armenian delegate did not shy away from purposefully mentioning false and fictitious figures concerning the number of Armenian residents of the Karabakh region of Azerbaijan. Azerbaijani leadership has repeatedly stated that all 25 thousand citizens of Azerbaijan of Armenian origin will enjoy equal rights as our other citizens.

Well-known multicultural and tolerant policy and traditions of Azerbaijan is an inspiration to be confident on this.

And finally, on the claim about so-called “blockage” of Lachin road, while completely refuting those baseless allegations, I wish to remind Armenian delegate that, Lachin road is open for unimpeded free passage of all civilian and humanitarian vehicles as confirmed by relevant international organizations operating in the field.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Azerbaijan is committed to implementing its obligations and at the same time ensuring the rights of its citizens are realized and legitimate demands are fulfilled.

Thank you for your attention.