

Madam Chairperson,
Distinguished Members of the Committee,
Dear guests,

On behalf of the government of Azerbaijan, I'm honored to present our fourth periodic report on the implementation of the United Nations Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women. I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the members of the CEDAW Committee for invaluable inputs that improved our report with their list of questions and issues. Your unique experience, expertise and recommendations will greatly enhance our understanding of our obligations under CEDAW, help us in overcoming existing gaps and challenges and assist us to better implement CEDAW.

Despite the existing problems of the lasting territorial dispute, and over 1 million refugees and IDPs, with all confidence I assure the Committee that the Government of Azerbaijan is fully committed to ensuring gender equality in all spheres, and to better protect women's rights, as we consider these factors fundamental to building a real democratic society.

The report presented covers the period from 2004-2008, although some more recent advancements in ensuring fuller participation of women in public and political life of the country and elimination of gender-based discrimination, have also been added in the final version of the report, that you have in front of you, as well as in the responses of the Azerbaijan Government to the Committee's questions.

In order to save time, I would like to brief you on the most recent developments and information on the implementation of key articles of

the Convention. The establishment of the State Committee for Family, Women and Children Affairs in 2006; a governmental body with a ministerial portfolio, the national machinery responsible for formulating and pursuing state policy on all aspects of the promotion and protection of women's rights and the empowerment of women and the implementation of CEDAW is a testimony of the political will of the government to gender equality. Prior to 2006 we had the State Committee for Women's Issues of the Republic of Azerbaijan, which was only an advisory state body addressing women's issues. This is a very important achievement in strengthening the institutional framework to address the key gender issues on a high governmental level, including better implementation of CEDAW obligations. The State Committee has, since 2006, been allocated an increased budget. I'm proud to mention that since its establishment the State Committee has achieved a lot and is still sparing no effort in establishing a comprehensive legal and practical framework for ensuring equal rights and opportunities for women and girls in Azerbaijan. We, however, acknowledge that much remains to be done, and that we face certain challenges along the way, which we are striving to overcome.

Before highlighting the major progress achieved for the period covered by the report, I must note that in order to fully consider the recommendations of the CEDAW Committee submitted after examination of the last report of Azerbaijan, the State Committee has applied a strategy of two way approach. Following the recommendation of the UN CEDAW Committee concerning wide dissemination of its concluding comments, only two months after our receipt of the concluding

comments, they were translated into the Azerbaijani language, and disseminated widely among relevant State bodies, including Parliamentarians, representatives of NGOs, the media and the public at large. The Convention, the Optional Protocol, General Recommendations of the CEDAW Committee have all been translated into the Azerbaijani language and are also widely disseminated in the country both in urban and rural areas.

Developing the legal and policy framework, we cooperate closely with state bodies and Parliament, by discussing the previous recommendations of CEDAW Committee, in order to integrate them in the formulation of state policy. At the same time we have greatly enhanced our collaboration with local NGOs, community-based organizations, women's groups and international organizations, by means of which we strive to narrow the gap between the *de jure* and *de facto* elimination of discrimination against women and ensuring real gender equality in all spheres of life.

Our Committee has taken a number of important initiatives which we believe are essential in mainstreaming gender equality in all governmental activities.

We have been very successful in establishing a gender budgeting system as a major guarantor of equal division of state financial resources in favor of both sexes, ensuring economic equality between women and men. The State Committee together with the United Nations Country Team established an Initiative Group on Gender Budgeting which analysed the 2006 state budget from a gender perspective and prepared recommendations, developed advocacy materials related to gender

sensitive budgeting, organized several training sessions on gender budgeting for state employees and parliamentarians, conducted TV debates and radio programs aimed at introducing Gender Budgeting to the general public. As a result a book on “Gender Review of the Budget of Azerbaijan”, which highlights a gender analyses of the budget has been published. This new concept for the state budgeting system of Azerbaijan has had a direct impact on ensuring gender equality. The Government has already allocated 120 000 USD in 2008 and 600 000 USD in 2009 for necessary activities ensuring gender equality and women’s empowerment, in the state budget. We expect to increase this amount in coming years, and provide the most efficient spending of these allocations.

In accordance with the recommendation of the CEDAW Committee made after the examination of 2nd and 3rd combined periodic reports, the State Committee for Family, Women and Children Affairs has submitted an amendment to the Family Code to equalize the minimum marriage age for women and men. This proposal had been considered by the Permanent Commission on Social Policy of the Parliament and we have been assured by the members of the Commission that its enactment is expected during the 2009 fall session of the parliament.

In addition to the “Complex Program of the Republic of Azerbaijan on combating daily violence in democratic society” approved by the Cabinet of Ministers of Azerbaijan Republic in January, 2007 a milestone in the series of measures conceived to address domestic violence has been the drafting of a Law “On the prevention of domestic violence” by the State Committee. The Draft Law aims to provide adequate and effective protection to all women against violence within their families and to

respect their integrity and dignity. It contains a comprehensive range of provisions to overcome family violence and includes protective measures, such as shelters, counseling, rehabilitation and support services for female victims, punishment of perpetrators etc. It also provides for the creation of a statistical database and a data collection methodology, since lack of data on domestic violence has been identified as a major gap.

The State Committee has also commissioned international experts to prepare a national strategy for combating Violence against Women which will accompany the legislation. Training of staff of the State Committee on the National Strategy and guidelines on the functioning of shelters for victims of violence has already taken place in June 2009.

This initiative was followed by a great deal of debate, both among state officials, and within society. We spared no effort to involve all sectors of society in this dialogue and held consultations with local NGOs and international organizations during its preparation. A lot of advocacy and behaviour-change materials such as posters, banners, brochures and calendars covering information on violence and the ways of elimination of such cases, have been developed and published. These materials were disseminated during related conferences, meetings and workshops. By attracting renowned male public figures as advocates against violence (namely an Olympic champion, a famous writer, a celebrated musician, a Member of Parliament), TV spots on Domestic Violence calling to stop violence against women were released. They were broadcasted on three national channels of Azerbaijan television throughout 2008–2009. Comprehensive awareness-raising campaigns on grass-root level and in schools have been conducted, educating girls and boys, men and women.

A team of gender experts and women's rights activists travelled to the rural areas in the Northern and Southern regions of the country to hold lively Question and Answer sessions covering Gender Based Violence related issues like Domestic Violence and early marriages.

Since these awareness-raising campaigns and zero-tolerance policy of the government, an increase in the number of cases reporting by women has been noted, both at the Police stations, and through available hotlines and to the Ombudsperson.

Refugee and IDP women and children, as victims of violence under conditions of forced displacement, have also the priority attention of the government. Under The Complex Program on combating daily violence in democratic society, women refugees and IDPs are offered a comprehensive range of services, which include reduction of unemployment rate among them, the increase in access to, and level of education, as well as awareness- raising campaigns on gender equality and especially on the consequences of all forms of violence on the future of our society. The government aims at preventing the marginalization of refugee women and IDPs, and also aims to ensure their full integration into society. As a result of these measures taken, the poverty rate among IDPs was reduced from 74% to 35%. During the last five years, living conditions of 70 000 refugees and IDPs were considerably improved, 25 048 women were rehoused in new settlements and 72 647 women refugees and IDPs were provided with relevant jobs. During 2001-2008 from the budget of The State Oil Fund, 61 settlements were constructed and equipped with necessary infrastructure such as 114 secondary schools, 4 musical schools, 36 kindergartens, 5 hospitals, 39

medical stations, 32 club centers, 32 phone and internet centers and 42 administrative buildings.

The other socially vulnerable groups of the population especially women, girls under 20, single mothers and mothers of many children, disabled women, women bringing up disabled children, women released from prison, IDPs, women war veterans, families of martyrs, and elderly women, are among the target groups of the State Program on implementation of Employment Strategy approved by the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan on 15th May 2007. The Strategy aims at increasing the employment of these people by organizing professional training for unemployed women, conducting research on the underlying causes of unemployment among women, etc.

In order to support the realization of the Presidential decrees and orders issued on women's issues, the Government of Azerbaijan has also developed and adopted, a State Program on Poverty Reduction and Sustainable Development which fully incorporates the gender component.

At the initial stage (2003-2005) of the elaboration of the abovementioned document, the Poverty Reduction and Sustainable Development Secretariat announced a temporary gender-expert position on a contractual basis. At the second stage of the Program (2008-2015), a gender expert joined the staff permanently. The Program contains a set of measures aimed at ensuring women's employment, including fostering women's entrepreneurship, providing gender equality in the process of developing small enterprises. A separate section in the Employment Strategy envisages wide application of flexible forms of

work for women that would allow better reconciliation of family and career. As a result in 2005, 9163 women were provided with relevant jobs, and over 572 women were involved in professional training. In 2007, 70 527 women were provided with relevant jobs by the placement services of the Republic out of which 7476 women received trainings to enhance their skills in different fields, retraining and courses of professional development; 8295 women were involved in paid social jobs.

We are also concerned about low-paid jobs in education and healthcare and the unbalanced involvement of women in the certain areas. Researches conducted by our Committee show that in the spheres of private entrepreneurship, especially big businesses, decision making positions, the structure is overwhelmed by men what we regard as a negative indicator. Based on these findings we are analyzing the reasons for these trends, among which the most influential is the armed conflict, war-torn families and the psychological barriers of women themselves to take responsibility of high positions and the risks of making business. But these tendencies are changing. The State Program on Social and Economic Development of the Regions of Azerbaijan gives impetus to the development of the women micro and medium entrepreneurship in regions and rural areas. As a result, the average percentage of women entrepreneurs in spheres of agriculture, tourism, healthcare, carpet weaving and etc,has increased.

Several Business Training Centers which provide entrepreneurs with consultation on business plan, information, marketing and training services have been established. In 2005, the Association of Women

Entrepreneurs was established in order to deal actively with all the problems of women entrepreneurs.

Since the very first day of its work the State Committee for Family, Women and Children Affairs has established a Coordination Council consisting of representatives – the focal points - from all ministries, committees and other state bodies to mainstream gender equality and related issues in their structures. These focal points have been very successful in ensuring a comprehensive approach and promotion of many ideas of our Committee regarding women empowerment and gender equality. In order to raise effectiveness of their work we are currently lobbying to raise their level to at least heads of departments. This way we will achieve better results in a shorter time frames.

Now however, after implementation of a series of governmental programs, compilation of the data base of active women living in provinces, and organizing special training for them we can see a considerable increase in activeness of women in different spheres. At the moment we have four women deputy Ministers (Ministry of Education, Ministry of Economic Development, Ministry of Culture and Tourism , the Ministry of Health), one Chairperson of a State Committee (State Committee for Family, Women and Children Affairs, one Chairperson of the State Commission (State Commission on Admission of Students),² heads of departments at the President Administration .In addition, one deputy of the chairman of the National Parliament out of three, The Ombudsperson, a deputy Prime Minister of Nakhchivan Autonomus Republic, The Chairperson State Committee for Family, Women and

Children Affairs and the Ombudsperson of Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic are women.

There is a considerable increase in the number of women deputies with executive powers in the regions - 35 women in 85 regions of Azerbaijan. There are also 45 women heads of departments at the executive bodies. But we still consider these indicators insufficient, and will continue to push for more women ministers and heads of local administrations in coming years.

In this respect I must mention one of the major events held last year – the third National Congress of Azerbaijani Women in Baku. Before the Congress, the Committee organized town-hall meetings in all regions where the local communities elected representatives for the Congress. It was attended by two thousand women from all over the country, as well as women leaders from foreign countries. Additionally, a set of interactive telecommunication technologies gave an opportunity to all regions of Azerbaijan to observe and participate in the overall work of this Congress. Conferences of women in arts, lawyers and entrepreneurs and NGOs have also been organized. Recently in July 2009, the first forum of 400 women journalists has been held. These events are very important in demonstrating the enormous potential of women and their ability to make changes for the better in our society.

As a result of these events and regional programs the level of women participating in the Presidential election in October 2008 considerably increased. We created a special data base on gender for the upcoming municipal and parliamentary elections and gave proposals to the presidential administration on measures for increasing women' activity.

At the present moment we are working with women from the regions, remote and rural zones to encourage them to participate actively in the upcoming municipal elections set for later in 2009, and next parliamentary election. Through a series of seminars, special training and publications, more than 500 women from each region are being introduced to necessary guidelines.

Not going too deep into details of all legislative and policy measures aimed at better implementation of our government's obligations, I would like to stress that important amendments to the Labor and Family Codes have been made to ensure better reconciliation of working and family life for working women, remove all barriers in equality of opportunity and provide all the conditions for the full exercise of their potential.

The government of Azerbaijan has also focused on the elimination of gender stereotypes, with special focus on the younger generation, as they are most likely to reconsider the traditional division of roles of women and men in society. The scope of activities on increasing awareness, understanding, commitments on women's rights and discrimination, motivation of students for critical analysis of gender situations in the country were conducted during the whole year of 2008 at several state and private Universities. The interventions have been implemented through the vehicle of youth conferences, debates, seminars, targeted both at university/school students / youth NGOs and teaching staff.

Awareness-raising campaigns, targeting women living in rural and remote zones, on their rights and gender equality have been promoted

through a series of publications which contain the Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan “On state guarantees of gender equality” and all relevant amendments made to other legislative acts in accordance with the Law.

In all recent workshops and seminars organized jointly with the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, The General Prosecutor’s office and the Supreme Court the concepts of gender equality, gender-based discrimination, as well as major provisions of the CEDAW convention including concluding comments of the Committee ,were addressed. Special training for law enforcement officials on CEDAW and gender-based violence also have been organised with the participation of international experts.

In recent years, the main strategy of the Azerbaijani Government was to invest in bringing up a healthy and well-educated nation. We consider human capital more valuable than any other resources, that may multiply and have a long lasting effect upon development of the country in all spheres. The Ministry of Health has considerably increased the number and quality of health-care services in the regions and there is an improvement in rural women’s access to health care, especially to Reproductive Health Centers. Now women even in very remote zones receive urgent and good quality medical assistance.

Education of women and girls is a priority area of focus of many state programs. Every year the State Commission on the Admission of Students monitors the enrollment of girls in all levels of education and analyses trends of the increase and decrease of the number of female students. All related state agencies focus on those areas where, for some reason, the percentage of girls entering to the universities is lower. We

immediately mobilise all sectors to promote necessary education for all women. Our main motto here, is - well educated, self confident and progressive women are the basis of a harmonious and developed society.

The government of Azerbaijan has always been, and still is engaged in a continuous dialogue and collaboration with non-governmental organisations.

The most significant example of successful collaboration of the state body, an NGO and an international organisation is the joint project of our Committee, the H.Aliyev Foundation and the UNFPA: “The XXI century without violence against women”. The main objectives of the project are: providing women with additional opportunities to use their rights; increasing women’s participation in society; prevention of violence, early marriages and reducing negative effects these cases have over the next generation; protection of women and children against domestic violence; raising awareness of the wider population in the field of gender issues.

Madam Chairperson, distinguished Committee members, I believe the above-mentioned measures, being only part of all work done for full implementation of the CEDAW Convention by the Azerbaijani government, will serve as good examples of our full commitment toward the implementation of the Convention and readiness to overcome every challenge along the way to eliminating all forms of discrimination against women.

Unfortunately the limited time frame does not allow me be as specific and detailed as I would like to be. Therefore we have tried to include in our delegation representatives of all related state agencies in

order to provide you with thorough information on those issues you are interested in. The members of our delegation are:

- 1.** Mr. Tofiq Musayev, Charge d' Affairs of the Permanent Mission of Azerbaijan to the United Nation
- 2.** Ms.Irada Huseynova, the Deputy Minister of Education
- 3.** Mr. Orudj Zalov, the Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs
- 4.** Mr. Natig Mammadov - Deputy Minister of Labor and Social Protection
- 5.** Mr. Faig Gurbanov, Head of the Department for Human Rights and Public Relations of the Ministry of Justice
- 6.** Mr.Murad Najafbeyli- Chief of the Department of International Law & Agreements of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- 7.** Ms. Sabina Manafova- Deputy Head of International Relations Department of the State Committee for Family, Women and Children Affairs
- 8.** Ms. Lala Rzayeva – Chief Adviser of International Relations Department of the State Committee for Family, Women and Children Affairs
- 9.** Mr. Elgun Safarov- Chief Adviser of the Law Department of the State Committee for Family, Women and Children Affairs
- 10.** Mr. Rufat Atakishiyev-Coordinator of the Project “The XXI century without violence against women”.
- 11.** Ms.Reyhan Huseynova - Head of the Azerbaijan Future Studies Society, an NGO

Thank you very much for your attention and inputs!