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**Statement by
H.E. Mr. Mahmud Mammad-Quliyev**

**Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs
of the Republic of Azerbaijan**

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UN Commission on Human Rights**

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Mr. Chairman,

Let me start by sincerely congratulating you on your well-deserved election as the Chairman of the Commission. I also would like to congratulate Madame Louise Arbour on her assumption of the duties of the High Commissioner on Human Rights. I wish both you every success and assure you of the full support of this Delegation.

Mr. Chairman, in a bit more than three months from now, the United Nations will mark the 60th anniversary of the signing of its Charter. As we all approach this solemn date, the United Nations faces serious tests to its credibility and effectiveness. Today hardly anyone can defy the premise that the UN needs reform and transformation, in order for it to be able to effectively address the challenges that are becoming more acute and dangerous, as well as to reconfirm its place in today's transformed international system.

The goals enshrined in the U.N. Charter — particularly those regarding international peace and security and promotion of the respect for fundamental human rights — have never been more pertinent and meaningful. We all, small and big, weak and strong, need the United Nations that in its entirety is credible and successful, one that can effectively deal with concrete problems facing the whole international community, such as terrorism and proliferation, threats to sovereignty and territorial integrity of states, gross and massive violations of fundamental human rights, protracted conflicts and forgotten crises, inadequate response to natural disasters, need to foster economic development, reduce poverty and improve global health.

We hope that the Millennium Summit+5 later this year will be able to record the so much needed progress in our collective march towards achieving the benchmarks fixed by our leaders five years ago. We also look forward to the follow-up to the report of the High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, that among other issues should deal with the long-awaited reform of the whole UN human rights machinery, including the work of this Commission, of which Azerbaijan intends to become a member.

We believe that vast experience gained by our country through its present membership in the Economic and Social Council as well as in the Council of Europe provides a solid basis for us to effectively contribute to the work of the Commission at a crucial stage in its history.

Mr. Chairman, realizing well that the anticipated changes within the UN system should be matched by action by individual member states, Azerbaijan itself has been engaged lately in the process of transformation. Setting the protection and promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms as the primary goal, and the construction of a democratic society as the strategic, conscious and irreversible choice of the people, Azerbaijan in the course of last few years has covered considerable ground in bringing itself closer to the democratic standards of the Council of Europe of which it had become a member in 2001.

Four years of our membership in this organization were crucial in enabling the country to advance along the path of strengthening secular democracy to be governed by the rule of law. Our engagement in the field of judicial and electoral reform is growing every year. Independent judiciary and free and fair elections are the targets that have to be completely met. New legislation in many fields has been adopted. Fully participatory transparent legislative process is an important objective we are determined to achieve. The recommendations of the Council of Europe and implementation of the commitments undertaken helped us a lot in ensuring our steady advance towards becoming a member of the family of European states.

Since restoring its independence Azerbaijan joined almost all main international treaties on

human rights. Implementation of commitments contained in those treaties remains a priority. Various state programs and laws on enhancing social security of people, fostering economic growth, addressing reduction of poverty and fighting corruption have been enacted.

Office of the Ombudsperson created in 2001 has been actively involved in considering the complaints from individuals and facilitating solutions as well as raising the public awareness about its mandate and activities.

National plan of action to combat trafficking in human beings has been established in cooperation with the IOM and OSCE last May at the initiative of the President of Azerbaijan aimed, among other things, at setting up a system to improve related national legislation and bring it in compliance with international standards.

As a multiethnic and multi-confessional State, Azerbaijan is committed to the principles of equality among all its citizens, following the principle “unity in diversity”. Numerous ethnic and religious minorities continue to enjoy all rights under the law and are protected by the Government.

Given one of the highest numbers of the displaced population in the world, around one million of internally displaced persons and refugees, Azerbaijan has been committed to alleviating suffering and hardships of this most vulnerable segment of the population by enacting numerous humanitarian and developmental programs to ensure the protection of their human rights and improve their living standards.

But all this is not to say that there is room for complacency. Problems do exist, and we are aware of them. We realize that in all these fields we still have quite a way to go. Good laws as well as numerous state programs will start to be felt when they are backed up by full and diligent implementation. Needless to say that the Government is committed to go ahead with even more devotion until the identified targets are reached.

But of course, Mr. Chairman, the picture would not be complete if I don't address the major factor negatively affecting our ability to go on with the process of democratic transformation and fulfillment of our obligations in the field of human rights, and that is the unresolved conflict with neighboring Armenia that continues to control one-fifth of the internationally recognized territory of Azerbaijan, and has most recently intensified its policy of consolidation of the results of aggression by settling ethnic Armenian population in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan.

To start with, this policy is being carried in gross violation of international humanitarian law, namely Geneva Conventions of 1949, accompanied by the bewildering silence of international community. Equally important is that it also undermines already fragile peace process in which both Azerbaijan and Armenia are involved with the mediation of the OSCE. Such behavior renders the search for a peaceful settlement of the conflict, even harder to achieve.

Mr. Chairman, one may pose a question: why all this takes place? First thing that comes to mind is that, obsessed by the illusions of its “military victory”, totally confused by its own flimsy myths, Armenia erroneously assumes that time is on its side to turn Nagorny Karabakh's de-facto annexation to de-jure acceptance.

One should not also dismiss another reason, namely, the stance of appeasement and double standards on the part of international community, that by turning a deaf ear to the pleas of Azerbaijan, emboldens Armenia further to proceed with impunity with this sort of unacceptable behavior.

Moreover, as if trying to add insult to injury, Armenia tries to diffuse various myths and legends throughout the world trying to win the latter's understanding and even sympathy by depicting itself as a perpetual victim at all times and occasions.

While no one is suggesting that the history of a nation should be sent to oblivion, yet remaining the hostage of these memories that become even more puffed up with time, can lead to very dangerous results, when revanchism is blinding the whole nation and pushing it over the brink of sanity and realism.

In the end, Azerbaijan has had the dubious honor of being exposed to such revanchism by Armenia for almost twenty years now.

As a result, hundreds of thousands of Azerbaijanis who used to historically inhabit present-day Armenia have been subjected to the first ethnic cleansing in modern history back in 1987 and 1988, even before this terrible practice came into view in the Balkans.

Further on, heartened by impunity, Armenia cleansed of Azerbaijanis Nagorny Karabakh and other surrounding regions of Azerbaijan.

After all this, what moral right this country has to portray herself as an ardent advocate of human rights of the "cleansed" people of Nagorny Karabakh, when she herself has brutally done away with one of its minorities some twenty years ago?

Against this background tireless attempts of Armenia to get international recognition of the crimes that it itself had been involved into, seem even more misleading, hypocritical and phony.

Let me conclude, Mr. Chairman, by saying that protection and promotion of human rights, as well as security and stability in the South Caucasus are dependent on our ability through joint efforts of all of us to achieve peaceful settlement of the outstanding conflicts, in order to give our children and grandchildren the inherent right that every human being should enjoy – the right to live in peace, security and prosperity.

Thank you.