



**Statement by H.E. Mr. Jeyhun Bayramov,
Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan,
at the General Debate of the 77th session of the UN General Assembly
“A watershed moment: transformative solutions to interlocking challenges”
New York, 24 September 2022**

Mr. President,
Mr. Secretary General,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

First, I would like to extend congratulations to His Excellency Csaba Kőrösi on assuming Presidency of the 77th session of the General Assembly and wish him every success in this highly responsible capacity. Mr. Kőrösi can count on full support of the Republic of Azerbaijan throughout his tenure. I also wish to thank outgoing President, His Excellency Mr. Abdulla Shahid, for his hard work over the past year.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Azerbaijan is well-known for its contribution to promoting intercultural and interfaith dialogue. The Baku Process launched in 2008 by the Government of Azerbaijan together with the UN Alliance of Civilizations, Council of Europe, UNESCO, ISESCO and others, has set standards and agendas for the dialogue and intercultural cooperation. The important role of the Baku Process in advocating for dialogue among cultures was recognized in the reports of the UN Secretary-General.

Based on the successful experience of the Baku Process, Azerbaijan in partnership with the UN Alliance of Civilizations and ISESCO launched in June 2021 a new international initiative entitled “Peace4Culture” Global Call, the aim of which is to contribute to the sustainable peace, development and protection of cultural heritage. We believe that this initiative will be equally successful, and invite all countries and international organizations to join this project.

Dear Colleagues,

The world continues to face serious challenges that the COVID-19 pandemic has brought. Despite the fact that expanding vaccination rates and increasing adaptivity of the global population to new realities give glimpse of hope for the post-COVID period, serious challenges remain.

All immediate and long-term challenges brought by the pandemic necessitate new mechanisms supported by high-level political engagement that would provide a comprehensive framework for global cooperation and solidarity.

From the very beginning Azerbaijan in its both national and the NAM Chair capacities has been advocating for greater global solidarity to overcome the pandemic, and put forward a number of global initiatives to that end. The initiative of President Ilham Aliyev, in his capacity as Chair of the Non-Aligned Movement, to convene a Special Session of the UN General Assembly in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, enjoyed broad support of the UN membership. On behalf of NAM Azerbaijan also tabled resolutions on ensuring equal, affordable, timely and universal access to COVID-19 vaccines, which were adopted at the UN General Assembly and Human Rights Council with an overwhelming support of Member States.

Along with effective vaccination campaign within the country, Azerbaijan has donated significant amount of COVID-19 vaccines to the countries in need. We have provided international assistance to more than 80 countries to combat the pandemic.

We will continue our endeavors aimed at further strengthening international cooperation in addressing the consequences of the pandemic and consolidating efforts for global recovery from the COVID-19. The President of Azerbaijan, in this regard, has initiated the establishment of High-level UN Panel on post-pandemic global recovery, which will be among the topics to be elaborated on at the upcoming Summit-level Meeting of the NAM Contact Group in response to COVID-19 to be held in Baku in coming months.

Excellencies,

Since gaining its independence Azerbaijan has made a long journey, transforming from a country, imposed with the security challenges on its own soil, into a contributor to the global security. Along the way Azerbaijan has been a strong and reliable partner of the United Nations, staunchly supported it and actively contributed to its activities.

Both in its national capacity and as current Chair of the Non-Aligned Movement, Azerbaijan is keen to continue contributing to peace and security, strengthening the international legal order, and enhancing dialogue, global solidarity and multilateralism.

We also look forward to the Summit of the Future, its inter-governmentally negotiated outcome and a New Agenda for Peace as an opportunity to reinvigorate global action, reflect on collective commitment to the Charter of the United Nations and multilateralism.

Azerbaijan is fully committed to 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. We launched the new development strategy up to 2030, which goes hand in hand with the 2030 Agenda. Over the last year Azerbaijan has progressed further in terms of SDG achievement and was ranked in top 50 countries in the UN 2022 Sustainable Development Report. Azerbaijan is among 12 countries, which submitted three Voluntary National Reviews in the High-Level Political Forum, held under the auspices of ECOSOC.

We pursue transformational changes in remodeling our economy to make transition to green and circular economy. The clean environment and green growth have been identified as one of the five priority areas of our new national development strategy. This transition stands high on our development agenda despite the fact that the oil and gas sector plays a significant role in our economy. It is against this backdrop that the non-oil sector of Azerbaijan rose by 11 percent in the first half of 2022, triggering the increase in our GDP by 7.2 percent.

Currently, Azerbaijan is one of the few countries worldwide gradually mainstreaming the sustainable energy in its development agenda, while being a reliable hydrocarbons exporter to the international markets. We will increase our profile in this regard, including through introducing new elements of alternative and renewable energy as well. A recently concluded EU-Azerbaijan MoU on a strategic partnership in the field of energy is a good example of Azerbaijan's constructive input into global energy security.

Sustainability has also been mainstreamed in post-conflict reconstruction and rehabilitation activities in the liberated territories, as well. New cities and villages are now being built from the scratch by applying modern urban planning methods, the concepts of "smart city" and "smart village". After the war 3 billion USD have already allocated from the state budget for these purposes, and Azerbaijan is keen to invest even more in the future. The liberated area was designated a "green energy zone".

Positioned at the crossroads of North-South and East-West transport corridors, Azerbaijan is a rising transit country. Corridors and routes passing through Azerbaijan offer competitive advantages for the transport operators and businesses in terms of high-end infrastructure and fast, secure transit traffic.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This year marks 30th anniversary of admission of the Republic of Azerbaijan to the membership in the United Nations. Since becoming part of the UN family, Azerbaijan has consistently demonstrated its strong commitment to the principles and purposes of the UN Charter and international law.

We joined the UN, when the very principles, which the UN stands for, have been blatantly violated in relation to Azerbaijan. In those difficult times the UN stood with Azerbaijan in defending the core values enshrined in its Charter.

Azerbaijan has seriously suffered from the aggression by Armenia in the early 1990s, at the core of which were groundless territorial claims, misinterpretation of international law, fabricated historical narratives and racist motivations. Back then, the United Nations Security Council unanimously expressed its support to the sovereignty, territorial integrity, and inviolability of the internationally recognized borders of Azerbaijan, and demanded the withdrawal of all occupying forces from Azerbaijani territories. So did the General Assembly.

In course of aggression Armenia occupied 20 percent of Azerbaijan's territory. 20 thousand Azerbaijanis have been killed, more than 1 million have become refugees and IDPs. Almost 4,000 citizens of Azerbaijan, both civilians and military, still remain missing in connection with the conflict.

Armenia has inflicted long-term damage on the environment in Azerbaijan. Also, thousands of cultural heritage objects of Azerbaijan have been destroyed, plundered or misappropriated by Armenia. Earlier this year, ISESCO has sent a technical mission to Azerbaijan to undertake a post-conflict State of Conservation Assessment of the Cultural Heritage in its liberated territories. For decades, Azerbaijan has called on Armenia to support an independent, transparent UNESCO mission to assess and advise on the protection and preservation of cultural heritage in the region. Although Armenian occupation of Azerbaijan's territory ended in 2020, a UNESCO mission has yet to arrive, and I once again publicly call for such a mission.

The scale of violations and destructions demonstrates the clear intent and purpose to terrorize, kill and expel Azerbaijani civilians, and erase all traces of Azerbaijan from these territories.

Within almost 30 years, Armenia, having committed ethnic cleansing, carried out illegal settlement policy by transferring Armenians *en masse* from Armenia and third countries to the occupied territories of Azerbaijan in a blatant violation of international humanitarian law, with the aim of preventing Azerbaijanis from return to their places of origin, and securing the annexation of these territories.

Conflict resolution efforts under the auspices of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe yielded no results.

Almost 30 years on, in autumn 2020, Azerbaijan, in response to yet another large-scale military provocation of Armenia and guided by the inherent rights conferred upon the Member States by the UN Charter, launched a counter-offensive operation. As a result,

Azerbaijan has liberated its territories and three-decades-old armed conflict has been resolved by military and political means in line with the Trilateral Statement signed by the leaders of Azerbaijan, Russia and Armenia on November 10, 2020.

The Trilateral Statement announced the end of all military activities between Armenia and Azerbaijan. It set the parameters for consolidating peace in the region, such as complete withdrawal of all Armenian armed units from the territory of Azerbaijan; the return of displaced persons; and the unblocking of all economic and transport connections in the region.

Azerbaijan has now embarked upon unprecedented recovery and reconstruction activities in the liberated territories and prioritized their full reintegration. Such activities aim at finally enabling hundreds of thousands of IDPs to return to their homes in safety and dignity, and ensure peaceful life in conflict-affected territories. The first families have recently returned to the Aghali village in the liberated Zangilan district of Azerbaijan.

Azerbaijan is resolute to re-integrate its citizens of Armenian origin residing in conflict-affected territories into its political, social, economic space, guaranteeing the same rights and freedoms with all the citizens of Azerbaijan regardless of their ethnic, religious or any other affiliation. The Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan provides the solid legal framework in this regard.

One of the major impediments to the ongoing recovery and reconstruction efforts and safe return of displaced persons is a massive contamination of liberated territories by landmines and other explosive devices, and continued refusal by Armenia to provide accurate and complete information on mined areas. Over the years of occupation of and during withdrawal of its forces from Azerbaijani territories Armenia heavily and indiscriminately contaminated those areas with mines and other explosive hazards. Since the signing of Trilateral Statement more than 240 Azerbaijani civilians and military were killed or seriously injured by mine explosions.

Obtaining the maps of minefields along with the targeted and sustainable international technical and financial assistance to further strengthen and increase national mine action capacities and efforts in Azerbaijan are critically important to save lives and strengthen peace. The UN sustainable support and adequate and predictable mine action funding are indispensable.

Excellencies,

Azerbaijan is committed to regional peace, stability and development. Establishment of good neighborly relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan is a key for building secure, stable and prosperous South Caucasus through full-fledged regional normalization.

Along with carrying out large-scale recovery and reconstruction works in the liberated territories, and pursuing reintegration of residents in conflict-affected territories, Azerbaijan has initiated the process of normalizing inter-State relations with Armenia based on mutual recognition and respect for each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity within their state borders.

Azerbaijan has, on numerous occasions, expressed its readiness to start negotiations on peace treaty between Armenia and Azerbaijan, and has established its national delegation to that end.

Equally, Azerbaijan has undertaken efforts to start the process of delimitation and demarcation of state borders between Armenia and Azerbaijan, unblocking transportation and communication links, including the establishment of the Zangezur Corridor, which is a part of international transportation network.

Notwithstanding the increased dynamism in contacts, including direct dialogue between Armenia and Azerbaijan over past months, Armenia seems to stick to its past practice of imitation of negotiations, and instead of good faith implementation of its commitments, it frequently resorts to provocations and sabotage to exacerbate tensions and undermine ongoing normalization process with Azerbaijan.

Armenia has not fully withdrawn its armed forces from Azerbaijani territories as stipulated by November 10 Trilateral statement, and continues a variety of military activities within the territories of Azerbaijan, including planting landmines. Recently, massive number of anti-personnel mines produced in Armenia in 2021, have been found in the Lachin district of Azerbaijan.

Following a series of political and military provocations, especially after the fourth Brussels meeting between the leaders of the two countries, Armenia resorted to another large-scale military provocation along the undelimited state border line in the night from 12 to 13 September attempting to plant mines on the roads between the military positions of Azerbaijan, taking advantage of night time and complex terrain.

Further on, Armenia, using weapons of different caliber, opened fire on Azerbaijani positions, which caused losses among the military personnel of Azerbaijan, and inflicted significant damage upon its military infrastructure.

Azerbaijan took adequate measures to neutralize threat against its sovereignty and territorial integrity, to ensure safety of its personnel, as well as civilian personnel involved in reconstruction works in the area. The armed forces of Azerbaijan demonstrated utmost restraint and professionalism, and limited to targeting exclusively fire points of Armenia with high precision weapons to suppress its attacks on the positions of Azerbaijan.

Armenia clearly attempted a further escalation to manipulate the attention of international community. Thus, Armenia disregarded the ceasefire agreed on September 13 and continued shelling the territory of Azerbaijan, including with high-caliber weapons and artillery. As a result, Azerbaijan suffered further losses and casualties, included 80 servicemen killed, 282 servicemen and 2 civilians wounded.

Contrary to such reckless actions of Armenia, Azerbaijan exercised utmost restraint, took several steps, including through contacts with relevant international partners, and demonstrated good faith and genuine will to restore the ceasefire.

Eventually the ceasefire was restored effective of 8 pm on September 14 through direct communication channels between Armenia and Azerbaijan, and is being maintained, as confirmed by both sides.

In the aftermath of the escalation, Azerbaijan is engaged in addressing the humanitarian consequences and in this context declared its willingness to return to Armenia remains of deceased military personnel on a unilateral basis, and informed the ICRC accordingly.

Azerbaijan is not and cannot be interested in the tension. As a matter of fact, latest hostilities erupted in close proximity of areas where impressive large-scale post-conflict investment, rehabilitation and reconstruction projects are underway.

Furthermore, latest escalation of tension fits very well into the pattern we had observed over last 30 years from Armenia. Each time at the decisive stage to achieve a breakthrough Armenia resorted to similar serious provocation as a mean of escaping from responsibility of taking necessary decisions.

We would have wished that current leadership of Armenia is not following the path of its predecessors by deliberately closing for yet another time the window of opportunity for peace and security in the region.

Azerbaijan is resolute in further repelling any threat to its sovereignty and territorial integrity, as well as safety of its citizens, and urges Armenia to refrain from further escalating the situation. Instead, Armenia has to constructively engage in the ongoing normalization process in order to establish predictable stable situation in the region through establishment of good-neighborly relations.

In this context, following the agreement reached at the fourth meeting held on August 31, 2022 in Brussels of the leaders of Azerbaijan and Armenia with the President of the EU Council, Azerbaijan reiterated to Armenia its readiness to start practical work on the peace treaty without further delay. Immediately after the meeting, we proposed concrete date and venue to Armenia for such talks.

Two days ago we listened to the statement delivered here by the Prime Minister of Armenia. Regretfully, this was yet another evidence demonstrating that the Armenian side seems focused on continuing the confrontation instead of normalization. In Azerbaijan we believe that our region has seen enough confrontation, destruction and suffering. It is high time for both our nations to engage fully and wholeheartedly in the post-conflict normalization, so we can finally turn over the tragic page of our history and start building a better future for our children. The commitment of Azerbaijan side is there. We hope that Armenia will finally reciprocate constructively and engage genuinely into the negotiations.

Excellencies,

Having liberated its territories from a long-term foreign military occupation, Azerbaijan is determined to spare no effort towards their full reconstruction and re-integration in accordance with the highest possible standards. At the same time, our country will continue playing a role of a responsible member of international community in all relevant fields, whether it is contributing to global energy security, helping fight against COVID pandemic or promoting sustainable development. We believe that in a globalized world no country is an island. And we act accordingly.

Thank you.