

**STATEMENT BY MR. ZAUR ALIYEV,
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HUMAN RIGHTS (OMBUDSMAN) OF THE REPUBLIC OF
AZERBAIJAN, AT THE OSCE HIGH-LEVEL CONFERENCE ON
TOLERANCE AND NON-DISCRIMINATION**

Tirana, 21 and 22 May 2013

**Regarding the activities of the Commissioner for Human Rights
(Ombudsman) of the Republic of Azerbaijan on ensuring
the right not to be subjected to discrimination**

One of the areas of activity of the Commissioner for Human Rights (Ombudsman) of the Republic of Azerbaijan is fighting and preventing discrimination and carrying out educational work in this sphere.

In the process of devoting special attention to the State's accession to the international legal instruments on preventing discrimination, the Ombudsman submitted a proposal to Parliament for the signing and ratification of Protocol No. 12 to the European Convention on Human Rights, which prohibits discrimination. As a result, the Protocol was signed on 12 November 2003.

One of the areas of activity of the Ombudsman in fighting discrimination is carrying out educational work in this sphere.

The Human Rights Ombudsman periodically carries out educational work by promoting the human rights and freedoms enshrined in national legislation and in the international treaties to which Azerbaijan is a party, in particular, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.

The Ombudsman periodically holds meetings with people in different regions of Azerbaijan, especially in areas that are densely inhabited by national minorities, and also organizes training sessions and seminars, including some for youth representatives in order to raise their awareness.

At national and international events held at the instigation of the Ombudsman, the topics discussed were religious tolerance, relations between people with different religious views, a culture of peace through religion, the role of national, ethnic and religious tolerance in that sphere, the development of intercultural dialogue and interreligious co-operation, and carrying out educational work in the schools to instil in children and young people the values of religious tolerance and an anti-discriminatory culture.

The Alliance for Peace and Development, composed of representatives of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and religious communities, was established on the initiative of the Ombudsman.

The Ombudsman, considering it necessary for human rights to be taught as a distinct subject in comprehensive secondary schools, specialized secondary educational institutions and institutions of higher education, proposed that the subject be included in the list of required courses. Human rights began to be taught as an academic discipline first in the law faculty of Baku State University and thereafter in all relevant departments of the University. At the same time, separate sections on human rights were added to secondary-school textbooks.

The Ombudsman took the initiative of preparing modules (programmes) for the graduated system of education in comprehensive schools (for grades 1 to 4, 5 to 8 and 9 to 11, respectively) in order to provide instruction on the rights of the child at each educational level and for the corresponding age group. The programme was prepared by the Ombudsman together with the Ministry of Education and implemented in comprehensive secondary schools. Textbooks were also prepared for teachers and students in order to raise their awareness regarding the rights of the child. The main point of the project is for students themselves to teach the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child to younger pupils enrolled in the class.

The textbooks deal with topics based on the Constitution, national laws, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. With great interest and enthusiasm, pupils study their rights, campaign for them in their milieu and learn how to defend both their rights and the rights and freedoms of their family and friends. Special attention is paid in discussion sessions to questions concerning the prohibition of discrimination, and the essence of that concept is explored in detail.

This initiative provides for work to be carried out across the country, and is continuing to be implemented successfully.

Another area of educational activity is raising awareness about the National Programme of Action on Human Rights.

The Programme was approved by a presidential decree of 27 December 2011. This document, which is quite important in terms of developing and ensuring the implementation of human rights, covers such areas as enhancing the legal and regulatory basis, co-operating with international organizations in the field of human rights, strengthening the defence of the rights of different categories of the population, enhancing the activities of governmental bodies in terms of human rights, and carrying out educational, scientific, analytical and co-ordinating work in the field of human rights.

Monitoring, evaluation and reporting on the implementation of the Programme are conducted periodically by an independent institution of the Ombudsman's Office.

With a view to the effective implementation of the provisions contained in the Programme and the co-ordination of actions in that area, a working group was set up and is functioning successfully under the Ombudsman's supervision. The working group's members

include representatives of governmental bodies responsible for carrying out the Programme, as well as many NGOs active in the field of human rights.

Public hearings in each district and city of Azerbaijan are playing a special role in promoting the Programme and discussion of it among the population and in governmental bodies. Thus, with a view to monitoring the Programme's implementation by the Ombudsman, public hearings are being held throughout the country, with the participation of deputies, representatives of local executive authorities, judicial and law enforcement bodies, town councils, local NGOs, the media, and representatives of refugee communities, displaced people and national minorities. Representatives of youth organizations also participate actively in these events.

The practice of holding public hearings, which is new to us, is being carried out on a large scale, with the population showing great interest in it and the participants in the process taking an active part. Public hearings promote the free expression of people's opinions and suggestions. They strengthen the notion that all rights belong to each person without any kind of discrimination, effectively ensure freedom of speech and the right of assembly, and enhance the democratic system of government.

At the same time, on the initiative and under the supervision of the Ombudsman, and with the support of the OSCE, a number of textbooks were translated from English into Azeri and presented to the public. These books are used as a basis for the training sessions and seminars for youth representatives. One of the topics addressed in the training sessions is the fight against discrimination and the right not to be subjected to discrimination.

Taking into account the specific characteristics of the manifestation of ethnic cleansing and racial discrimination and the particular harm that Azerbaijan has sustained in this regard, the Ombudsman made a special statement on ethnic cleansing, its tragic consequences and the need to prevent it that was later submitted to the Secretariat of the United Nations Human Rights Council.