

APPEAL of the Commissioner for Human Rights (Ombudsman) of the Republic of Azerbaijan to the international community on the occasion of 21 September — the International Day of Peace

Peace means life, the right to live, and healthy generations. The totality of all these means sustainable development and mutual cooperation in individual countries and throughout the world.

The sustainable development of humanity and the realisation of human rights and freedoms depend on ensuring peace and security. The path towards sustainable development lies precisely through peace, justice, tolerance, the rule of law and human rights.

The “21 September — International Day of Peace”, observed worldwide as a significant day by decision of the United Nations, embodies people’s right to truth, a society free from violence and conflict, and a prosperous life.

The “Declaration on the Right of Peoples to Peace”, adopted by United Nations General Assembly Resolution 39/11 of 12 November 1984 and marking its 30th anniversary this year, also accorded special status to the right of peoples to peace, declaring this right to be a sacred right of every human being, without any discrimination. This once again confirms the necessity of ensuring the right to peace.

As stated in UNESCO’s 1995 Declaration of Principles on Tolerance, tolerance, which serves as a fundamental basis for peace, justice, mutual understanding and respect, “makes peace possible and promotes the replacement of a culture of war with a culture of peace.”

The aforementioned Declarations place an obligation on every State to ensure and preserve peace.

In a rapidly globalising world, the existing political, economic and cultural processes require every country to respond adequately to the urgent challenges of our time. This is possible through the development of interstate cooperation, the establishment of new creative thinking and an innovative environment, as well as respect for an individual’s religious beliefs and the elimination of any manifestation of racism and intolerance.

Unfortunately, contradictions between States, confessions and civilisations are widening, and new centres of war are emerging.

The last 25 years of the history of Azerbaijan, where people belonging to different religions and faiths have lived for centuries in an environment of mutual understanding and which has supported and remained committed to a peace-oriented position, have been marked by the occupation of 20 percent of our territory as a result of Armenia’s aggression and the pursuit of a policy of ethnic cleansing against Azerbaijanis; our people’s experience of the horrors of war; hundreds of thousands of our compatriots, driven from their ancestral lands, seeking refuge in tent camps and settlements for refugees and internally displaced persons; and the massive and gross violations of their human rights.

Today, despite the ceasefire regime, the systematic violations of the terms of this agreement by Armenian military formations, including causing harm to the civilian population by setting large-scale fires and opening fire on border villages with various

types of weapons, as well as taking civilians hostage, endanger people's lives and violate their right to life, freedom of movement and other rights.

All of this results in serious violations of the provisions of international instruments concerning the protection of the human rights of civilians, children, women, elderly persons and persons with disabilities during armed conflicts, including the United Nations Declaration on the Protection of Women and Children in Emergency and Armed Conflict of 14 December 1974; the Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907 concerning the protection of the civilian population during armed conflicts (wars); the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Victims of War (1949) and its Additional Protocols I and II (1977); as well as the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989).

The continuation of such incidents creates numerous precedents of impunity. Impunity, in turn, creates conditions for new crimes against humanity and leaves the civilian population exposed to danger.

The requirements of United Nations Security Council Resolutions 822, 853, 874 and 884 of 1993, as well as the resolution adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 14 March 2008, which provides for the resolution of the conflict concerning Nagorno-Karabakh, an integral part of the Republic of Azerbaijan; the immediate cessation of all military operations and acts of hostility threatening peace and security in the region; the establishment of a ceasefire; and the withdrawal of all Armenian military forces from the territory of Azerbaijan, are not being fulfilled.

A dismissive attitude is being demonstrated towards peace and security; our cultural heritage existing in the occupied territories is being appropriated, and our rare historical monuments are being ruthlessly destroyed. All of this has a negative impact on the establishment of peace throughout the world.

In this regard, emphasising that among the main tasks of the United Nations, the Council of Europe, the OSCE and other international organisations is the importance of taking decisive measures to strengthen universal peace and of ensuring the fair settlement of conflicts that may lead to a breach of peace through peaceful means and in accordance with the principles of international law;

Noting the need to end impunity for the policy of ethnic cleansing at the global level and the necessity of punishing those who perpetrate it for this purpose;

Advocating the initiative of "Religions — a bridge to peace";

Re-emphasising the need to provide support to countries facing the threats created by wars and disasters and living in dire conditions;

As a country whose 20 percent of territory has been occupied as a result of the aforementioned conflict, with more than one million refugees and internally displaced persons awaiting the protection of their violated rights and their return to their native homes, and whose civilian population is suffering from armed conflict;

Declaring the rights of peoples to peace, development and truth,

Guided by the principles of the sovereign equality of States, respect for the territorial integrity of States, the fulfilment of international obligations in good faith, the peaceful settlement of disputes, and the prohibition of the use or threat of force, which are

universally recognised norms of international law directly related to the principle of respect for human rights, we call upon international institutions, representatives of academia and religious leaders, representatives of civil society, and all segments of the population, regardless of nationality, religion or race, to direct their efforts towards the resolution of conflicts at the national and international levels, as well as to demonstrate solidarity in order to ensure sustainable development.

We call upon the international community and influential international organisations to support stability and peace-building processes in the South Caucasus region, to support Azerbaijan's just position in the peaceful resolution of the Armenia-Azerbaijan, Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, and to assist in restoring its territorial integrity.

Prof. Elmira Suleymanova

Commissioner for Human Rights

(Ombudsman) of the Republic of Azerbaijan

20 September 2014

Appeal

The Appeal was sent to the Secretary-General of the United Nations; the UN Security Council; the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights; the OSCE; the Council of Europe; the International and European Ombudsman Institutes; the Asian Ombudsman Association; the International Peace Bureau; the Universal Peace Federation; the embassies of the Republic of Azerbaijan in foreign countries and the embassies of foreign countries in the Republic of Azerbaijan; Azerbaijani diaspora organisations; and ombudsmen of foreign countries.