

# Special Interview with the Chairperson of the State Committee for Family, Women and Children Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Mrs. Hijran Huseynova



**In recent years, lots of works have been conducted by the government, including your Committee for stimulating women to entrepreneurship. Could you, please, elaborate a few of them?**

Government understands that one of the components of women's active participation in political and public life is their economic independence. It facilitates poverty reduction, ensures advance in women's economic and social performance and in many cases eliminates gender based discrimination in society. H.E. President Mr. Ilham Aliyev pays

significant attention to the creation of favorable conditions for the development of private enterprise. The loans provided by the state, the work carried out by the National Fund on Assistance for Entrepreneurship and ABAD centers on Support for Family Business, give an extensive support to the development of women businesses, especially in rural areas. Special competitions are being launched among women graduates from the "Start and Improve Business" Program and the best micro project proposals are being provided by in-kind contribution to start businesses.

In the framework of the projects on "Enabling civil society to play greater role in advancing gender equality and women's rights" we conduct the assessment of employment opportunities for women in the local labor market. We held meetings with the private sector and banks to sensitize them to gender specific needs and initiate dialogue between the businesses and civil society activists to promote women's rights.

Regional Women's Resource Centers focusing on economic and social empowerment of rural women are opened to strengthen government efforts in addressing the needs and concerns of rural women in the area of economic and social participation. It also supports network building among economically active women residing in rural and sub-urban settlements. Jointly with local NGOs, we conduct Gender Assessment to analyze barriers to economic and social participation of women and girls both rural and urban areas.

**As a result of your work, do you see an immediate positive change or a trend?**

After implementation of a series of governmental programs, we can see an increase in women's activeness in different spheres. Such major events as National Congress of Azerbaijani Women, conferences on women leadership have been very important in demonstrating the enormous potential of women. Women take part actively in civil-society building by asserting their presence in both political and public organizations. It should be noted that more than 200 non-governmental organizations are women NGOs dealing with different aspects of women issues. 49% of members of the Leading New Azerbaijan Party are women. There are special Women Councils of the political parties which positively influence on enhancement of the role of women in the political life of the country.



### What is the current statistics?

As a result of adopted measures, the decrease of the poverty rate among women from 49% to 5.9% has been achieved in the country. Today 6% of working women are involved in private sector and 31% of them in public. In 2017 share of women entrepreneurs in small and medium business reached 28%, while earlier their share was only 4 percent. Behind of all these listed numbers and figures are people. We try to cover specially women who lost their husbands during the conflict, mothers of many children, women who left unclaimed due to the transformation processes in society. These projects give women a hope and possibilities to subsist and stimulate them to be more active in the society.

### Do we have an opportunity to stimulate young females, based on our rich history and traditions?

Indeed. It is worth to mention our famous diplomat, Sara Khatun, who was provided with all opportunities to administer the state policy and held diplomatic negotiations as far back as in the fifteenth century. This single fact denying false stereotypes about women's status in the East proves that even in the Middle Ages women in Azerbaijan were involved in important public and social matters and stroke contemporaries with their activity. Among the main problems, dealt with by Azerbaijani enlighteners, an important place was given to women's education, rights and freedoms. That's why the first girls' secular school in the Middle East was opened in Baku in 1901.

When contemporaries would ask the famous philanthropist Haji Zeynalbdi Taghiyev why he pays so much attention to the opening of a school for girls namely, he would respond that the educated girls would eventually become the educated mothers. And exactly an educated mother could teach, direct her children and encourage them for development. The most important legacy of this school was a whole generation of remarkable Azerbaijani women, who later become outstanding educators in their own rights. For example, in 1911 the first women magazine "Ishig" started to be published by Hadija Alibeyova.

### What is the role that women play in the modern Azerbaijani society today?

Today, women use all opportunities provided by the state, easily obtain education, raise their professional level, actively participate in social-political processes, are widely represented in such areas as politics, entrepreneurship, work in the field of healthcare, sports, army, national security and law-enforcement bodies, technology and oil sector.

Women are more and more involved in the decision making process. The number of women in the parliament has increased from 11% (13 deputies) in the 2005 elections to 16% in the last elections (20 women out of 125 deputies) and the representation of women at municipal level has increased from 4% (2004 elections) to 35% in the elections of 2014. The number of woman deputy head of executive powers increased from 35 to 79 and one woman was appointed to the position of head of executive power in the recent years.



Women equally represent the country with the men at international arena. 181 persons out of 271 diplomats working at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs are women. Women Deputies of the National Parliament are the chairpersons of the Equality and Non-Discrimination Committee of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, and coordinators of the PACE campaigns of fight with violence against children and women, etc.

Bearing in the mind that education is the key to the advancement of women, government tries to improve the access of women to quality higher education. The number of women studying at higher education institutions was 80 thousand in 2016-2017. So by the official statistics for the beginning of the 2016 there were 47 women and 53 men per 100 educated students in Azerbaijan. Every year The State Students' Admission Commission conduct gender review of entrance examination. We strengthen our work in those regions where we see decrease of girls' entering the universities. The role of women in the field of science is also significant. 46 % of PhDs and 51 % of all scientific workers are women. Among the women-scientists there are 20 academicians, more than 4000 candidates of sciences.

### What are the lessons which the Committee is sharing globally?

Today our women are active players of constructive processes going on not only in the country, but also at international arena. Taking into consideration that Azerbaijan is the only country in the region which has the state body to deal with women issues, our experience is being studied by the neighboring states. We have signed memorandum on cooperation with Kazakhstan, Iran, State of Qatar, Kingdom of Morocco, Kingdom of Jordan, France, Latvia and Republic of Turkey and etc. Through the UN Agencies we accept delegations of women from Afghanistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan who comes to learn our experience in the field of women empowerment and gender equality.

In framework of these treaties and partnership we send our experts to address gaps and challenges, on women's rights, early marriages and gender based violence.

Azerbaijan hosted a number of international conferences on gender and children issues, for example the 7<sup>th</sup> Council of Europe Conference of Ministers responsible for Equality between Women and Men, Fifth Ministerial Conference of Organization of Islamic Cooperation on Women's Role in Development, Workshops on countering violent extremism through the education of girls in the framework of World Forums on Intercultural dialogue, Conferences of Women's Wings of Asian Political Parties, etc.

Azerbaijan organizes women business forums and conferences. In the framework of the United Nations Special Program for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA), where Azerbaijan has been chairing for 6 years, three "International Forums for women entrepreneurs" were held. Besides we hold exchange of experience on women's economic empowerment with women's organizations from Afghanistan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan. This has given an additional opportunity to strengthen networks among women entrepreneurs at national, regional and global levels.

We can state that a gender culture is closely bound with the development of our country. But there are still challenges for promotion and advancement of women. Analyzing that challenges and the reasons of some unbalanced involvement of women in certain areas, the most influential become the armed conflict, war-torn families and the psychological barriers of women themselves to take responsibility of high positions.

Of course, it is very hard in such a short time to have a full picture of an Azerbaijani woman. But if you ask me – what makes the living of Azerbaijani women today? – I'll answer that they want peace, wellbeing of their families, want to see their children healthy and happy. I will not make a mistake calling these values uniting all women of the world.

### Can we talk about the role model for young females in Azerbaijan?

The role of the First Vice President of Azerbaijan becomes a positive example for young generation. Mrs. Mehriban Aliyeva exerts great efforts for strengthening of an idea of patronage and charity, preservation and dissemination of cultural legacy

of Azerbaijan people all over the world. Alongside with her important mission, being a prominent public figure, she gains success in the field of assisting indigent people, especially women and children. She has taken orphan girls under her patronage and provides them with distinct living conditions, education and job. Her voice is often heard from the tribune of UNESCO and other international forums. And it is always a call to peace and protection of the weak. She is a symbol of a modern, tolerant as well as loyal to her family and Motherland Azerbaijan woman.



### Our guest's biography

**Mrs. Hijran Huseynova** is Chairperson of the State Committee for Family, Women and Children Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan since 2006.

Mrs. Huseynova started her career as a teacher in a public secondary school #189. In 1978 she became the post graduate student and at the same time started to teach at the Oriental Studies and History departments of Baku State University.

In 1985 she got her Ph.D in Political History and in 1992 she became an Associate Professor of the International Relations Department. She taught the following Courses: History of International Relations, The process of the modern integration, Lobbying and Diaspora in International Relations.

In November 2001 Mrs. Hijran Huseynova was awarded the academic degree of Doctor of Political Science and the theme of her dissertation was "Azerbaijan in the System of European Integration". It should be mentioned that she was the first woman in Azerbaijan who could get a degree of Doctor in the field of political sciences

Mrs. Hijran Huseynova carries various awards: Diploma of the Ministry of Education for her valuable input in the sphere of education (2002), International Diploma of "Famous Scientists of XXI century" (2004), Ambassador of Peace Award (2006), the Supreme Attestation Commission attached to the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan awarded her with the academic title of Professor at the department of Diplomacy and Modern Integration (2007), UNIFEM Certificate of Appreciation in recognition of significant contribution she made in promoting of gender equality and advancement of women (2007). Even more, Mrs. Hijran Huseynova was awarded with The National Order of the Legion of Honor by the President of French Republic (2010) and due to her active participation in social and political life of the Republic of Azerbaijan she was awarded with Order "Shohrat" (2015).