

**Opening Statement by H.E. Ms. Bahar Muradova,
Chairperson of the State Committee for Family, Women and Children Affairs,
at the consideration of the combined fifth and sixth periodic report of the
Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan**

23-24 January 2023, Geneva

Dear Madam Chair,

Distinguished Members of the Committee,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Today, on behalf of the Government of Azerbaijan, I am honoured to present to you the combined Fifth and Sixth Periodic Report submitted by Azerbaijan on the UN Convention on the Rights of Child at the 92nd session of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child.

The report entails information provided by the relevant line ministries and State Committees, as well as the views of civil society.

Today we are represented here with a high-level government delegation from all relevant Ministries and State Committees, including Presidential Administration and the Permanent Mission of Azerbaijan to UN Office and other international organizations in Geneva, supported by a highly-qualified team of professionals.

The list of Azerbaijani delegation has been shared with you in advance. Power Point presentation will be displayed with my introductory statement of which a printed version was shared with you.

Dear Committee members,

First, I wish to highlight our efforts to bring national legislation in compliance with CRC and other normative legal acts directly or indirectly related to the protection of children's rights, mainly on children's safety, including their food and health, and strengthening educational opportunities and social protection of children in vulnerable groups.

Azerbaijan ratified the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse in 2019 and International Recovery of Child Support and Other Forms of Family Maintenance Convention in 2022.

In line with the concluding observations of the CRC Committee and Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child, a 10-year Child Strategy and a 5-year Action Plan on the implementation of the Strategy were prepared and adopted.

Two weeks ago, the Cabinet of Ministers approved the *Rules on children's safe access to education, social and other services during pandemics and other emergency situations*.

"The interagency single e-form" was created for the **evaluation and analysis of activities on Strategy monitoring**. The information on the platform is submitted to the Presidential

Administration and the Cabinet of Ministers annually, and the general public is informed about this.

This year we plan to conduct a 2-year comparative analysis of the implementation of the Strategy.

Second, I would like to touch upon activities to **strengthen the institutional mechanisms** during this period, which we carry out in the form of **high and local-level Coordination for Child Protection**.

Currently there are 12 **Child and Family Support Centers** in the country and 17 Resource Centers in the regions.

New buildings of the Child and Family Support Center were opened in three regions over the last two years, and construction of a modern building was started in the liberated Aghdam district.

Child and Youth Development Centers are operating in the capital city Baku and 76 districts of Azerbaijan. In the first days of New Year, the President of Azerbaijan viewed another renovated **Child and Youth Development Center**.

During the reporting period the Agency for Sustainable and Operative Social Provision (**DOST Agency**) and its local-level DOST Centres, "DOST Center for Inclusive Development and Creativity", as well as **Social Services Agency** were established. More than 30 DOST Centers are expected to be established in Baku and regions of Azerbaijan by 2026.

In 2021, the **Department of Social Rehabilitation for Victims of Domestic Violence** was launched at the Shelter and Social Rehabilitation Institution for Vulnerable People.

Establishment of the 12 **Crisis centres** and **new shelters** in the regions have already been included in the plan taking into account the limited number of shelters for the victims of violence.

The draft Decree "On some issues related to the improvement of the foster family mechanism and the application of the **gatekeeping system** aimed at protecting the rights of children deprived of parental care" was prepared and is now under consideration.

As an alternative model the number of **day-care centres** increased from 28 to 70 and **community-based social rehabilitation centres** increased from 22 to 49.

A 5-year "Socio-economic Development Strategy of the Republic of Azerbaijan" was adopted in 2022. Construction of new **Community Resource and Family Centers** in 5 regions, 1 **Rehabilitation Center** and 8 **Vocational Education Centers** are planned within the Strategy.

Moreover, a Unit for the Protection of Children's Rights was established within the Office of the Commissioner for Human Rights (Ombudsman) of the Republic of Azerbaijan and its material and technical capabilities were enhanced.

However, in order to achieve better results, the proposals to empower the Ombudsman Office to conduct an independent monitoring of the Conventions on the Rights of Children and Persons with Disabilities are being discussed.

Dear Committee Members,

The number of children with disabilities accounts for 1.9% of the total number of children in Azerbaijan.

In 2021, "Organization of activity of social rehabilitation centres for children with disabilities" project covered 6200 children with disabilities in 62 regions of the country.

The State Program on **inclusive education** was adopted and inclusive education classes were organised in 12 schools in the last academic year.

However, the issue of feasibility of full provision of these services in all kindergartens and schools and additional number of psychologists, social workers and social educators are under consideration.

Child participation is ensured through 3 platforms- "**Child Ambassadors Council**", **National Forum of Azerbaijani Children** which is held every 3 years, and "**My voice-my rights**" project.

According to the Law on the Rights of Child and other normative legal acts **violence against children and corporal punishment cases** leads to administrative or criminal liability.

The implemented "**School-Friendly Project**" against violence and corporal punishment has been successful in creating a safe environment in schools, and tackling bullying.

Stemming from the Strategy, the measures are being taken to review the national legislation to effectively protect the children from violence in all areas of life.

Last year the General Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Azerbaijan designed an Action Plan and created Working Group in order to prevent suicide among children.

The General Prosecutor's Office prepared an *awareness-raising manual* as a result of the analysis investigating the causes of suicide

The Guidelines prepared by the WHO (World Health Organisation) to prevent suicide cases were translated into Azerbaijani language by the State Committee and sent to relevant government agencies, as well as media representatives.

Enhancing the skills of social workers and psychologists working with children were also on the focus.

2500 school psychologists were trained within the "**School Psychologist**" project particularly during the pandemic and post-pandemic period.

In addition, an analysis of "Media's effect on suicides" is currently being conducted by specialized experts at the request of the State Committee.

However, we consider that there is a need to increase the number of psychologists and social workers in the regions, and improve their knowledge and skills based on international standards. In this context, we plan to increase the number of clinical psychologist and social workers working with children who experienced sexual abuse, as well as develop and support programs to prepare current professionals to offer quality services.

Local and international level projects on digitalisation of education are organised in the country and recently Azerbaijani President inaugurated another STEAM Center.

Within the **Socio-economic Development Strategy** we plan to open **school preparatory groups** in general education for 150 thousand children, and provide 8 million copies of **free textbooks** to students. In addition, 90 million USD will be allocated for the education, medical, health and rehabilitation expenses of 12 thousand 700 children enrolled in special education.

The President of Azerbaijan recently adopted new *social reform package* that entails another round of *financial support to vulnerable groups*. The *allowances for childbirth, low-income families with a child up to one year and mothers with more than 5 children*, as well as *people with disabilities* have been increased.

Maternal and infant mortality rates declined as a result of activities undertaken in the country to protect maternal and infant health.

Although an increase in the maternal mortality rate was observed due to the direct impact of the COVID-19, this rate was stabilised and decreased and we combine our efforts to achieve a more positive trend.

Since 2020 the **Compulsory Medical Insurance system** covers all citizens of the country including children.

In 2021, the **Reproductive Health mobile** application was launched, containing important materials for expectant mothers and parents related to the care of newborns and babies.

I would like to inform you that the **draft Law on Reproductive Health** is expected to be discussed and adopted at the next session of the Parliament.

Dear Committee Members,

Improving the **juvenile justice system** is an important area for our country.

National legislation of Azerbaijan basically is in line with international norms in this field. In order to improve the work of the Probation Service with children, Justice Academy started a training program in cooperation with public associations. It is also planned to improve the legislation in this area from next year.

5% of crimes are committed by juveniles in Azerbaijan. Some of these children undergo legal proceedings, while others are directed to rehabilitation. The number of children who committed crimes has partly decreased compared to previous years.

There are **7 Child Hotline and Helpline services** and **Psycho-Social Rehabilitation Center** for children in conflict with the law.

New Penitentiary institutions for women and juvenile prisoners were opened in 2022. However, in addition to positive results achieved in fully ensuring the rights of minors in the justice process, there is a need to apply a complex approach to problematic issues.

Early marriage, sex-selective abortions as the factors which slow down the process of ensuring children's rights, in particular the rights of girls fully around the world, do also concern us.

Although we observe a decrease in the number of early marriage cases and number of births to mothers under the age of 18, it has not yet been completely eliminated. However, we continue to increase our awareness-raising programs in this field.

Dear Committee members,

During a time of pandemic, 44-Day Patriotic War between Armenia and Azerbaijan ended with a historic victory of Azerbaijan and occupied territories of Azerbaijan were liberated. Armenia's military aggression against Azerbaijan resulted in the killing of 93 civilians, including 12 children and 27 women.

While Armenia did not demonstrate a credible concern for international humanitarian and human rights law, Azerbaijan adhered strictly to its obligations under international conventions throughout the war. The safety of the civilian population of other side, especially children and women was ensured, no acts of violence committed against them in accordance with Geneva Conventions. Moreover, there were no registered cases concerning involvement of children in armed conflicts.

Since the end of the war, Azerbaijan has undertaken large-scale rehabilitation and reconstruction works in its formally occupied territories. We envision delimiting our borders, signing a peace treaty and reopening transport and economic connectivity in the region. With regret I stress that the clearing of landmines intentionally planted in the territories of Azerbaijan by Armenia for the past 30 years and cases of continuing landmine planting since 2020 hinder these processes. Mines also pose serious threats to civilians working in these territories, as well as the return of internally displaced persons, including children and peaceful life in their places of origin. Over the past 30 years, 38 women and 357 children have become landmine victims. Since the end of the conflict, 269 people have become landmine victims.

Dear distinguished members of the Committee,

Along with a request to pay more attention to the issue of landmines and children's safety, I would like to express that we have work still left to do in order to raise children in a happy, loving and mutual understanding environment, as well as to reach their full potential. I believe that we will be able to successfully overcome the challenges that we encounter in joint cooperation with you.

Our country is ready to work together with relevant international partners, including the UN agencies that want to contribute to peace and stability in the region.

I am sure that today we will have constructive dialogue with you and I would like to thank you in advance for your recommendations regarding this report.