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## **PRESS RELEASE**

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On 18 October 1991, the Constitutional Act on State Independence of the Republic of Azerbaijan was adopted, establishing the political and economic foundations of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

On 12 October 2016, the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev signed an Executive Order, instructing to celebrate the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Restoration of the State Independence of the Republic of Azerbaijan at the State level. The document notes, *inter alia*, that the adoption as the State attributes of the flag, national anthem and emblem of the Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan, the first democratic republic in the Muslim East, and the celebration of 28 May as the State holiday demonstrate high respect for the 1918 Declaration of Independence and for the efforts of the Democratic Republic towards the State-building.

The Executive Order also informs about the contribution made by the people of Azerbaijan to the world culture, the significance of the restoration of the State independence in attaining by the Republic of Azerbaijan of the international legal personality, remarkable achievements in strengthening the traditions of statehood, carrying out result-oriented reforms in all spheres, developing economy, implementing strategic energy and transportation projects, developing education, health care and tourism, enriching the country's culture, promoting human rights and fundamental freedoms, contributing to regional and international security, and meeting the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

The Presidential Order reminds that, besides deep political, economic and social crisis experienced by Azerbaijan while it has been taking first steps since 1991, the country has also faced with the armed aggression and the policy of ethnic cleansing on the part of Armenia. "Only the return to power in 1993 of the National Leader Heydar Aliyev and his wise policy prevented the imminent threat of the country's collapse, put an end to separatist tendencies and evolving civil war and secured the unity of the State and the nation", the document underlines.

Over the past period, despite the continuing aggression of Armenia and its devastating consequences, Azerbaijan has transformed into an economically and politically dynamic modern State and has proved itself as reliable partner and consolidated its role at the regional and international levels.

Notwithstanding global economic crisis and other challenges, Azerbaijan has maintained the country's gradual economic growth and continues to undertake consistent efforts towards developing inclusive and diversified economy and adapting its national sustainable development strategy to that end. On 6 October 2016, the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev issued an Executive Order on the Establishment of the National Coordination Council on Sustainable Development, instructing it to identify national priorities and their indicators until 2030, in line with the global development goals and targets, adapt the relevant State programs and strategies to the SDGs and prepare annual national SDG progress reports.

Since the admission to the membership of the United Nations on 2 March 1992, Azerbaijan has consistently demonstrated its strong commitment to the principles and purposes of the U.N. Charter and international law, has staunchly supported the Organization and actively contributed to its activities. During that period, Azerbaijan has been a member of two principal organs of the United Nations, namely, the Security Council (2012-2013) and the Economic and Social Council (2003-2005 and since 2017 for the following three years term), as well as served in the Commission on Human Rights (2005-2006), the Human Rights Council (2006-2009) and the Organization's other bodies and agencies.

As a country located at the crossroads of the West and East and benefiting of being a part of both Asia and Europe, Azerbaijan actively contributes to promoting inter-religious and intercultural dialogue based on mutual respect and understanding and looks forward to continuing its efforts to that end. A number of high-profile international events have been organized in Azerbaijan, such as the 7th Global Forum of the UN Alliance of Civilizations in 2016 and the annual Baku Humanitarian Forum. 2016 has been declared a Year of Multiculturalism in Azerbaijan.

Azerbaijan's role as a natural bridge between cultures and civilizations has also manifested in hosting the first European Games in 2015 and the forthcoming Islamic Games in 2017, as well as in organizing other important international cultural and sports events, such as the Eurovision Song Contest in 2012, the Formula 1 Grand Prix of Europe and the 42<sup>nd</sup> Chess Olympiad in 2016.

At the last Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement, held in Venezuela in September 2016, a unanimous decision was adopted on the approval of the candidature of Azerbaijan for hosting the Movement's next Summit in 2019 and presiding over the NAM Coordinating Bureau for a three years period.

Unfortunately, no substantive progress has been made in resolving the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict. Armenia continues to occupy the territories of Azerbaijan, including the Nagorno-Karabakh region and seven adjacent districts, in flagrant violation of the generally accepted norms and principles of international law.

In its resolutions 822 (1993), 853 (1993), 874 (1993) and 884 (1993), the United Nations Security Council condemned the use of force against Azerbaijan and the occupation of its territories, reaffirmed respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Azerbaijan and the inviolability of its international borders and demanded the immediate, complete and unconditional withdrawal of all occupying forces from the occupied territories of Azerbaijan. Other international organizations have adopted the similar position. Since 2004 the special item entitled "The situation in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan" has been included in the agenda of the regular sessions of the United Nations General Assembly, and two resolutions under that agenda item have been adopted by the Assembly.

The conflict can only be resolved on the basis of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Azerbaijan within its internationally recognized borders. The sooner Armenia reconciles with this reality and withdraws its armed forces from the occupied territories of Azerbaijan, the earlier the conflict will be resolved and both countries and their peoples will benefit from the prospects of cooperation and economic development.