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**Statement by H.E. Mr. Elmar Mammadyarov
Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan
at the General Debate of the 73rd session of the
United Nations General Assembly**

*“Making the United Nations relevant to all people: Global leadership and shared responsibility
for peaceful, equitable and sustainable societies”*

New York, 28 September 2018

Madame President,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to congratulate Ms. María Fernanda Espinosa Garcés on her assumption of the presidency of the General Assembly as the fourth-ever woman being elected for this highly responsible position and to wish her every success in discharging her important duties. Ms. Espinosa may count on full support of Azerbaijan during her tenure. We are also grateful to H.E. Mr. Miroslav Lajcak for his tremendous work in presiding over the Assembly during the seventy-second session.

I express my profound respect and gratitude to the Secretary-General of the United Nations H.E. Mr. António Guterres for his dedicated leadership and efforts aimed at improving the efficiency of the Organization. Taking this opportunity, I would also like to pay tribute to former Secretary General Kofi Annan – “a man of peace”. His legacy will remain as true inspiration for all of us.

Madame President,

The theme of this year’s General Debates is very timely and embodies the issues of utmost significance for all of us. We live in a globalized world where interactions between people representing different national societies are only getting more intense and more extensive.

Azerbaijan fully supports the Secretary General’s determination to genuinely contribute to preventing wars and sustaining peace, as well as his efforts towards responding early and effectively to conflicts and crises, assisting Member States in their endeavors to sustain peace and build resilient and prosperous societies and making the United Nations more coherent, integrated, effective and efficient.

As we embark upon a path of implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, we need to regularly test ourselves to identify the extent to which we are delivering on our commitments. Coordinated efforts and shared responsibilities among states backed by adequate resources are essential to secure sustainable future and ensure that no one is left behind.

Azerbaijan has adapted its national development strategy taking into account the SDGs, and continues to implement large-scale programs on improving good governance, sustainable growth, strengthening the rule of law, ensuring respect for human rights, providing facilitated access to public services, and promoting inclusive societies.

We continue to consistently undertake efforts aimed at promoting the living conditions of our citizens. The level of poverty in the country equals to 5.4 percent, while the unemployment rate is at the level of 5 percent. Davos World Economic Forum ranks Azerbaijan number 35 with respect to competitiveness. Among the developing countries Azerbaijan is number three with respect to inclusive development index.

Azerbaijan contributes to regional development efforts through promoting connectivity. It plays an important role in bringing together continents, creating a platform for mutually beneficial cooperation. East-West transportation corridor was inaugurated in October 2017. It is a transportation corridor which saves at least two weeks of time for transporting goods from Asia to Europe and vice versa. Other important projects are South-North and South-West corridors, which, as a result of our efforts together with neighboring countries, become reality. Azerbaijan invests largely on these corridors and is an active participant of both initiatives. The first phase of the construction of Baku International Sea Trade Port Complex was put into operation in May 2018. The handling capacity of the port will be 15 million tons of cargo per year with opportunity to increase it up to 25 million tons.

Azerbaijan also initiated transnational broadband project, namely Trans-Eurasian Information Super Highway (TASIM), which aims to build a trans-national fiber-optic line between Hong Kong and Frankfurt. It will be the shortest line connecting East and West in the era of competition where every single second is important.

Today, Azerbaijan offers its own development model to the world, backed by internal stability, civil unity and solidarity in society, and an environment of peace and tolerance among the different peoples and religions living together in a liberal, sustainable and dynamic economy.

Inspired by its achievements in economic development, successful social policy, rich human capital and traditional values of multiculturalism, Azerbaijan decided to nominate its capital – the city of Baku – for hosting the World EXPO2025. Our theme – "Developing human capital, building a better future" – is of universal concern and has a particular significance for Azerbaijan. It is also fully aligned with the international development agenda, in particular, the UN Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The whole region of Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Caspian has never hosted World Expos. In that sense, World EXPO 2025 Baku shall be truly universal in terms of expansion of its traditional geography and vivid example that through historically short time period of 27 years of independence the countries like Azerbaijan can achieve remarkable results for applying to the huge

events like World Expo. Availing myself of this opportunity, I kindly ask the Member States of the Bureau of International Exhibitions to vote for Baku at the elections to be held in Paris late in November this year.

Sustainable economic growth has enabled Azerbaijan not only to focus on its national development strategy, but also to actively support the international development efforts. Azerbaijan has rendered international humanitarian and development assistance to a number of countries through the Heydar Aliyev Foundation and Azerbaijan International Development Agency (AIDA) under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Particular attention has been paid to addressing the needs of the developing and least developed countries, as well as those recovering from natural disasters.

Madame President,

As this year we are celebrating the 70th anniversary of the UN Human Rights Declaration, we wish to reaffirm our commitment to strengthening democracy and protecting human rights as top priorities of the Republic of Azerbaijan. The Government implements large-scale programs to create necessary conditions for all the citizens of Azerbaijan to fully enjoy all human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Education is a top priority in our domestic policy, because a well-established educated society is one of the guarantees of successful and sustainable development. The right to health is fully ensured in the country. Every year more than 5 million people – half of the country’s population – have their medical check-ups totally financed from the State budget. Azerbaijan has been the first country in the Muslim world granting women the right to vote as early as in 1918. Azerbaijan strives to ensure gender equality and empower women in public and social life. Since we live in a digital age, it is worth noting that currently about 80 percent of the country’s population have unimpeded access to internet, which has become the most favored and practical vehicle for information, media communication and free flow of ideas and thoughts.

Combating corruption lies at the heart of SDG implementation in Azerbaijan. Application of innovative approaches and technological innovations has enabled Azerbaijan to register significant progress in curbing corruption at the public sector. Earlier this year, the UN Human Rights Council has unanimously adopted a resolution on “Promoting human rights and SDGs through transparent, accountable and efficient public services delivery” initiated by Azerbaijan which aimed to promote the concept of ASAN public service delivery brand of Azerbaijan. Earlier in May, Azerbaijan has successfully presented its periodic report in the framework of the third cycle of the Universal Periodic Review. We remain committed to enhanced dialogue and interaction with other UN human rights mechanisms on the basis of mutual respect and understanding.

Azerbaijan is one of the world’s recognized centers of multiculturalism. All ethnic and religious groups live in Azerbaijan in peace and harmony. We have hosted numerous international events aimed at strengthening intercultural dialogue. Being a member of both the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the Council of Europe, Azerbaijan launched the Baku Process in 2008, the main goal of which is to strengthen dialogue, partnership and cooperation between the Muslim world and Europe.

Implemented under the patronage of Azerbaijani leadership, the Baku Process provides large-scale platform for the exchange of knowledge on interreligious and intercultural dialogue. In his most recent report on the promotion of a culture of peace, interreligious and intercultural dialogue the Secretary General specifically mentioned the important role of the Baku Process in advocating for

dialogue among cultures. This year marks the 10th anniversary of the Baku Process, and a series of events will be organized on this occasion, including the high-level 6th Humanitarian Forum on 25-26 October 2018 in Baku.

Madame President,

From this podium, I am pleased to announce that Azerbaijan is going to take over the chairmanship of the Non-Aligned Movement next year. Throughout its history the Non-Alignment Movement has played a fundamental role in strengthening international peace and security by promoting adherence to the Bandung Principles.

The chairmanship of Azerbaijan will provide another impetus for advancing the founding principles of the Movement, the 65th anniversary of which will be celebrated in 2020.

Madame President,

Unresolved armed conflicts, existing and emerging security challenges and related humanitarian crises threaten to reverse much of the development progress. The ongoing armed conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan still represents a major threat to international and regional peace and security. The conflict has resulted in the occupation of one fifth of the territory of Azerbaijan and has made approximately one out of every nine persons in the country an internally displaced or refugee.

Since the very first day of the conflict, combat operations have been conducted exclusively inside the territory of Azerbaijan, almost in the middle of the country, affecting its civilian population and infrastructure.

In its resolutions of 822 (1993), 853 (1993), 874 (1993) and 884 (1993), the UN Security Council acknowledged the fact that military force was used against Azerbaijan; that such actions are unlawful and in contradiction with the purposes and principles of UN Charter; and that they constitute an obvious violation of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Azerbaijan. The numerous decisions and documents adopted by other authoritative international organizations have been framed along the same lines. However, the key Security Council demands, including in the first place the withdrawal of the Armenian forces from the occupied territories of Azerbaijan, have not been implemented yet. On the contrary, the policy and practice of Armenia clearly testify to its intention to secure the annexation of Azerbaijani territories that it has captured through military force and in which it has carried out ethnic cleansing on a massive scale.

Initially, after changes in the government of Armenia, there were some expectations that the new leadership will uphold democratic values and the norms and principles of international law, including the relevant resolutions and decisions of international organizations, particularly those adopted by the United Nations Security Council. Unfortunately, so far no progress has been observed in that regard.

Contrary to his earlier statements, the Prime Minister of Armenia now does not shy away even from overtly attempting to regard the Nagorno-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan as part of Armenia. Such an annexationist claim does not only constitute utter disrespect for the norms and principles of international law and the resolutions adopted by the Security Council, but even undermines the

peace process mediated by the OSCE Minsk Group and its Co-Chairs. Thus, Armenia at the highest political level demonstrates that its real intentions are not the settlement of the conflict through negotiations, but continuation of the illegal occupation of the Azerbaijani territories.

As there are consistent unstable internal political developments in Armenia, with no external understanding on what is going on in this country, we cannot and will not exclude that the latest statements and actions of the Armenian Prime Minister are aimed at escalating the situation on the ground even more and provoking armed hostilities along the line of contact and on the border between Armenia and Azerbaijan. But one thing is clear that full responsibility for the consequences of this negative scenario will lie entirely with the Republic of Armenia. We call upon the international community to send a strong message to and exert pressure on Armenia to ensure its full compliance with international law and to immediately and unconditionally start implementation of the relevant UN Security Council resolutions adopted with regard to the settlement of the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict.

Armenia has consistently obstructed the conflict-settlement process and, in the meantime, refuses to conduct result-oriented negotiations, while it regularly resorts to various provocations to escalate the situation on the ground and tries to consolidate the occupation of the seized territories by changing their demographic, cultural and physical character and preventing the hundreds of thousands of forcibly displaced Azerbaijanis from returning to their homes. In flagrant violation of the 1949 Geneva Conventions, Armenia continues to exhibit its policy of illegal settlement of Armenians, particularly those from Syria, in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan.

Armenia's new leadership should understand that their promises to the Armenian people to make Armenia economically developed and prosperous State can't be possible without peace, good neighborly relations and respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of its neighbors. The earlier Armenia puts aside its territorial claims and withdraws troops from the territories of Azerbaijan, the sooner peace can come to our region and prospects for Armenia's development will be opened.

They are now talking much about democracy and the Armenians of the Nagorno-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan. But what about the Azerbaijani population of Nagorno-Karabakh and the Azerbaijanis from the seven surrounding districts who were subjected to brutal ethnic cleansing and forced to leave their places of origin, homes and properties? If the new Armenian leadership is calling itself democracy, then they have to act in accordance with the rule of law and democratic values and let those uprooted people return to their homes and withdraw its armed forces from the occupied territories of Azerbaijan, as it is demanded by the relevant resolutions of the Security Council and other international organizations.

Azerbaijan sincerely believes that there is no alternative to peace, stability and mutually beneficial regional cooperation and is the most interested party in the earliest political settlement of the conflict. At the same time, no settlement of the conflict can be reached which violates the Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan and is inconsistent with international law. The resolution of the conflict is possible only on the basis of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Azerbaijan within its internationally recognized borders.

Thank you.