



PRESIDENT OF AZERBAIJAN  
ILHAM ALIYEV

[NEWS](#) » [Events](#)



30 may 2013, 10:30

Ilham Aliyev attended the opening ceremony of the Second World Forum on Intercultural Dialogue

The Second World Forum on Intercultural Dialogue on the subject of "Living Together Peacefully in a Diverse World" has started at the Heydar Aliyev Center in Baku.

President Ilham Aliyev attended the opening ceremony.

The forum participants warmly welcomed the head of state.

President Ilham Aliyev made a speech at the opening ceremony.

**Speech by President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev**

- Dear ladies and gentlemen!

Distinguished guests!

I cordially greet all of you, welcome to Azerbaijan! The fact that the World Forum on Intercultural Dialogue is held in Azerbaijan is a very significant event. I am glad that this forum is being held in Baku for the second time. I remember putting forward the idea during the first forum two years ago

that it would be good if this forum was traditional. I am very pleased that our friends have supported this initiative and are participating in the second forum together with us today.

In fact, the holding of this forum is a manifestation of the "Baku process". The "Baku process" began in 2008. I believe that this was a very important event in modern history. The start of a broad process will be remembered for the participation of Culture Ministers of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation member-states in the Baku meeting of Culture Ministers of the Council of Europe in 2008. Then, in 2009, a meeting of the Culture Ministers of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation was attended by their colleagues from the Council of Europe. In other words, Baku, essentially playing the role of a geographical bridge, has also successfully performed the function of an intercultural bridge.

In 2010, there was another very important event - the World Summit of Religious Leaders in Baku, while the first forum was held in 2011. The "Baku process" is already developing, and I am sure that the discussions, exchanges of views and reports to be held during this forum will contribute to our common cause. After all, we all want interreligious and intercultural relations in the world to be built on a sound basis, the trend of cooperation to intensify, negative phenomena to be thwarted and the dialogue among civilizations to be dominated by positive trends. Unfortunately, we still cannot fully achieve our goals.

There are standoffs on religious and ethnic grounds, civil wars and growing trends of misunderstanding in different parts of the world. I think that the discussion of these important issues in this format will be a contribution to our cause and to our cooperation.

I believe that the holding of this forum in Azerbaijan is no coincidence. Azerbaijan has been the homeland for the representatives of all ethnicities and confessions living here for centuries. We are proud that the independent Azerbaijan is still a multi-ethnic and multi-religious country. Representatives of all religions and ethnicities live here like one family, in an atmosphere of peace, friendship and mutual understanding. It is our great asset, a great advantage, and I believe that this factor has also played a role in the successful development of Azerbaijan.

I should note that regardless of the public and political structure, Azerbaijan has always been a space of religious tolerance. I am glad that in the years of independence we have not only managed to maintain these positive trends, but have further strengthened them and do not limit our activities to Azerbaijan alone. The initiatives Azerbaijan has put forward are reverberating around the world today. I believe that all of our regional initiatives – political, economic and others – also create favorable conditions for regional cooperation, while the dialogue among peoples and nations further enhances these positive trends. Countries may and do have political interests. Of course, there are also economic interests involved. In many cases, these interests bind countries together. But I believe that in order to strengthen the positive trends of cooperation, the relations between peoples must be built on a sound basis.

I believe that the agenda of the forum is very broad. The issues to be discussed here are of great importance. Thoughts regarding our views on the common future will also be expressed. This is a very important issue - the common future.

This world has room for every people and for every nation. We only need to have peace, tranquility and mutual understanding. We see the advantage of cooperation in the successful development of Azerbaijan.

All our steps associated with regional initiatives are aimed at cooperation. Through cooperation and mutual support we fully provide our economic and political interests. As for the area of regional cooperation, I believe that our positive experience may be of interest. At the same time, Azerbaijan

is not only a multi-ethnic and multi-religious country. It is one of a handful of countries that are members of both the Council of Europe and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. We are very active and have a very strong position in both organizations. These features, I think, are also making a contribution to the promotion of intercultural dialogue.

Azerbaijan is a part of the Muslim world. Of course, Azerbaijan has very strong national and religious traditions. The independent state of Azerbaijan is built on strong national and spiritual values. At the same time, there was a fairly strong European influence in Azerbaijan at different times, especially since the 19th century. Two days ago we celebrated the 95th anniversary of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic. The Azerbaijan Democratic Republic was the first republic in the Muslim world and essentially not only led to the independence of the Azerbaijani people but also provided an impetus for the development and spread of the republican system in the region and the Muslim world.

Azerbaijan as a part of the Muslim world is very active in the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. I am proud to say that Baku was declared the capital of Islamic culture in 2009. Another ancient Azerbaijani city, Nakhchivan, will be awarded this honorary title in 2018.

In addition, last year Baku hosted the most representative music contest of Europe and perhaps the world - "Eurovision".

In 2015, Azerbaijan will play host to the first European Olympic Games. All these issues indicate that Azerbaijan is not only a favorable venue and platform for intercultural dialogue. By our initiatives, foreign policy and contribution to the dialogue between civilizations, we are further enhancing this cooperation.

This is a very important issue indeed, because we are all witnesses to both positive and negative trends in the world. In particular, different thoughts about multiculturalism have been expressed lately. Some believe that multiculturalism has failed. Politicians in some countries have openly talked about that. We see that public opinion is very pessimistic about the development of multiculturalism trends. Unfortunately, sometimes political statements, the activities of non-governmental organizations and some media institutions do not contribute to the development of inter-civilizational dialogue. Instead, they give way to discrimination. Therefore, the responsibility of politicians and public figures is of great importance here. Any idea expressed anywhere in today's globalizing world and in the Internet era may immediately reverberate in the world.

I believe that we should apply the positive experience even more broadly. The people present here, the participants in this forum have one common idea. We share the idea of multiculturalism, the successful future of the intercultural dialogue, strengthening the positive trends occurring in the world. This being the case, we must also strive to strengthen these positive trends with our work and practical steps.

Returning to Azerbaijan, I can say that multiculturalism has existed in Azerbaijan for centuries.

In previous periods we were not familiar with this concept. These are relatively new notions - tolerance and multiculturalism. But they have existed at all times. Azerbaijan is one of the addresses of multiculturalism. As I pointed out, representatives of all ethnicities and religions live like one family in Azerbaijan. The historical monuments of all religions are protected in Azerbaijan. We have great respect for our historical past. A beautiful monument of Zoroastrianism, the Atashgah temple, has been preserved in Baku. On 17 May, the oldest mosque of the country reopened in Shamakhi after restoration. This mosque was built in 743 - 1270 years ago. Today, Azerbaijan has restored this mosque.

The Government of Azerbaijan has also provided full support for the construction of a synagogue in Baku.

The Azerbaijani state restores and preserves ancient Albanian churches. There are also Orthodox and Catholic churches here.

So a mere enumeration of these facts shows that there are excellent opportunities for multiculturalism. I believe that these positive trends may be strengthened in every corner of the world as long as there is political will and politicians follow the right course on this issue. There is practically no alternative to multiculturalism. The alternatives of it are discrimination, xenophobia, racism and fascism. I believe that in the 21st century progressive people should be more active in preventing these negative trends. This activity should be complemented in a variety of forms.

I think that that the second forum taking place in Baku is a great contribution to our common cause. But we should not limit our work to organizing forums. We have to prepare a variety of activities and carry out a variety of events. We should take serious measures to promote intercultural dialogue.

I am glad that we have taken important steps in this direction in the period that has passed since the first forum.

I am confident that the results of this forum will be very positive. At the end of the forum we will adopt a plan of activities.

The development of multiculturalism is necessary and important for every nation and every state, especially for Azerbaijan, a country which has suffered from ethnic cleansing. As a result of a low level of multiculturalism trends, Azerbaijani lands have been occupied. This occupation has lasted for more than 20 years. Our people have been subjected to a policy of ethnic cleansing.

The Azerbaijani population has been driven out of Nagorno-Karabakh and surrounding districts. All of our religious monuments and historical assets have been destroyed and looted. This is confirmed by the reports of two OSCE missions. The reports of these missions explicitly say that Armenian armed forces have destroyed all the monuments, infrastructure and buildings on our occupied lands. This injustice continues. Unfortunately, the conflict remains unresolved. Unfortunately, the rules of international law do not apply to this conflict.

The UN Security Council has adopted four resolutions on the settlement of the conflict. These resolutions contain a clear message concerning the withdrawal of Armenian forces from the occupied lands. The occupation must end unconditionally. But Armenia does not fulfill these resolutions, and the injustices continue. The rules of international law are grossly violated. A speedy resolution of the conflict would, on the one hand, be a sign of respect for international law and, on the other, mean the restoration of historical justice because Nagorno-Karabakh is native Azerbaijani land. All place names there are Azerbaijani place names. All the monuments there belong to our people and are the result of talent and hard work of the Azerbaijani people.

The speedy resolution of the conflict will bring peace to the region. In this case, the processes in the region will go in a more positive direction. Azerbaijan must restore its territorial integrity.

The territorial integrity of Azerbaijan is recognized by the entire world and international organizations. The conflict can be resolved only on the basis of the principles of territorial integrity.

I believe that we will hear valuable thoughts on these important issues today and tomorrow. The forum is a significant event. I think that the first forum held two years ago was quite symbolic. In the past two years, the development in Azerbaijan continued in all directions. Important activities have been carried out for the development of intercultural dialogue. The International Humanitarian

Forum has been held twice - in 2011 and 2012. One could say that the themes of these forums were similar. Despite the fact that 20 per cent of our land is under occupation and more than a million of our citizens live as internally displaced persons, the rapid development of Azerbaijan has continued. Azerbaijan is developing. Our successful development manifests itself in all directions.

Since the previous forum the world community has shown great confidence in Azerbaijan. In October 2011, Azerbaijan was elected a member of the UN Security Council with the support of 155 countries. This is a great historic event for our people and for our independent state.

The trend of successful economic development has further intensified. We can say that Azerbaijan has successfully addressed major economic and social issues. Even in the years of global economic recession the Azerbaijani economy continued to grow. Today the process of economic diversification is successfully continuing. This is the fundamental condition for sustainable development. International rating agencies have upgraded the credit ratings of Azerbaijan.

Azerbaijan's economy is among the top 50 most competitive economies of the world. Of course, our strong financial position, a stable political situation, regional initiatives, natural resources and, most importantly, human capital are the factors leading Azerbaijan forward. A few years ago we stated that human capital is of paramount importance to us. A very strong social policy is being pursued. At the same time, a lot is being done in connection with culture and preservation of our historical heritage.

I am sure that guests will also see the historical monuments of Baku. Those who are here for the first time will go back with pleasant impressions.

Once again, dear friends, I cordially greet all of you. Thank you for coming to Azerbaijan.

I wish the forum success. Thank you!

X X X

Other speakers included the head of the UN Alliance of Civilizations and the High Representative of the UN Secretary General, Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, the Director General of UNESCO, Mrs. Irina Bokova, and the Director-General of ISESCO, Abdulaziz Othman Altwaijri.

At the end of the official opening ceremony, the forum participants were photographed with President Ilham Aliyev.

Then, a flash mob was held in the lobby of the Heydar Aliyev Center.

The head of state watched the flash mob.

Then, the Second World Forum on Intercultural Dialogue held under the patronage of President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev continued its work in sessions.

Source: <http://en.president.az/articles/8296>