



**Address by**

**Mr Abulfaz Garayev**

Minister of Culture of the Republic of Azerbaijan,  
President of the 12<sup>th</sup> General Conference of the Islamic  
Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization  
(ISESCO)

At the opening of the

**13<sup>th</sup> ISESCO General Conference**

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**Excellency Dr Abdulaziz Othman Altwaijri, Director General of the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO),**

**Excellencies heads of delegation,**

**Excellencies,**

**Ladies and gentlemen,**

It is my pleasure to address you at the opening of the 13<sup>th</sup> Session of the General Conference of the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO), which is being held under the high patronage of His Majesty King Mohammed VI of Morocco. This is a great honor for us, members of the Conference, and for which I would like to express our sincere thanks to His Majesty, wishing this honorable country more progress and prosperity.

Allow me, first, to convey to you the cordial greetings of H.E. Mr Ilham Aliyev, President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, and his warmest wishes for the success of this Conference in achieving its lofty objectives.

It has been three years since my country hosted the 12<sup>th</sup> Session of the General Conference, in November 2015. After our joint discussions, the Conference composed its bureau and adopted the Three-Year Action Plan and Budget for 2016-2018, along with a set of reports and projects, amendments to the Internal Regulations of the Conference and to ISESCO's Financial Regulations, Staff Regulations and Organizational Chart. Besides, following the approval of Member States, Azerbaijan was elected as Chair of the General Conference for 2016-2018.

This period has been abound with achievements scored by this Organization which is according to the international standards applicable in ranking international and regional organizations, one of the most eminent organizations that accumulate successes in their respective areas of competence. This is a clear proof to the whole world that ISESCO is the beacon of civilization, enlightenment and culture; and the true voice that expresses the Islamic world's vision regarding the current issues that preoccupy the intellectual, scientific, academic and creative minds in various fields of knowledge.

I came to you from a country which has become a bastion of intercultural and interfaith dialogue, harmony and coexistence. In order to fruitfully cooperate with ISESCO, the National Commission of the Republic of Azerbaijan for ISESCO was reestablished by H.E. President of the Republic of Azerbaijan in 2016.

During this period, Azerbaijan continued its commitment to contribute to dialogue and peaceful coexistence through culture, education and science.

One of the most important global initiatives that celebrates its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year is “Baku Process” for intercultural dialogue. Baku Process was launched in 2008 with the initiative of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Mr Ilham Aliyev, and supported by many international organizations such as UNESCO, UN Alliance of Civilizations, World Tourism Organization, Council of Europe, North-South Center of the Council of Europe and ISESCO. This process has become a unique platform for dialogue and cooperation in the globalized world. Baku Process comprises open and respectful exchange of views among individuals and groups with different ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds and heritage living on different continents, on the basis of mutual understanding and respect.

Within Baku Process, World Forums on Intercultural Dialogue are being held every two years since 2011.

These forums attract representatives from all continents of the World – scholars, global public figures, delegations of international organizations, heads of states or governments, ministers of culture and cultural ambassadors, members of parliaments, diplomats, mayors and other local-authority figures, representatives of non-governmental organizations, enterprises, media representatives and journalists, cultural experts and practitioners, religious leaders, prominent activists and intellectuals, including our dear friend Dr Abdulaziz Othman Altwajiri, ISESCO Director General. Playing a role of a genuine platform, World Forums gather these people under one roof with the aim to discuss global challenges, share opinions and build bridges.

The fourth biennial Forum, on the theme “Advancing intercultural dialogue: new avenues for human security, peace and sustainable development”, held in Baku, in May 2017, hosted more participants, events and sessions than any previous edition, while its high-level dimension was enhanced by high-level meeting on countering violent extremism through girls’ education and a ministerial meeting.

In October 2017, UN Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres, has stressed the role of Baku Process in promoting dialogue among cultures and highlighted Baku Process, as a process being at the forefront of advocating for dialogue among cultures since 2008.

In December 2017, the Resolution “Promotion of Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue, Understanding and Cooperation for Peace” was unanimously adopted at the plenary meeting of the UN General Assembly, held on 11 December 2017. A separate paragraph of this Resolution referred to the World Forum on Intercultural Dialogue, as a key global platform for promoting intercultural dialogue.

For your information, the 5<sup>th</sup> World Forum will be held in Baku in 2019 and I invite all the participants of this Conference to take part at this Forum and share their best practices, thoughts and opinions.

Baku also hosted the 7<sup>th</sup> Global Forum of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) under the theme “Living Together in Inclusive Societies: A Challenge and a Goal”, on 25-27 April 2016. More than 4000 delegates from 147 countries took part in the 7<sup>th</sup> Baku Global Forum. Taking into account the special role of youth in the establishment and development of inclusive societies, UN Alliance of Civilizations Youth Event was held on 25 April 2016 on the sidelines with the participation of more than 150 young people.

Azerbaijan, as a country with an ancient history and people preserving Islamic values as a part of their cultural and spiritual values and experiencing complete Islamic solidarity, is also making great contributions to strengthen friendship among Muslim nations.

The year 2017 was declared the Year of Islamic Solidarity in Azerbaijan. During this year, Azerbaijan hosted various regional and international events. The 4<sup>th</sup> Games of Islamic Solidarity, a celebration of friendship and brotherhood, was solemnly organized on 12-22 May 2017. Over 3000 athletes from more than 50 countries, as well as thousands of guests, came to Azerbaijan to participate at the games.

In 2018, within “ISESCO Programme of Islamic Culture Capitals”, the city of Nakhchivan was proclaimed as the Islamic Culture Capital for 2018 during the 6<sup>th</sup> Conference of OIC Culture Ministers, in October 2009. Nakhchivan is a major historic Islamic city in the Caucasus region, which was referred to as “Bilad Al Rehab” in ancient Arabic books authored in the early Islamic ages. The launch ceremony of “Nakhchivan as the Capital of Islamic Culture for 2018” took place on 21 June 2018. A number of events were organized on this occasion. In cooperation

with ISESCO, “the Launch of ISESCO Prize for Best Cultural Project”, as part of this celebration, a “National workshop on the importance of investment in cultural industries and their role in curbing youth unemployment”, a “Sub-regional workshop on the culture of dialogue and mediation as a mechanism for the fight against extremism and Islamophobia”, a “Regional meeting of the experts in charge of the implementation of the ISESCO Strategy for Green Cities in the Islamic World” and a “Sub-regional training session for the staff of National Commissions in English-speaking Member States”, on the occasion of this celebration were successfully organized.

Another significant platform for constructive debates and discussions, exchange of ideas, theoretical and practical knowledge is Baku International Humanitarian Forum established in 2010. The 6<sup>th</sup> Baku International Humanitarian Forum will be held on 25-26 October 2018, in Baku. This event will bring together famous representatives of political, scientific and cultural elite of the world community including well known statesmen, Nobel Prize winners in the various fields of science and leaders of influential international organizations to hold dialogues, discussions and exchange of views on wide range of global issues in the interest of all humanity.

One of the main goals of state policy of the Republic of Azerbaijan is to increase the quality of education and to produce graduates who meet the needs of the global labour market. Literacy in Azerbaijan is almost 100% today. Reforms are now underway to improve the quality of education: new education institutions are being established, teacher’s operation assessment system works effectively, and the number of exchange programmes with different outstanding education institutions is increasing every year.

Inclusive education (schooling for children with and without special needs together) is making inroads into Azerbaijan. Consistent work is underway to create an inclusive education model for people in need of special care envisaged in “State Programme on Development of Inclusive Education for Persons with Disabilities for 2018-2024”. The document includes all the factors ensuring the access of persons with special needs to education at all levels along with other people, creating an unobstructed environment for their education and integration into the community through inclusive education. Azerbaijan is also a member of the World Disability Foundation.

There is a great amount of active cultural and scientific organizations, where peaceful Islamic values are promoted, such as Science Development Foundation under the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Knowledge Foundation under the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Baku International Centre of Multiculturalism, Moral Values Promotion Fund, and Azerbaijan Institute of Theology.

**Dear friends,**

We highly appreciate your fair and consistent position in relation to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, which resulted in de-facto occupation of 20 percent of the land of Azerbaijan.

Please, accept our sincere gratitude for your support to the just cause of Azerbaijan in the framework of ISESCO and OIC Contact Group for the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict comprising foreign ministers of the OIC Member States. Armenia has not yet implemented numerous UN Security Council resolutions on withdrawal of its armed forces from the Nagorno-Karabakh and the

surrounding districts. But I am sure that one day, with the support of your respected countries, we will see the peaceful resolution of this long-lasting conflict.

**Excellencies,**

**Ladies and gentlemen,**

Over the past three years as the President of the General Conference, I have been keen on keeping abreast with ISESCO's action, coordinating with its Director General and endeavoring to promote its efforts and initiatives in service of joint Islamic action.

Our world today is subject to a plethora of challenges, which cannot be easily addressed without inter-state cooperation and partnership. For us in the Islamic world, there is a dire necessity to promote cooperation and develop partnerships at all levels, in the spirit of Islamic solidarity, which is the nucleus of joint Islamic action that unites us at the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO).

I am confident that our long-standing Organization will move forward on the way toward more edification, innovation, and excellent accomplishments. Such a way requires firm support for the Organization and the provision of action mechanisms likely to help ISESCO achieve its noble objectives. In this regard, I assure you that my country will continue, Allah willing, supporting ISESCO, out of firm belief in the Organization's civilizational mission which mirrors the bright image of the Islamic civilization and serves with dedication comprehensive sustainable development in all Member States.

I wish success to this Conference and express my sincere gratitude to all the organizers and to the beautiful country of Morocco.