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ILHAM ALIYEV CHAIRED THE FIRST MEETING OF THE ORGANIZING COMMITTEE OF THE 4TH ISLAMIC SOLIDARITY GAMES

Speech by President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev

- In 2017, Baku will host the Fourth Islamic Solidarity Games. This is a major international event. It is a very important sporting event both for the planet and for the Islamic world. The fact that the Games are to be held in Azerbaijan once again demonstrates that Azerbaijan is a country enjoying great respect in the world. Until now, all prestigious international events have been held in Azerbaijan at the highest level. At the same time, we regard this as a high assessment the Islamic world gives to Azerbaijan and its development, and we, on our part, will make every effort to conduct these Games at a high level.

A few days ago, I signed an executive order to set up an Organizing Committee of the Games. Today we are holding the first meeting of the Organizing Committee. Given the importance of the Games, I am chairing the first meeting myself. I am sure that the Organizing Committee will successfully accomplish all its tasks in the future and the Games will be held at the highest level.

Leadership of the Organizing Committee has been assigned to Mehriban Aliyeva. Mehriban Aliyeva led the Organizing Committee of the "Eurovision" song contest and the Organizing Committee of the First European Games. The results are obvious. Both international events were held at the highest level. Both during the "Eurovision" song contest and the European Games, all organizational issues were addressed, which was highly appreciated by the participants of these events and visitors to Azerbaijan.

I would like to emphasize the results of the First European Games. It was the first such competition. Prior to that, continental competitions had not been conducted in Europe. Of course, the success of this event depended on our efforts. We set the standards for these Games. Those were the highest standards. Both visitors and citizens of Azerbaijan were further convinced that the First European Games

were held at the level of Summer Olympic Games. This was our goal even though we only had two and a half years to prepare for the games. The creation of a new sports infrastructure, the refurbishment of the existing sports facilities and the solution of all organizational problems – everything was done at the highest level, and the Organizing Committee certainly owns a special role and contribution in this.

The European Games have allowed us the opportunity to demonstrate our potential. Azerbaijan showed Europe and the world again that it is experiencing a period of rapid development, is a land of friendship and cooperation where representatives of all nations and religions live in peace like one family, and we are ready and capable of accommodating all the guests. The Azerbaijani people have once again demonstrated their hospitality, tolerance and respect for the guests. At the same time, our organizational skills were demonstrated at their best. And this has already received high praise from visitors as an indicator of the overall development of our country.

Nevertheless, a dirty campaign was conducted against Azerbaijan both in the run-up to and during the European Games. This was a well-concerted campaign. Certain foreign circles seemed to be competing with each other in denigrating Azerbaijan, discrediting our country and creating an untrue view about it. False, defamatory and fictional information about Azerbaijan was widely circulated in foreign media. Of course, we understood that and knew that it was no coincidence. It was a planned and orchestrated campaign of libel and slander. The forces who masterminded and carried out this campaign aimed to undermine Azerbaijan's authority and tarnish the Games. But all their efforts were in vain, as the athletes, members of delegations and guests of our country saw the realities of Azerbaijan with their own eyes. They saw that Azerbaijan is a modern, vibrant and democratic country. Azerbaijan is a center of multiculturalism. In recent years, creative and landscaping work in Azerbaijan have been so extensive and fast that Baku has become one of the most beautiful cities in the world. They saw that Azerbaijani youth and volunteers who actively participated in the Games love their homeland and are proud of it. They are proud to be citizens of Azerbaijan. They saw that Azerbaijani sportsmen are professional and patriotic.

These Games were a triumph of the Azerbaijani state. The forces that ordered and executed these shady dealings against us failed to achieve anything despite the fact that the European Parliament attempted to adopt an anti-Azerbaijani resolution on the eve of the Games. They failed to achieve this goal and the resolution was not adopted. On the opening day of the Games, 12 June, the German Bundestag adopted a disgraceful resolution against Azerbaijan, which was built on lies and slander. The Azerbaijani people and state rejected it. All these attempts show that even in the face of unprecedented pressure, we did not deviate from our path and Azerbaijan demonstrated its capabilities once again.

Of course, we predicted that pressure on us will continue to mount even after the Games because Azerbaijan remains faithful to its independent policy. For this policy, the national interests of the Azerbaijani people are paramount. Azerbaijan does not act under the dictation of any external forces, conducts an independent policy and grows rapidly, while also proving that there is a vibrant, modern and strong state in the Muslim world which is committed to its national and spiritual values. This does not fit into the stereotypes of some external circles, the stereotypes they have created. Unfortunately, the Muslim world today is presented more as a zone of conflict, there is a growing trend of Islamophobia. There is an anti-Muslim campaign of insults and slander, and when they see that there is

such a beautiful, dynamic and modern country in the Muslim world, this, of course, frustrates their plans.

Speaking about the Games, I must say that our athletes have delighted us. Azerbaijan won a historic victory, finishing second in team standings. Our athletes won 56 medals, including 21 gold ones. So the First European games were a comprehensive holiday, a celebration of the Azerbaijani state and people. I am confident that there will be many more such events and victories in the future.

Islamic Solidarity Games, as I said, will also become a very important international competition. Azerbaijan is a part of the Muslim world. This is our family, and we should try to conduct these games at the highest level. All athletes, guests and members of delegations should be provided with the best conditions, so that they could become acquainted with our country, see the ancient history of Azerbaijan and feel comfortable here.

I can say that in addition to these Games, Azerbaijan will host various international competitions. In 2016, Azerbaijan will play host to a Formula-1 Grand Prix for the first time. We will host games of the World Cup in football. The eyes of the whole world will once again be focused on Azerbaijan. I am confident that we will conduct these competitions at the highest level. Next year, Azerbaijan will host the World Chess Olympiad. In other words, we are going and will continue to go along this path, because we have ample opportunities to promote our country in the world.

The best answer to our detractors, anti-Azerbaijani and Islamophobic forces is our reality. Let them come and see everything with their own eyes. I can say that the vast majority of foreign visitors to Azerbaijan leave the country with the kindest wishes because they are impartial. They come to Azerbaijan with good intentions. I have already said this and I want to reiterate that we are ready to embrace all foreign guests coming to our country with good intentions. Azerbaijan is a land of multiculturalism. Azerbaijan has never had and never will have discrimination on religious or ethnic grounds. We are an example for many countries, especially at the present time. Today, we are witnessing Muslim refugees being exposed to torture. This worries us a lot. I should also note that Azerbaijan is one of the countries that have expressed their position. We do not tolerate injustice. We advocate justice and humanity. We have our own position on all important international issues. I think that if our experience is studied sufficiently, there will be fewer conflicts and stand-offs on religious or ethnic grounds in the world.

Azerbaijan is an example and model. This is a normal way of life. I want to say once again that we do not see this as some kind of an achievement. This is a normal way of life. Some countries, however, have disrupted normal life and established a domination of racism, xenophobia and Islamophobia.

I am confident that Islamic Games will, in the first place, strengthen Islamic solidarity and show both the Muslim world and the whole planet once again that Islam is a religion of peace, mercy and brotherhood. The Games will also show the world that Azerbaijan is a country with great potential capable of conducting the most prestigious international competitions.

We will make sure that all organizational issues are resolved. Of course, we will benefit from the experience we gained in the First European Games. If we consider that the Organizing Committee was dealing with the European Games in about the same composition, I am sure that all our objectives will be met and Azerbaijan will demonstrate its capabilities once again.

And now, I want to give the floor to the Chair of the Organizing Committee, Mehriban Aliyeva.

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Azerbaijan`s first lady, chairperson of the Organizing Committee of the 4th Islamic Solidarity Games Mehriban Aliyeva and Youth and Sports Minister, member of the Organizing Committee Azad Rahimov made speeches at the event.

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Bring the meeting to a close, President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev said:

- I think that sufficient information has been provided. I am sure that the Organizing Committee will successfully meet all the challenges ahead. Of course, members of the Organizing Committee and heads of other agencies should be heavily involved in this and work hard. The European Games have allowed us the opportunity to accumulate a great experience. This has already been mentioned. At all stages, there should be coordination and professionalism. I am convinced that the arrival of guests and athletes in our country, their greeting at the airport, visa matters, modern transport vehicles, and provision of visitors, athletes and members of delegations with hospitality – all these issues will be resolved.

Particular attention should be paid to security measures. I am sure that the people dealing with this sphere will organize Islamic Solidarity Games at a high level. During the European Games, security measures were organized at the highest level. I have already talked about this and want to say it again. In recent years, I have attended the opening ceremonies of many Olympic Games and seen armed men on the streets and even special installations in some cases. Sometimes, anti-aircraft guns were installed on rooftops. But it was impossible to find a single armed man in Baku. This is our approach. Security was organized at the highest level. At the same time, security measures should not create problems for ordinary people, especially the people of Baku. Visitors should not feel that either. Therefore, I am pretty sure that all security precautions will be taken at a high level this time as well.

There were no problems in connection with the information and communication sector during the European Games. In the time left for the Islamic Solidarity Games, we need to take extra measures for all information and communication systems to work smoothly without problems.

The process of streamlining the city transport is under way. New organizations are being set up and the people of Baku can see that. New underground stations are under construction. We are already applying innovations related to city transport. I believe that in the time left for the Games work in this area should go even faster. Again, as was the case in the European Games, we should identify special tracks. I believe that there will be no problem in this sphere either.

The process of improving the city of Baku continues. This has nothing to do with the Games. Additional measures will be taken before 2017. New streets are opening in Baku, buildings are constructed and the city is getting prettier. The instruction has been issued to continue serious and major creative work throughout our city. Baku is not only about the center. Improvement work and infrastructure projects should be carried out in all districts and suburban settlements of our city.

As for healthcare, I can say that there are new health centers in Azerbaijan now, in particular those built in Baku in recent years. They have the most sophisticated equipment. I believe that special teams and special centers will be established during the Games, so that medical assistance is immediately available in the event of any accident.

The athletes village and the media village are at the highest possible level. Athletes and members of delegations who lived there during the European Games specifically highlighted that. I am told that some athletes were reluctant to leave Baku after the competition. They were very comfortable in the media village and the athletes village. Everything was organized at the highest level. Of course, the athletes and media villages will remain empty until 2017. Therefore, of course, we have to make sure that current repairs are carried out and we can maintain this high level for the Games.

Our sports facilities are at the highest level as well. It was noted here that there is no need for the construction of new facilities. So these Games do not require any investment. Of course, there will be operational costs. We will invite foreign experts for the Games again. They will work alongside local experts. An international operating company will probably be established again, so that we could conduct these Games at the level of the European Games.

During the Games, we should envisage broad-based cultural programs – performances, concerts, etc., so that our guests could get acquainted with our rich culture. It is necessary to arrange sightseeing tours. If necessary, we can purchase additional sightseeing buses because, as far as I know, these buses currently play a huge role. They are used by both local residents and tourists. We must display our rich history and culture. These Games will last for more than two weeks. The tourists coming here should also have the opportunity to travel to our regions. Each hotel should have special booklets and brochures. We already have this experience.

Of course, we look forward to the work of our volunteers again. For volunteers it will be a wonderful opportunity to show their skills and professionalism. I know that volunteers have been a little bored since the European Games. We all are. Of course, we want to relive those unforgettable days. I am sure that our volunteers will work hard in Islamic Solidarity Games. Their role is extremely high. As you know, all volunteers have received letters of commendation. They are our future – young people who are

trained, patriotic, knowledgeable and already experienced. In general, we should conduct a policy of rejuvenation in our management systems. Azerbaijan is modernizing and developing, generations replace each other, and we should prepare young people who could confidently run our country in the future.

There is less than two years left for the Games. The Games will be held in May 2017. Therefore, the Organizing Committee should already get down to business. I know that some preparations are already under way. This has also been mentioned today. All agencies should work in a coordinated manner, so that we could conduct the Games at a high level. I want to repeat that we must demonstrate the same approach as in the European Games. These Games are no less important than the European Games. We must make sure that Azerbaijan demonstrates its hospitality, organizational skills and overall potential to the world.

I wish the Organizing Committee success. I congratulate you and the entire Azerbaijani people on the occasion of Eid al-Adha. Thank you.