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# REALITIES IN A POST-CONFLICT ERA: RESTORATION OF LOST OPPORTUNITIES

*Supreme Commander-in-Chief,  
President Ilham Aliyev raises  
the national flag in Shusha*





*The city of Aghdam ruined by Armenian occupiers and labeled as the Hiroshima of the Caucasus*



This year marks 30 years of the independence of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Over these 30 years, Azerbaijan has experienced two wars with neighboring Armenia, a political failure and lost opportunities at the early stages of its independence, a speedy recovery and rapid economic development based on the farsighted policy conducted under the leadership of national leader Heydar Aliyev, and Great Victory leading to restoration of the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan within its international borders under the leadership of the Supreme Commander-in-Chief, President Ilham Aliyev.

Due to the successful foreign policy, today Azerbaijan is a leading country in the South Caucasus in terms of economic development, and it would have been even more successful if not the Armenian aggression and the occupation of its territories for nearly three decades.

Since early days of its independence, the Republic of Azerbaijan became a victim of armed aggression from a neighboring country, as a result of which internationally recognized territories of Azerbaijan, including the Nagorno-Karabakh region and seven adjacent districts, were occupied and the entire Azerbaijani population of the area was expelled from their homes.

International organizations adopted numerous documents demanding full, immediate and unconditional withdrawal of the Armenian occupying

forces from all of the occupied territories of Azerbaijan and calling for the conflict settlement on the basis of norms and principles of international law, including respect for territorial integrity, sovereignty and inviolability of borders. This position was explicitly reflected in the resolutions and decisions passed by the UN Security Council and the UN General Assembly, the Non-Aligned Movement and the OSCE, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the Council of Europe.

Azerbaijan was committed to the negotiation process for almost 30 years, with the hope that Armenia would understand the realities and leave the internationally recognized territories of Azerbaijan in compliance with the norms and principles of international law and resolutions and decisions of international organizations. Azerbaijan tried to avoid escalation and wanted the voice of truth to be heard by international community.

Armenia in the meantime was delaying the negotiations while taking consistent steps to consolidate the results of occupation of Azerbaijani territories, aiming at their annexation. This included, among others, the settlement of migrants on the occupied territories, the destruction and looting of historical and cultural heritage, the illegal exploitation of natural resources, the misappropriation of private and public property in the seized lands. A series of grave crimes have been committed by Armenia against the civilian

*President Ilham Aliyev lowering a symbolic capsule in a groundbreaking ceremony for a future airport in Fizuli*



population of Azerbaijan, as well as its cultural heritage and infrastructure throughout the years of occupation.

Despite Azerbaijan's commitment to a political solution, the absence of a mechanism to implement international decisions, the disruptive position, as well as the recent demonstration of clearly provocative and aggressive actions by Armenia, made the military restoration of the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan within its internationally recognized borders inevitable.

In response to another provocation by Armenia on 27 September, a counter-offensive operation was launched by the order of Supreme Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Azerbaijan, President Ilham Aliyev. As a result of the 44-day Patriotic War, Azerbaijan implemented four resolutions of the UN Security Council (822, 853, 874 and 884), decisions and resolutions of the UN General Assembly, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, the OSCE, the Non-Aligned Movement, the Turkic Council, NATO, GUAM, the European Parliament and other international organizations, demanding full, immediate and unconditional withdrawal of the Armenian occupying forces from all of the occupied territories of Azerbaijan and calling for the conflict settlement on the basis of norms and principles of international law.

Thus, the counter-offensive operation carried out by the Armed Forces of Azerbaijan in accordance with international law to protect the civilian population and ensure the territorial integrity of the country made it possible to resolve the protracted conflict.

On 10 November 2020, a new chapter was opened in the history of Azerbaijan, Armenia and the wider Caucasus region. The trilateral statement signed by the leaders of Azerbaijan, Armenia and Russia put an end to the almost three-decades-long armed conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

The implementation of this statement ensured the cessation of all military activities and the return of the occupied Aghdam, Kalbajar and Lachin districts to Azerbaijan. The statement contains an important provision on the return of the internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees to their homes under the supervision of the UNHCR.

The agreement also envisages the removal of obstacles to all economic and transport links in the region and provides guarantees for the safe movement of persons, vehicles and cargo between Armenia and Azerbaijan in both directions, including the connection between mainland Azerbaijan and its Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic.



*Construction of Victory Road in progress*

This agreement creates a new reality in the region, forming a new cooperation framework. The respective contributions of the Russian Federation and the Republic of Turkey to make this agreement a reality should be particularly underlined. These neighboring states have played an important part as guarantors of the above-mentioned agreement, the implementation of which will ensure the long-overdue peace and stability in the South Caucasus.

To ensure peace and security in the liberated territories of Azerbaijan, a Joint Monitoring Center has been established by Russia and Turkey to monitor the implementation of agreements by Armenia and Azerbaijan under the Trilateral Statement of 10 November.

Azerbaijan is determined to re-integrate its citizens of Armenian origin residing in the conflict-affected territories into its political, social and economic space, guaranteeing them the same rights and freedoms exercised by all the citizens of Azerbaijan regardless of their ethnic or religious affiliation. The Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan provides for the solid legal framework in this regard.

The peaceful co-existence of Azerbaijani and Armenian residents of the conflict-affected territories

based on respect for each other's security, ethnic and religious identity within the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Azerbaijan must and shall be finally ensured.

We have entered a new post-conflict stage, a stage of reconstruction and rehabilitation, a stage of restoration of peaceful co-existence. New opportunities for development and cooperation are emerging. We have already started to work with our partners to take advantage of the new promising realities.

Azerbaijan attaches great importance to the full implementation of trilateral statements of 10 November 2020 and 11 January 2021 both in letter and spirit, and to healing the wounds of the bloody conflict on the basis of normalization of inter-state relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

It is our firm belief that the international community, led by the UN, has an important role to play in supporting the implementation of the trilateral statements, which promise restoration of good neighborly relations in the region.

A peaceful, prosperous and stable future can be achieved only through joint determination, respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of states, and full compliance with international obligations related to the inviolability of internationally recognized borders. 🌟