

## PRESS RELEASE

### **of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan on the results of 2023**

#### **Introduction**

During the year of 2023, under the leadership of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan H.E. Mr. Ilham Aliyev, the Republic of Azerbaijan has successfully implemented an independent, resolute and principled foreign policy course. This policy has been aimed at ensuring the national interests of our country, including creating a favorable environment for national security and socio-economic development.

Content-wise, Azerbaijan's foreign policy has been very rich during 2023, the year of celebration of the 100th Anniversary of Heydar Aliyev, the National Leader of the Azerbaijani people, the founder of the independent state of Azerbaijan, and the outstanding politician and statesman.

In 2023, Azerbaijan fully restored its sovereignty and territorial integrity and thus, established the foundation for the regional order based on international law and justice.

Though the approaches of some circles based on blatant bias and double standards during this process caused certain obstacles to bilateral relations as well as the situation in the region, creating certain challenges to our foreign policy, Azerbaijan's decisive and principled approach and at the same time it's path for constructive and active dialogue made it possible to overcome these challenges.

Throughout the year, Azerbaijan maintained friendly relations with the vast majority of world states on the basis of sovereign equality and mutual respect, and worked together with other states to take appropriate measures related to common threats and challenges facing humanity. During the year, Azerbaijan successfully chaired several international organizations and entities, hosted international events such as 74th International Astronautical Congress, Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) Contact Group in response to COVID-19, the Ministerial Meeting of the NAM Coordinating Bureau, Summit of the member states of the UN Special Program for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA), 27th meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), Conference of labor ministers of the member states of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), VII Conference of Ministers and Senior Officials Responsible for Physical Education and Sport of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

#### **Bilateral relations with foreign countries**

As in previous years, **relations with neighboring states** have had a special priority in our foreign policy. Meetings held at the highest level with Türkiye, Russia and Georgia and implementation of the reached agreements at the practical level ensured the development of bilateral cooperation throughout the year.

The armed terrorist attack against the Embassy of the Republic of Azerbaijan in the Islamic Republic of Iran on January 27 caused serious tension in relations with Iran, and the Embassy staff was evacuated. At the same time, discussions on the elimination of tensions and on the

prospects of relations were continued, and high-level contacts were carried out. Practical steps have been launched for the purpose of creating new communication links between the East Zangezur economic region of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic via the territory of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The first meeting at the level of Foreign Ministers of the “3+3” regional consultation format was held in Tehran, which has a significant potential to accomplish existing bilateral and other cooperation formats, strengthen security and stability in the region, and bring out its unused potential for the sake of economic growth and progress.

During the year, the intensity of contacts, especially high-level visits, with the **Central Asian states**, with whom we have common historical and cultural ties once again demonstrated the strategic nature of our relations with those countries. During the year, the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan visited the Central Asian states 6 times, and the Presidents of the Central Asian states visited Azerbaijan 8 times. The President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Mr. Ilham Aliyev participated for the first time as a guest of honor in the Fifth Consultative Meeting of the Heads of State of Central Asia held on September 14 in Dushanbe, the capital city of Tajikistan.

Throughout the year, Azerbaijan’s relations with a number of European countries, **Central and South-Eastern European states** in particular, have shown a special dynamic. The heads of states and governments of Romania, Bulgaria, Albania and Montenegro visited Azerbaijan during the year and our head of state visited Hungary, Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia. On January 30, the Joint Declaration on an enhanced strategic partnership with Hungary and on April 13, the Joint Declaration on the strategic partnership with Bosnia and Herzegovina were signed.

The traditionally close relations with the states of the **Middle East and Africa** have been further developed. The visit of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Mr. Ilham Aliyev to the United Arab Emirates, as well as the visits of the heads of states of the Arab Republic of Egypt and the Republic of Iraq to our country should be noted in particular. Throughout the year, meetings were held with Foreign Ministers of 20 Middle Eastern and African countries.

Relations with **Asian countries** have been in focus as well. During the year, mutual endeavors between Azerbaijan and China including the meeting of the intergovernmental commission, the opening of another Azerbaijan Trade House in China and other events have demonstrated the great prospects of cooperation between the two countries in economy, trade, transport-logistics, renewable energy and other fields. Prime Minister of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan Shehbaz Sharif paid an official visit to our country on June 14-15. Meetings of intergovernmental commissions were held with the Republic of Korea and India on June 7 and October 25, respectively. Azerbaijan’s inter-parliamentary relations with the Philippines and Indonesia have developed.

Dialogue with **South, Central and North American states** were continued, and interactions took place with the USA, Mexico, Cuba, Colombia and Venezuela within both bilateral and multilateral formats. Inter-parliamentary relations with Peru, Venezuela and Brazil have developed.

**Work on signing of bilateral and multilateral legal documents** has been carried out. Throughout the year, a total of 161 documents covering various fields were signed with 44

countries (USA, Albania, Belarus, Belgium, Great Britain, Brazil, Czech Republic, Eswatini, Philippines, India, Iraq, Switzerland, Italy, Colombia, Maldives, Morocco, Moldova, Montenegro, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Qatar, Kyrgyzstan Republic, Rwanda, Romania, Serbia, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Tajikistan, Türkiye, North Macedonia, Uganda, Venezuela, Japan, etc.).

In the course of the year, **political consultations** were held with the Foreign Ministries of 25 countries (Czech Republic, Italy, Lithuania, Slovenia, Austria, Germany, Bulgaria, Pakistan, Philippines, Kazakhstan, Moldova, Uzbekistan, Georgia, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Jordan, Ethiopia, Algeria, Djibouti, Uganda, Oman, Mexico, Colombia, Cuba).

In 2023, **work on opening of new diplomatic missions** was continued. The Embassy of the Republic of Azerbaijan was established in the Slovak Republic (the city of Bratislava). The total number of diplomatic missions of the Republic of Azerbaijan abroad has reached 90 (67 embassies, 6 permanent missions, 9 consulates general, 7 embassy offices and 1 representative office). On March 29, the opening ceremony of the Embassy of Azerbaijan in Israel (Tel-Aviv) was held with the participation of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan and Israel.

### **Cooperation within international organizations**

In its capacity **as the Chairman of the NAM**, Republic of Azerbaijan carried out decisive activities together with other member states towards the accomplishment of the aims and objectives of the Movement based on the Bandung principles. In this regard, Summit of NAM Contact Group on fight against COVID-19 on post-pandemic recovery issues organized in Baku on March 2, Ministerial Meeting of NAM Coordinating Bureau organized on July 5-6, official opening ceremony of the headquarters of NAM Youth Organization on July 6, high-level meetings of the NAM-G77 Joint Coordination Committee chaired by Azerbaijan and Cuba held in New York on September 22, as well as initiated and organized events related to the development of sectoral cooperation within the Movement and dialogue on various issues should be noted.

Important documents such as the Final Document, Baku Declaration and Commemorative Declaration on Centennial Anniversary of National Leader Heydar Aliyev were adopted at the Ministerial Meeting of NAM Coordinating Bureau in Baku.

Azerbaijan shared its successful experience of chairmanship with Uganda, which will take over NAM chairmanship next year.

In 2023, Azerbaijan has chaired the **SPECA** under the theme of “Transforming the SPECA Region into a Connectivity Hub with Global Outreach.”

On November 20-24, our chairmanship hosted SPECA week in Baku including several events, and the first-ever Summit in SPECA’s 25-year history. At the Summit, the Baku Declaration was adopted, the Roadmap on Digitalization of multimodal data and document exchange along the Middle Corridor was endorsed, and the establishment of the SPECA Trust Fund was agreed upon. Azerbaijan announced its contribution to this Fund in the amount of 3.5 million US dollars.

Azerbaijani Chairmanship to the **Organization of Economic Cooperation** was carried out under the theme of “2023-Year of Green Transition and Interconnectivity.” At the 16<sup>th</sup> Summit in Tashkent, it was decided to hold the next summit in Azerbaijan in 2025.

Events related to the Organization’s sectoral cooperation in the fields of transport, customs and tourism were held by Azerbaijan’s chairmanship, alongside the 27<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs, which is the main decision-making body of the Organization on October 10 in Shusha with the Shusha Declaration being adopted.

At the meeting of the Ministers of Tourism of the Member States of the ECO held on October 5 in Ardabil, Shusha city was elected as the Tourism Capital of the Organization for 2026.

As in previous years, Azerbaijan attached special importance to the strategic cooperation within the **Organization of Turkic States (OTS)**, actively participated in all areas of cooperation within the Organization, hosted several events, including the Ministerial Meeting on Emergency Management (September 7) and the Meeting of Ministers in charge of Urban Planning (September 30).

In accordance with the position previously expressed by the Member States, in the Declaration of the 10<sup>th</sup> Summit of the OTS held on November 3, 2023 in Astana, support to the normalization process between Azerbaijan and Armenia was reaffirmed, the full restoration of sovereignty of the Republic of Azerbaijan following local anti-terror measures on September 19-20 was welcomed, and the readiness of Member States to contribute to post-conflict rehabilitation and reconstruction works in Azerbaijan were expressed.

In 2023, within the **Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC)**, Azerbaijan continued to contribute to strengthening sectoral cooperation between Member States. In this regard, it should be mentioned that on November 21-23 Azerbaijan hosted Conference of Labor Ministers of the OIC Member States and in this framework, the Inaugural General Assembly of the OIC Labour Center headquartered in Baku was held and the OIC Labour Center began to operate.

At the 49<sup>th</sup> session of the OIC Council of Foreign Ministers held in Nouakchott, the capital of Mauritania, on March 16-17, 5 following resolutions including on “Elimination of the Consequences of the Aggression of the Republic of Armenia against the Republic of Azerbaijan,” “Solidarity with the Victims of the Khojaly Massacre of 1992,” “Economic Assistance to the Republic of Azerbaijan,” “Destruction and Desecration of Islamic Historical and Cultural Relics and Shrines in the Territories of the Republic of Azerbaijan Resulting from the Aggression of the Republic of Armenia against the Republic of Azerbaijan” and on “Attack against the Embassy of the Republic of Azerbaijan in Tehran” were adopted. In addition, in accordance with the norms and principles of international law, throughout the year the OIC General Secretariat made statements in support of Azerbaijan’s fair position and just cause.

Shusha city was declared as the Capital of Culture in the Islamic World for 2024 by the Islamic World Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ICESCO), and as the Youth Capital of the Islamic World for 2024 by the OIC Youth Forum.

During the year, dialogue between Azerbaijan and the **European Union (EU)** on the fields of energy, transport, etc. continued. Negotiations on “Institutional, general and final provisions”

section of the draft of new bilateral agreement which will form the legal basis of future cooperation between Azerbaijan and the EU were held. The participation of our country in the meetings of high-level officials and Foreign Ministers of the Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries was ensured.

In 2023, the Republic of Azerbaijan continued cooperation within the **Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)** in various, in particular, cultural, humanitarian, scientific and other fields. Mr. Ilham Aliyev, President of the Republic of Azerbaijan attended the meeting of the CIS Council of Heads of State held in Bishkek on October 13. On June 8 and October 26, Mr. Ali Asadov, Prime Minister and Mr. Shahin Mustafayev, Deputy Prime Minister took part in the meetings of the CIS Council of Heads of Government in Sochi and Bishkek. On October 12, 2023, Jeyhun Bayramov, Minister of Foreign Affairs attended the CIS Council of Foreign Ministers held in Bishkek.

On December 5, the first meeting of Foreign Ministers of the **Caspian littoral states** was held in Moscow. During the meeting, views were exchanged on the agenda of sectoral cooperation among the Caspian littoral states in various areas, including economic, trade, investments, energy security, connectivity, environmental protection, etc. In his speech, Minister Jeyhun Bayramov voiced the position, expectations and concrete proposals of Azerbaijan on the joint use of the Caspian Sea for the purposes of peace, friendship and solidarity.

During the year, multilateral and bilateral cooperation on military-political issues were in focus. In this context, **Azerbaijan-NATO** partnership retained its significance, and both political dialogue and practical cooperation between the parties continued.

On March 1-3, Azerbaijan, which attaches great importance to international cooperation in the field of peaceful use of nuclear technologies, received Mr. Rafael Mariano Grossi, **Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency**. The discussions were helpful in determining the promising directions of cooperation between the Agency and Azerbaijan.

Azerbaijan, having an important petrochemical industry, made a financial contribution to the Chemical Technology Center established under the **Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons**, commending the increased attention of this Organization to promote the peaceful use of the chemical industry.

During 2023, activities were continued **to promote the candidacies nominated by the Republic of Azerbaijan for the elective positions of international organizations**. In this regard, Azerbaijan's election to the Executive Council of the World Tourism Organization for 2023-2025, the Subsidiary Committee of the Meeting of States Parties to the 1970 Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export, and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property for 2023-2027, to the membership of International Coordinating Council of the Man and the Biosphere programme (MAB-ICC) for 2023-2027 could be mentioned. The approval of the candidacy of the Republic of Azerbaijan to host the 29th Conference of Parties (COP-29) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the largest event of the UN system, should be especially noted.

In connection with the **aggravation of the situation in the Middle East**, diplomatic contacts of our country have intensified. Our country was represented at the level of the Foreign Minister at the Extraordinary Ministerial Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Organization of

Islamic Cooperation on October 18, in connection with the latest events in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict zone. On November 11, Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov took part and delivered a speech at the Joint Arab-Islamic Extraordinary Summit in Riyadh. During the speech, it was emphasized that the continuation of the current tension in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict zone, in particular, the fact that civilians are the most affected by the conflict, is of serious concern. A call was made for an urgent de-escalation of the situation, as well as an urgent cessation of hostilities. The importance of resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on the basis of two state principle in accordance with the norms of international law and the relevant resolutions of the UN was emphasized.

### **Economic diplomacy**

For many years, Azerbaijan has put forward initiatives and taken practical steps to develop economic, energy and transport communications of regional and global importance.

During the year, relevant work was continued with foreign countries in a bilateral format in order to expand our export geography, to promote investment cooperation, and the participation of foreign companies in large-scale restoration and reconstruction works carried out in our liberated territories.

In 2023, Azerbaijan's role in ensuring international energy security and cargo transportation has further increased.

The inauguration ceremony of the Serbian-Bulgarian Gas Interconnector was held in Niš, Serbia on December 10, and the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan has attended the event.

At the same time, relevant activities were carried out to strengthen the transit and transport potential of our country. Efforts were made to implement East-West, North-South international transport corridors, regional transport and infrastructure projects.

Groundbreaking ceremony was held for the construction of a road bridge and the border-customs infrastructure near Agband settlement of Zangilan district on October 6 within the framework of the “Memorandum of Understanding on the establishment of new communication links between the East Zangezur Economic Region of the Republic of Azerbaijan and Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic passing through the territory of the Islamic Republic of Iran” signed between Azerbaijan and Iran in Baku last year.

Meetings of 22 intergovernmental commissions (United Kingdom, Russia, Republic of Tatarstan of Russian Federation, Morocco, India, Iraq, Israel, Lithuania, Czech Republic, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyz Republic, China, Poland, Korea, Romania, Serbia, Hungary, Moldova) and 2 Working Groups (Germany, Albania) were successfully organized during this year.

### **Humanitarian diplomacy**

In 2023, numerous initiatives of our country were implemented within the framework of **the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)**. In this regard, the inscription of the nomination of “Khurshidbanu Natavan’s “Gül dəftəri” – album of illustrated poems” in

UNESCO's the Memory of the World Register, "Hirkan forests" and "the Cultural Landscape of Khinalig and "Köç Yolu" in UNESCO's World Heritage List, "Khudaferin bridges" and "Azikh and Taghlar caves – prehistoric places of Azerbaijan" in the Tentative List of UNESCO, the 900<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the prominent architect of Azerbaijan Ajami ibn Abubakr Nakhchivani and the 950<sup>th</sup> anniversary of "Dīwān Lughāt al-Turk" in UNESCO's Anniversaries List, "Craftsmanship and performing art of balaban", "Craftsmanship of mother of pearl inlay" (Azerbaijan and Türkiye) in Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, thus reaching the number of our heritage samples in this List to 23, can be noted as important examples.

As a result of the cooperation of the National Commission for UNESCO of the Republic of Azerbaijan with relevant bodies, a training program was organized for the Secretaries-General and representatives of the National Commissions for UNESCO of African countries, as well as various conferences, exhibitions and other events.

On April 7-8, Baku and Shusha hosted the 9th Meeting of UNESCO National Commissions of TURKSOY Member States, jointly organized by the National Commission of the Republic of Azerbaijan for UNESCO, TURKSOY, ADA University, and adopted the Final Declaration.

On June 26-29, the 7th International Conference of Ministers and Senior Officials Responsible for Physical Education and Sport (MINEPS VII) was held in Baku. The conference was attended by more than 540 delegates from 124 countries, 37 ministers and senior officials. At the end of the conference, the Baku Declaration was adopted.

Drawing the attention to the urbicidal acts in our liberated lands during the occupation period and the implementation of urban planning in these areas in accordance with high standards became the basis for the effective continuation of cooperation with the **UN Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat)** in 2023, the main goal of which is to provide people with decent housing and promote quality urbanization. In order to provide advisory support in this area, an expert of UN-Habitat has been operating in our country since May 2023. Additionally, on September 29-October 2, "Urban Planning Week" was held in cooperation with UN-Habitat in Azerbaijan. Our country has received the right to host the 13<sup>th</sup> World Urban Forum, which will be held in 2026.

Azerbaijan, as a country suffering from landmines, has always kept on the agenda the **negative effects of mines such as threats to peace and security**, violation of human rights and creation of obstacles to socio-economic development. Efforts were continued to raise awareness at the international level about large-scale humanitarian mine clearance operations to eliminate the mine problem facing our country and to attract international assistance to humanitarian mine clearance operations.

With its activities in this area, Azerbaijan not only brought the problem of landmines to the global agenda, but also contributed to the formation of international political dialogue and cooperation on the subject of landmines. The annual international conference on humanitarian demining has become an important dialogue format in this area. In the final document of the Ministerial Meeting of the NAM Coordinating Bureau held in Baku on July 5-6, it was agreed to create a "Contact Group for consultation and practical cooperation on humanitarian demining and related issues" on the initiative of Azerbaijan, and the first meeting of the Group was held in New York on September 8. In addition, at the initiative of Azerbaijan, UNESCO adopted a

special resolution on the impact of mines on cultural property as a special direction of preserving cultural heritage during armed conflicts.

On the occasion of the International Day of Victims of Enforced Disappearances, an international conference on “**Increasing national and international efforts to clarify the fate of missing persons**” was held in Baku on September 18. A Statement addressed to the international community was adopted on behalf of the conference participants.

On November 14, within the framework of the 44<sup>th</sup> Session of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) Working Group of the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC), the 4<sup>th</sup> periodic report of the Republic of Azerbaijan was reviewed. The periodic report included comprehensive details about the work carried out in our country, cooperation within the framework of international human rights mechanisms, “the Great Return” state program, the issue of missing persons, the problem of refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs) brought on by Armenia’s aggression, and the facts of human rights violations committed against Azerbaijanis. Simultaneously, at the 54<sup>th</sup> session of the Human Rights Council, a Resolution on the Right to Development was adopted, which was proposed by Azerbaijan on behalf of the NAM and co-authored by over a hundred countries.

Azerbaijani side considers the activities of the **Western Azerbaijan Community** to ensure the right of Azerbaijanis expelled from Armenia to return to their homes peacefully, safely and with dignity, while respecting the norms and principles of international law, including the territorial integrity and sovereignty of states, as important in terms of fulfilling international norms in the field of human rights.

### **International aid**

In 2023, Azerbaijan prioritized international development assistance. Humanitarian and technological assistance to the world’s least developed and developing countries continued throughout the year. Development assistance projects primarily consisted of supporting various scientific research, training, and scholarship programs, implementing projects in areas of social infrastructure most in need by the population in foreign countries, and allocating contributions to projects and activities carried out by international organizations in a number of countries around the world. Support to the brotherly Republic of Türkiye following the catastrophic earthquake on February 6, as well as support given to Ukraine, carried significant weight in the Republic of Azerbaijan’s foreign assistance actions this year. In this sense, the following work might be presented as an example:

The President of the Republic of Azerbaijan H. E. Mr. Ilham Aliyev has issued two worldwide calls for the recovery of **Africa and Small Island Developing States** following the pandemic. As the first contributing country, Azerbaijan allocated \$1 million for each call. It is planned to allocate educational grants for citizens of OIC and NAM member states, as well as citizens of states inhabited by peoples and minorities with ethnic, historical, and cultural ties to our people, and citizens of small developing island states, within the framework of the program “International Educational Grant named after Heydar Aliyev” established by the order of the head of state dated July 8, 2023.

The International Development Agency of the Republic of Azerbaijan (AIDA) continued its financial support for the UN Central Emergency Response Fund, the African Capacity Building



Foundation, and other similar institutions this year, as well as its support for the “fight against preventable vision loss” campaign carried out in African countries collaboratively with the Islamic Development Bank and other partners. Schools and special educational institutions in Ethiopia, Guinea-Bissau, and Iraq were also provided with assistance.

**Scholarship and training programs** were one of our country’s key priorities in terms of international aid. The number of students receiving full scholarships under the educational grant program (5-year, 2018-2022) for nationals of Organization of Islamic Cooperation and Non-Aligned Movement member states reached 200 in the 2022-2023 academic year. By the order of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan H. E. Mr. Ilham Aliyev dated July 8, 2023 “International Educational Grant named after Heydar Aliyev” program was established for citizens of OIC and NAM member states, as well as citizens of states inhabited by peoples and minorities with ethnic, historical, and cultural ties to our people, and citizens of small developing island states. The first student admission within the framework of the 5-year program, which provides for the annual admission of 100 students to study in our country’s higher educational institutions at the preparatory courses, bachelor’s, master’s, doctoral, basic (higher) medical education, and residency levels will take place in the academic year 2024-2025.

From the early days of the **devastating earthquake in Türkiye**, Azerbaijan showed brotherly solidarity by sending search and rescue teams, medical personnel, volunteers, and different humanitarian supplies. Azerbaijan has sent 940 rescue and medical personnel, as well as volunteer detachments, as well as more than 5,300 tons of humanitarian cargo to the affected region. Azerbaijan was the number one country in the world in terms of the number of rescue personnel dispatched to Türkiye. On March 20, Minister Jeyhun Bayramov attended the International Donors' Conference “Together for People in Türkiye and Syria” in Brussels, where it was announced that, on the instructions of President Ilham Aliyev, support in the amount of \$100 million US dollars will be provided for the construction of residential buildings, social facilities, and educational institutions to contribute to the restoration and reconstruction activities in the earthquake-affected areas of Türkiye.

This year, the Republic of Azerbaijan continued to provide **humanitarian assistance to Ukraine**. The humanitarian aid, as well as the aid for restoration and reconstruction purposes provided to Ukraine by the Republic of Azerbaijan amounted to the total of 57 million Manats (about 34 million US dollars), half of which has been provided in the current year.

In December, \$2 million was allocated as financial assistance to the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) to provide assistance to **civilians in the Gaza Strip**.

Pakistan, Slovenia, Malawi, Vanuatu, Burkina Faso, Chad, Niger, Belize, Yemen, and Sudan also received aid.

### **Diplomatic activities in the post-conflict period**

Throughout 2023, the agenda for normalizing relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan based on mutual recognition and respect for each other's sovereignty, territorial integrity, and state borders put forward by Azerbaijan has been continuously furthered. Consistent, systematic, and steadfast foreign policy activities were carried out to prevent the smear campaign against Azerbaijan by Armenia and its enablers, to explain to the international

community the steps towards neutralizing threats to Azerbaijan's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and to prevent attempts to question and limit these steps.

Initiatives against Azerbaijan's interests were effectively thwarted as a consequence of concerted efforts, notably in the United Nations Security Council, the International Court of Justice, and other international platforms.

Despite systematic actions against Azerbaijan, particularly in the political, diplomatic, legal, and media spheres, the agenda of the negotiations on the normalization of interstate relations with Armenia was ensured to be based on the five basic principles proposed by Azerbaijan in 2022, and the negotiations continued exclusively on this basis throughout the year.

The agenda for the normalization of relations during the year is set in three main directions: the preparation of an agreement that will determine the foundations of bilateral relations, the delimitation of borders and the restoration of transport and communication relations between the two states.

In 2023, 4 meetings were held between the leaders of Azerbaijan and Armenia: on February 18, with the organizational assistance by the US State Secretary Anthony Blinken in Munich, on May 25 in Moscow with the participation of the Russian President Vladimir Putin, on June 1 in Chişinău with the participation of the President of the European Council Charles Michel, German Federal Chancellor and the French President, on July 15 in Brussels with the participation of the President of the European Council Charles Michel. Moreover, on December 26, an informal bilateral meeting between the President of Azerbaijan and the Prime Minister of Armenia took place within the framework of the informal meeting of the CIS Heads of State held in St. Petersburg.

4 meeting were held between the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan and Armenia: on May 1-4 2023 in Washington D.C., on May 19 in Moscow, on June 27-29 in Washington D.C., and on July 25 in Moscow. Besides, on the initiative of Azerbaijan, an unofficial meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs was held in Tehran on October 23.

In 2023, two meetings of the State Commission on the delimitation of the state border between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Armenia and the Commission on the delimitation of the state border and border security between the Republic of Armenia and the Republic of Azerbaijan were held on July 12, and November 30 on the border between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Armenia. Both countries have approved the Regulations on organizing and holding the joint working meetings.

However, despite the noticeable dynamics of bilateral contacts between Armenia and Azerbaijan in the direction of normalization during the year, it was not possible to achieve serious progress in all three areas of normalization. Armenia's constant non-fulfillment of its obligations, attempts to continue and strengthen the illegal military presence in the sovereign territories of Azerbaijan while imitating negotiations did not allow significant progress to be achieved in the negotiations.

However, the successful local anti-terror measures carried out on September 19-20 firmly put an end to Armenia's attempts to form a new "status quo" in the sovereign territories of Azerbaijan based on an illegal military presence and encouragement of aggressive separatism,

and created a historical opportunity to establish relations between the two countries based on norms and principles of international law.

Along with the normalization of bilateral interstate relations with Armenia, the development of international partnerships in the area of reconstruction and restoration in the post-conflict context was also a focus of attention during the year.

In 2023, at more than 70 meetings with foreign colleagues held within the framework of the visits of the Minister of Foreign Affairs and international events in which he took part, detailed information was provided on the realities existing in the region at the post-conflict stage and on the steps taken by our country in the name of sustainable peace.

Numerous visits of foreign officials, parliamentarians, think tank representatives and journalists were organized to the liberated territories.

### **International legal measures against Armenia**

Work has continued to expose the crimes committed by Armenia in the territories of Azerbaijan it occupied for almost 30 years and to establish Armenia's international legal responsibility for these acts.

In order to hold Armenia accountable for the severe blow to the environment of Azerbaijan and the large-scale destruction of its biodiversity, on January 18, in accordance with the European Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats, Azerbaijan has initiated the first known interstate arbitration process. Another arbitration process against Armenia began on February 27 under the Energy Charter Treaty. Azerbaijan demanded compensation from Armenia in connection with the violation of our sovereign rights to energy resources during the occupation.

On January 23, Azerbaijan's Memorial was submitted to the International Court of Justice on the ongoing proceedings related to the application of the International Convention (the Convention) "For the Abolition of All Forms of Racial Discrimination". The Memorial is based on thousands of pages of evidence of crimes committed against the Azerbaijani state and people over a period of thirty years. The document contains detailed information about Azerbaijanis killed, displaced and harmed as a result of cleansing by ethnicity and nationality, one of Armenia's worst acts.

During the year, the International Court of Justice held public hearings on the Convention three times. New evidence of increasing human losses resulting from the continued deliberate placement of landmines and explosive traps by the Armenian Armed Forces in civilian areas of Azerbaijan was presented at a hearing held on January 31.

The International Court of Justice's Order of February 22 rejected two major claims by Armenia against Azerbaijan, alleging that protests carried out by a group of Azerbaijani environmental activists on the Khankendi-Lachin road were allegedly "organized by the government of Azerbaijan" and that allegedly "Azerbaijan interfered with the supply of natural gas and other utilities (e.g. electricity and internet)."

By a decision of the ICJ of July 6, Armenia's claims were rejected in connection with the border checkpoint on the Hakari River "obstructing traffic along the Lachin road."

The decision of the International Court of November 17 rejected the unfounded demands of Armenia regarding the alleged violation of the rights of Armenian residents in the Karabakh region of Azerbaijan after local anti-terror measures carried out by the Armed Forces of Azerbaijan, and the withdrawal of personnel of all military and law enforcement agencies of Azerbaijan from the Karabakh region. This court decision once again confirmed the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Azerbaijan and rejected the demand of Armenia, which questioned Azerbaijan's sovereignty over the Karabakh region accepted and recognized at the international level.

In addition, Azerbaijan is rightly concerned about the possible harmful transboundary impact of a large metallurgical plant that Armenia has begun to build on the territory bordering the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic of the Republic of Azerbaijan, near the village of Arazdayan (Yeraskh). In particular, as a result of measures taken during the year within the framework of the "Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context" of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe of 1991, the Armenian side relocated the said plant and stated that it was ready to negotiate with Azerbaijan in accordance with the Convention regarding transboundary damage.

### **Measures on protection of rights and freedoms of Azerbaijani citizens**

Protection of the rights and interests of citizens of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the development of consular services provided to them in accordance with the relevant legislation of the Republic of Azerbaijan is one of the priority issues.

Relevant work was continued in relation to persons believed to be citizens of the Republic of Azerbaijan, who emigrated to the Republic of Türkiye since the 1990s and are currently living there illegally, including members of their families born in Türkiye, and, along with other measures, 2,746 passports were issued to citizens (based on passport applications accepted in 2022-2023).

Also, during 2023, the Azerbaijani government carried out activities to repatriate and evacuate our citizens in connection with military conflict, natural disasters and other crisis situations in foreign countries.

As a result of the **earthquake that occurred in the Republic of Türkiye**, 661 citizens of the Republic of Azerbaijan and their immediate family members, who are citizens of foreign countries, were evacuated from the earthquake zone. In connection with the **situation in the Republic of Sudan**, 26 citizens of the Republic of Azerbaijan living in this country were repatriated to our country on April 26. Coordination work has been carried out to bring 12 citizens of the Republic of Azerbaijan from the **Gaza Strip (Palestine)** to our country.

Throughout the year, 62 people, including 13 women and 49 children, have been repatriated from the **Syrian Arab Republic** to our country. At the same time, the repatriation of a citizen of the Republic of Azerbaijan from **Iraq** to our country was carried out. Currently, there are no minors left in the Republic of Iraq whose Azerbaijani citizenship has been identified.

In 2023, the visa-free travel opportunity has been created for individuals holding national passports according to the agreements signed between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the United Arab Emirates, the Republic of Serbia and the State of Qatar.

The Electronic Appointment Portal system (appointment.mfa.gov.az) has been launched at the Reception Center of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and 28 diplomatic missions and consulates of the Republic of Azerbaijan in foreign countries. Another launched electronic service was the "Visa application-questionnaire" portal (www.visaapplication.mfa.gov.az). Over the year, 22 diplomatic missions and consulates of the Republic of Azerbaijan were connected to the "Citizenship Status Acts" and "Electronic Notary" electronic information systems of the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

### **Conferences organized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, communication of foreign policy and analytical work**

Over the year, in more than 80 foreign countries, the conferences, symposiums, round tables, exhibitions and concerts were held, books and magazines were published, documentaries and videos were exhibited.

In connection with the "Year of Heydar Aliyev", the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with the support of the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources held a tree-planting event in Mushfigabad settlement and the special edition of "World of Diplomacy" journal was published. This year, the conference on "National Leader Heydar Aliyev and Azerbaijan's foreign policy" and "Diplomacy Week" have been organized, and the MFA employees marched to Heydar Aliyev summit.

Within the framework of the "Year of Heydar Aliyev" and on the occasion of the 148<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of the national press in the Republic of Azerbaijan, the names of 58 foreign media representatives who illegally visited our former occupied territories were removed from the list of foreign citizens who illegally visited the territories of Azerbaijan.

A number of important commemorative events for our country, as well as the exhibitions related to the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations with countries with which Azerbaijan has close, friendly and strategic relations were organized by the Press Service Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Over the year, around 480 foreign media representatives from about 50 foreign countries have visited the Republic of Azerbaijan, including its liberated territories.

In order to convey the truths of Azerbaijan to the world community, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs continued its activities on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube platforms. In the course of the year, 740 statements were posted on the MFA website (up to December 25, 2023), 26 briefings were organized for local and foreign media and diplomatic corps accredited in our country.

In 2023, the analytical work was carried on by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and our state institutions concerned have been provided with pertinent information. The contacts have been established with reputable research centers and analysts both in Azerbaijan and abroad, including in Great Britain, Belgium, Russia, India, the USA, Switzerland, Qatar and other

countries, and joint events were organized and the participation in international forums were arranged.

Over the year, Foreign Minister's interviews for foreign media organizations and multiple meetings with international think tanks and researchers were organized – i) Round table at the Royal Institute of International Relations (Chatham House) in UK; ii) Round table organized by "GLOBSEC" think tank in Slovakia; iii) Round table in Croatia on "Security problems in the South Caucasus and prospects for cooperation between Azerbaijan and Croatia"; iv) Briefing for leading media organizations at the Association of Correspondents Accredited to the UN (ACANU); v) round table on "Regional security and Azerbaijan's cooperation with Central Asian countries" jointly organized with the Global Studies Institute of the University of Geneva; vi) 2<sup>nd</sup> European Conference on Azerbaijan studies held in North Macedonia; and vii) a meeting with representatives of the media and leading think tanks in Brussels.

### **Human Resources at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs**

In order to improve the HR provision process of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in 2021, the **competitive recruitment process for the diplomatic service** has started over. Over the past period, 58 people were appointed to diplomatic posts, out of which 20 appointments have been made in 2023.

In June 2023, the next competition for admission to the diplomatic service was announced at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. As a result, a competition for the diplomatic service (a two-stage written exam) to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has been held by the State Examination Center of the Republic of Azerbaijan. One hundred (100) candidates successfully passed both stages of the written exams and obtained the highest results, as well as 39 candidates who did not manage to show sufficient results in the interview stage organized from May 10 to June 2, 2022, were also invited to the interview. The interview stage of the competition is planned to be held in January-February 2024.

Furthermore, 14 **new heads of diplomatic missions** were appointed.