



**Statement by H.E. Mr. Ali Ahmadov,  
Deputy Prime Minister of the Republic of Azerbaijan,  
Chairman of the National Coordination Council  
For Sustainable Development**

*Check against delivery.*

**Mr. Chairperson,  
Excellencies,  
Distinguished delegates,  
Ladies and Gentlemen!**

First of all, let me express my gratitude for the opportunity to submit the Voluntary National Review of Azerbaijan for 2017 to the High-Level Political Forum.

This is an excellent opportunity to illustrate the readiness of my country to take an active part in global initiatives launched by the United Nations such as ‘Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development’ and share achievements made in the implementation of the national development programs in the past years to transform our society.

Azerbaijan is one of the most successful young states which gained their independence from the Soviet Union. During the last 25 years, my country has been able to exemplify a unique opportunity for transformation, which could be described as a transition from a communist ideology to democracy, from misery to wealth, from out-dated infrastructure to modernization. This is why the idea of transforming the world is so dear to us and is in line with intrinsic need of our society for positive changes and sustainable development. The fact that over the last 12 years the national economy has increased 3,5 times, i.e. 250 percent, could serve as a brilliant evidence of this inherent necessity. Similarly, salaries and pensions have risen, and the well-being of the people has profoundly changed.

The global initiatives for transforming the world have been instrumental for the development agenda of Azerbaijan since 2000. Our country was actively engaged in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Having joined the Millennium Declaration in 2000, Azerbaijan crafted its national development strategy, which was reflected in state programmes.

I would like to place special emphasis on the state programmes on reducing poverty for the period 2003-2005 and 2008-2015 respectively. The successful implementation of these programmes created conducive environment for attaining impressive results and improving in the living standards and social life in the country.

We achieved to reduce poverty rate from 49,0% in 2001 to 4,9% in 2015. Food security and food ratio status of Azerbaijan are similar to those of the developed countries.

By accelerating the implementation of the MDGs, the poverty rate among women was reduced by half. Along with this, we achieved to increase the number of women in decision-making and as a result the number of female MPs increased from 10, 7 percent to 16,8 percent.

The introduction of positive changes into the national healthcare system may arise interest. Under-five mortality rate per 1,000 live births dropped to 11,4, and infant mortality rate per 1,000 live births is decreased from 16.4 to 11.

Proportion of the population with access to drinking water sources reached nearly 90% in 2015.

Number of Internet users per 100 population increased from 8 to 77.

In recognition of its outstanding achievements in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals, Azerbaijan received the 2015 South-South Award.

In 2009, Azerbaijan was assessed as a “leading reformer of the world” by the World Bank’s annual Doing Business Report. According to the World Economic Forum’s Global Competitiveness Report for 2016-2017, Azerbaijan ranked 27<sup>th</sup> among 138 countries, making a dramatic leap upward from 37<sup>th</sup> in 2006. In compliance with this report, Azerbaijan is 39<sup>th</sup> in the world for the quality indicators of macroeconomic environment, 26<sup>th</sup> - for labour market efficiency, and 55<sup>th</sup> - for infrastructure quality.

Since 2010, Azerbaijan has been categorized under the high human development group (2015 HDI is above the average of 0.759 for countries in Europe and Central Asia).

The economic and administrative reforms have entailed the launch of a number of innovative projects. One of them is ASAN Service, which was created as a one-stop shop model to significantly foster and simplify several public services for population. ASAN in Azerbaijani means easy, rapid. Currently, a substantial part of the population is receiving a range of services at ASAN. In 2015, ASAN received the UN Public Service Award in recognition of its contributions to excellence, creativity and considerable simplification of the delivery of public services. This model presently is being examined for replication in a number of countries.

Having joined the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Azerbaijan is currently intensifying its efforts to align national development strategy with the global Sustainable Development Goals. Several state programmes have been initiated and implemented or are under preparation to further transform the society. Of a particular importance are the following state strategies which are either under execution or initiation:

- The State Strategy on the Development of Education in the Republic of Azerbaijan
- A National Programme of the Republic of Azerbaijan on Women’s Issues
- The State Programme on the Improvement of Maternal and Child Health for 2014-2020
- The Employment Strategy of the Republic of Azerbaijan for 2017-2030, etc.

Azerbaijan has gained a remarkable experience in the institutionalization of the Sustainable Development Goals. Pursuant to the Decree of the President of Azerbaijan, the National Coordination Council for Sustainable Development was established under the stewardship of the Deputy Prime Minister.

The Council is comprised of the Minister of Economy, Deputy Ministers and heads of a number of public service agencies. The Coordination Council encompasses the Secretariat as well as working and expert groups. It is the vested authority for coordination and overseeing the extensive implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

The process of aligning SDG s to national priorities for transforming the society includes the following measures and activities:

- With support of the UN experts in applying a Rapid Integrated Assessment tool for a gap analysis to determine the relevance of the SDGs, a mapping of the national strategies and the relevant sector plans against the SDG targets was executed to set national priorities and corresponding indicators;
- Efforts are underway to draft national priorities for sustainable development of Azerbaijan and their corresponding indicators, as well as to mainstream the SDGs into national policies and strategies to foster socio-economic development in the country;
- Intensive work has been underway, in cooperation with the respective UN experts, to integrate the SDG targets into national sustainable development priorities.

Special emphasis is placed on advocacy to raise public awareness of the Sustainable Development Goals and create conducive environment for their implementation. Several wide-ranging discussions engaged key stakeholders and included a panel on the role of science in achieving the SDGs in Azerbaijan, an open lesson entitled “The Sustainable Development Goals: Education Can Change the World”, consultations on the role of civil society in achieving the SDGs, and a panel entitled “The SDGs: Women and Development”.

The Government of Azerbaijan, in partnership with the UN Office in Azerbaijan, developed the Advocacy Campaign Strategy on the SDGs for 2017-2018, which is guided by the principle of leaving no one behind.

The first Voluntary National Review of Azerbaijan captures achievements made in the implementation of seven goals and highlights the commitment of the Government of Azerbaijan to significantly accelerate progress in the relevant areas.

By 2020, our Government is determined to accomplish the following:

1. Reduce poverty by 1% by:

- creating additional jobs;
- increasing the minimum salaries and pensions;
- improve the social protection system;

2. Significantly improve quality of life and ration of the vulnerable strata of the population based on:

- a targeted social assistance for the most vulnerable families;
  - improving food security in the country;
3. Improve quality of the healthcare system through:
- boosting state funding for the healthcare;
  - transition to mandatory medical insurance;
4. Advance gender equality by encouraging women's active participation in:
- economy;
  - political life;
  - civil society organizations;
5. Develop new sectors of industrial manufacturing underpinned by diversified economy and initiating new infrastructural projects;
6. Further improve drinking water quality by:
- effective water resources management;
  - Substantial increase in portable water production.

More detailed information concerning the relevant Sustainable Development Goals can be found in our voluntary national review, which has been posted on the UN website, and, for the time saving purposes, I would like to outline the challenges faced and the way forward in achieving the SDGs.

Security, stability and social cohesion are the major pre-requisites for sustainable development. As the 2030 Agenda clearly states, I quote, "There can be no sustainable development without peace and no peace without sustainable development", end of quote.

Azerbaijan faces the following challenges to achieving the SDGs:

- First and foremost, the ongoing occupation of the Nagorno-Karabakh region and seven adjacent districts of Azerbaijan, as a result of which more than 1 million people became refugees and IDPs.  
Social problems and needs of this most vulnerable category remain the main burden for the national budget. In the past 21 years, \$6.2 billion has been spent to mitigate their social needs.  
I would like to draw your attention to the fact that, preliminary calculations show that the total economic damage of the Armenian military aggression against Azerbaijan estimated around hundreds of billions of US dollars.  
Along with this, there are some other challenges we face.
- There is a need for obtaining more detailed statistical information and strengthening analytical capacity, particularly by disaggregating data on gender, age groups, urban/rural dimensions, sectors, and regions/administrative districts;
- Lack of data on some indicators and the relevant methodologies;
- There is a need to strengthen efforts to foster diversification, enhance export capacity and expand export, increase effectiveness of healthcare and upgrade social services, as well as improve environmental security.

We will soon undertake the following steps to pave the way towards effective participation in the process of appropriate implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals:

- Raising public awareness of the SDGs country-wide and create a conducive environment for their achievement, within the Advocacy Campaign Strategy on the SDGs for 2017-2018 which is guided by the principle of leaving no one behind and by engaging all concerned stakeholders;
- Boosting efforts for integrating the global SDGs, targets and indicators into the national development agenda;
- Finalizing the establishment of monitoring and evaluation system on the SDGs, at both central and local levels, to monitor the progress made in their achievement;
- Exploring opportunities to generate reliable and disaggregated statistics, particularly on gender, age groups, urban/rural dimensions, sectors, and regions/administrative districts;
- Building statistical capacity for the SDGs within a joint initiative of the UN and the State Statistical Committee of Azerbaijan on establishing a database for the SDGs;
- Strengthening international partnerships for achieving the SDGs.

Thank you for your attention