



**International Human Rights
Instruments**

Distr.: General
17 November 2023

Original: English

**Common core document forming part of the
reports of States parties**

Azerbaijan*

[Date received: 10 October 2023]

* The present document is being issued without formal editing.



I. General information about the reporting State

1. The Republic of Azerbaijan lies at the crossroads of Asia and Europe. Located in the south-east of the southern Caucasus, it is bordered to the north by the Russian Federation, to the south by the Islamic Republic of Iran and to the west by Türkiye, Georgia and Armenia, with Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan to the east across the Caspian Sea. The Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic is part of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

- Official name: Republic of Azerbaijan (Azərbaycan Respublikası).
- Form of government: democratic, law-governed, secular, unitary republic with a unicameral parliament (Milli Məclis (*hereinafter Milli Majlis*)), composed of 125 deputies.
- Head of State: President.
- Capital city: Baku (Bakı).
- Monetary unit: manat.
- Total land area of the country: 86,600 km².

2. The Republic of Azerbaijan is a multi-ethnic and multi-faith State, where members of all ethnic groups and religions have lived in peace, harmony and friendship for centuries, and this tradition is supported by state policy.

3. Approximately 96 per cent of the population of Azerbaijan are Muslims, and 4 per cent belong to other religions (Judaism, Christianity, Baha'i and Krishna consciousness). As at 1 January 2023, the country had 993 religious communities registered with the State. 956 of these were Muslim and 37 were non-Muslim (26 Christian, 8 Jewish, 1 Krishna consciousness and 2 Baha'i) religious communities. Under article 8 of the Law "On the Freedom of Religious Belief", religious Islamic communities in the Republic of Azerbaijan are subject to the Caucasus Muslim Board in religious matters, and other religious communities have the right to be subordinate and change their subordination to religious centres or institutions operating in the Republic of Azerbaijan and abroad. There are currently 2,253 mosques, 16 churches and 7 synagogues in the country.

A. Demographic, economic, social and cultural characteristics of the State

Historical background

4. Azerbaijan is one of the most ancient centres of civilization in the world. Its historical borders cover the eastern part of the South Caucasus and the north-west of Iran. Archaeological excavations conducted in Azerbaijan show that human beings were living here more than 1.5 million years ago. A study of the Guruchay archaeological culture, the most ancient culture in the territory of the former Soviet Union, and the similar Oldowan culture in Africa confirms that the territory of Azerbaijan was part of the ancestral homeland of humankind. In 1968, a fragment of a lower mandible of an Azykhanthrop, an ancient hominid who lived between 350,000 and 400,000 years ago, was discovered in the Middle Acheulian layer in a cave at Azykh, on the left bank of the Guruchay River. A series of rock carvings created 12,000 years ago by inhabitants of Gobustan (60 km from the city of Baku) is an outstanding monument of the Mesolithic and subsequent eras, an art gallery of its time. With the collapse of the Kura-Aras culture, a new phase began in the history of its people, including the ancient ancestors of today's Azerbaijanis.

5. The well-known Norwegian explorer, Thor Heyerdahl, who made special visits to the country between 1979 and 1994 to study the rock carvings considered that the shores of the Caspian Sea were the cradle of a civilization that then spread southwards and northwards across the water.

6. Indications can be found dating from the end of the fourth and beginning of the third millennium BCE of the first class-based societies, early urban civilization and early state institutions.

7. From the mid-ninth to the seventh centuries BCE, another ancient Azerbaijani State, Manna, ruled in the area of Lake Urmia. At the end of the seventh–beginning of the sixth centuries BCE, having defeated the Assyrians, the State of Media brought the kingdoms of Manna and Urartu and the Scythians under its rule.
8. With the fall of the State of Media in the mid-sixth century BCE (550 BCE), the historical territory of Azerbaijan was occupied by the newly formed Achaemenid Persian State. The early 420s BCE saw the appearance of a newly independent State which was at first officially called Media Atropatene and a little later Atropatene (Atrpatakan, Adurbadagan and hence Azerbaijan). Appearing on the historical stage two and a half centuries after the fall of Manna, Atropatene became the first eastern State that was politically independent from the Graeco-Macedonian conquerors.
9. At the end of the fourth–beginning of the third millennium BCE, the ancient State of Caucasian Albania was established in the north of Azerbaijan, with the Araz River forming its southern border. For strengthening the domestic market, coins which are an important attribute of a State, were first produced in Caucasian Albania in the second half of the third century BCE.
10. The people of Caucasian Albania included a number of different ethnic groups, most of whom spoke Turkic languages. Christianity was adopted in Caucasian Albania from 313 AD.
11. At the beginning of the first century AD, the Arsacids, who succeeded the Atropatene ruling dynasty, also took overpower in Caucasian Albania, overthrowing the local Arranshakhid dynasty.
12. Under Javanshir (642–681 AD), the most outstanding representative of this dynasty, despite the Arab conquest that began in 643 and the complete annexation of southern Azerbaijan-Adurbadagan by the Arabs, Caucasian Albania was still able to maintain relative independence for some time. However, as a result of attacks from three sides (the Khazars, the Arabs and the Byzantines), all the territory of Azerbaijan was conquered and, in 705, having lost even its vassal status, Caucasian Albania joined the Arab Caliphate.
13. A number of new States arose on the territory of Azerbaijan in the ninth century, the most powerful of them being the State of Shirvan, with its capital in Shamakhi. The State, which existed until the sixteenth century, played a significant role in the history of medieval Azerbaijan.
14. The population of the towns of Shirvan had a complex social structure, characteristic of a feudal society. After the earthquake in 1192, the capital was transferred temporarily to Baku.
15. In the eighth and beginning of the ninth centuries, another Azerbaijani State arose in the north-west of the territory: the dominion of Shaki.
16. From the ninth to the eleventh century, the territory of Azerbaijan saw the appearance of the independent States of the Sajids, the Sallarids, the Ravvadids.
17. Towards the end of the eleventh century, power in Azerbaijan moved to the Seljuks. Between 1136 and 1225, the Ildenizid Atabegs ruled in Azerbaijan.
18. This period is considered as a time of cultural flourishing in Azerbaijan, which gave the world many eminent philosophers, architects, poets and scientists. The work of the Azerbaijani poet and philosopher Nizami Ganjavi (1141-1209) is a treasure of the world's cultural heritage.
19. In the 1220s and 1230s, with the devastating campaigns of the Mongols, many local dynasties in Azerbaijan ceased to exist. Between 1239 and 1256, these areas were ruled by governors under the Mongol Empire. In 1258, Azerbaijan became part of the fifth Mongol Ulus – the Ilkhanid State, which covered territory from Egypt to the Amu Darya and from Derbent to the Strait of Hormuz. In 1359, after the fall of the Ilkhanid State in 1357, Azerbaijan joined the Jalairid sultanate.
20. At the end of the fourteenth century, forces under the Central Asian Emir Timur and Tokhtamysh, Khan of the Golden Horde, attacked Azerbaijan by turns. All the attempts by

the Jalairids from 1386 to 1405 (till the death of Emir Timur) to win back political power in Azerbaijan failed.

21. The unifying policy of Shirvanshah Ibrahim I (1382–1417) was an important factor in the history of the statehood of Azerbaijan. But the victory of the Garagoyunlus over the Timurids and the Jalairids, as well as internal rivalries between feudal lords, hindered the unifying policy of Ibrahim.

22. In 1410, the Gara Goyunlu State was formed under the rule of Gara Yusuf. The Gara Goyunlu State flourished under the rule of Gara Yusuf's son Jahan Shah (1435–1467). In 1468, the Ag Goyunlu State was formed under the rule of Uzun Hasan.

23. In 1501, the Safavid Empire was established in Azerbaijan named in honour of the ruling Azerbaijani dynasty which traced its origins to Sheikh Safi-ad-din (1252–1334).

24. Under this dynasty, for the first time in its history, all lands of Azerbaijan were merged into a single Azerbaijani State. The territory of the Safavid State extended from the Amu Darya River to the Euphrates and from Derbent city to the shores of the Persian Gulf. Azerbaijani was the official language of the Safavid State. At the end of the sixteenth century, the capital of the Safavid State was transferred to Isfahan. Researchers consider the Safavid period as a new phase of renaissance in Azerbaijani culture.

25. At the end of the seventeenth and beginning of the eighteenth century, a political and economic crisis in the Safavid State weakened Azerbaijan. In 1736, Nadr Qolī Beg, a talented commander in the Safavid army, declared himself Shah, bringing an end to the rule of the Safavid dynasty. By means of expansionist wars, Nadir Shah, as he became, established an empire that included Azerbaijan. Abolishing the Azerbaijani provinces (Shirvan, Karabakh, Tabriz and Chokhur-e Sa'd), Nadir Shah formed the province of Azerbaijan, which included Irevan and Derbent.

26. After the death of Nadir in 1747, the State fell apart. A number of independent khanates grew up on the territory of Azerbaijan: Nakhchivan, Irevan, Ganja, Karabakh, Shamakhi, Shaki, Derbent, Guba, Baku, Javad and Lankaran. In the South, the khanates of Tabriz, Urmia, Ardabil, Khoy, Karadagh, Maragheh, Maku and Sarab were formed. The sultanates of Qazakh, Borchali, Qabala, Aresh, Shamshadin and Elisubeyli were created. The Djaro-Belokani jamaat was to the north-east. The meliks of Varanda, Khachin, Gulistan, Dizak and Jraberd lay in the mountainous parts of the Karabakh khanate.

27. On 14 May 1805, the Azerbaijani khan, Ibrahim Khalil, signed the Kurekchay Treaty under which the independent Azerbaijani khanate of Karabakh came under the patronage of Russia, thereby confirming the vassal dependence of the Karabakh khanate on the Russian Empire.

28. Between 1805 and 1806, the Shaki, Shirvan, Derbent, Baku and Guba khanates also came under the control of Russia. On 13 October 1813, the Treaty of Gulistan was signed, bringing an end to the Russian-Iranian war that had begun in 1804. Under the Treaty, the territory of the Azerbaijani khanates to the north of the river Araz (except Irevan and Nakhichevan) were incorporated into the Russian Empire. Subsequently, the khanates were abolished, becoming eponymous provinces. Under the 1828 Treaty of Turkmenchay between Russia and Qajar Iran, Russian troops left the territory they had occupied in southern Azerbaijan, transferring it to the Iranian State. The Nakhchivan and Irevan khanates became part of Russia. With the conquest of northern Azerbaijan by Russia, the Azerbaijani khanates definitively lost their independence. A single nation was pulled apart. The northern part of Azerbaijan became a colony of Russia.

29. With the overthrow of tsarism and its colonial system in February 1917, the political situation also has changed in Azerbaijan. Bolshevik-Dashnak armed units under the leadership of Stepan Shaumyan, who were opposed to Azerbaijani independence, began the mass slaughter of Azerbaijanis in Baku, Shamakhi, Guba, Lankaran, Irevan, Zangazur, Nakhchivan and other regions of Azerbaijan.

30. On 28 May 1918, at a meeting of the Azerbaijani Interim National Council, a decision was adopted on the establishment of an independent Azerbaijan Democratic Republic.

31. On 29 May 1918, the National Council of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic was forced by circumstances to adopt a decision ceding to the Armenians the city of Irevan and a total of 9 km² of the surrounding areas, on which the so-called first Armenian Republic was established.
32. In the period 1918–1920, the Azerbaijani Democratic Republic established diplomatic relations with a number of States. Agreements on the principles of relations were signed with several of them, and 16 States set up embassies in Baku.
33. On 28 December 1918, the Government of Azerbaijan sent a delegation to the Paris Peace Conference to seek admission to the League of Nations. As a result of the efforts of the Azerbaijani delegation and in the face of the growing threat of Soviet Russia occupying the Caucasus, on 12 January 1920, the Supreme Council of the Allied Powers at the Paris Peace Conference decided to recognize de facto the independence of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic.
34. The political decision of the Bolshevik Government of the Russian Socialist Federal Republic not to recognize the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, the deployment of the Eleventh Red Army on the borders of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic in spring 1920, aggression by the Dashnak Government of Armenia against Azerbaijan in Karabakh and Zangazur, terrorist attacks by Armenians and Bolsheviks on the peaceful Azerbaijani population within Azerbaijan and the socioeconomic crisis that hit the country were the factors that led to the weakening of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic and its occupation by the Soviet Army on 27 and 28 April 1920.
35. On 28 April 1920, it was announced that the Soviet Socialist Republic of Azerbaijan (Azerbaijan SSR) had been created on the territory of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic. The convening of the First Congress of Soviets of the Azerbaijan SSR on 6 March 1921 completed the sovietisation of Northern Azerbaijan. The first Constitution of the Azerbaijan SSR was adopted on 19 May that year.
36. The Azerbaijanis played an active part in the Second World War. Between 1941 and 1945, more than 600,000 young men and women left for the battle front. Azerbaijani military divisions fought all the way from the Caucasus to Berlin. Around 130 of the Azerbaijanis were awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union and a further 30 were awarded the Order of Glory, third class. More than 170,000 Azerbaijani soldiers and officers were awarded medals and decorations of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). During the war years, Azerbaijani oil workers supplied the front with about 80 per cent of the petroleum and petroleum products produced at that time in the USSR.
37. Between 1970 and 1985, Azerbaijan established its State sovereignty and economic independence, systematically expanding its foreign economic ties and gradually becoming integrated into the global economy on the basis of its domestic economic capacity. It was at that time that new progressive industries such as electronic engineering, radio manufacturing and the production of machinery and equipment for light industry and food processing developed in Azerbaijan. In total, 213 major industrial enterprises came into operation. In many industries, Azerbaijan held the leading position in the USSR.
38. Compulsory secondary education was introduced in the Azerbaijan SSR, and a network of educational institutions, including universities, was developed, together with the Academy of Sciences; women's rights were protected and their active participation in social and economic life was encouraged; dozens of theatres opened, film production developed, and thousands of newspapers and magazines began to be published.
39. On 18 October 1991, Azerbaijan restored its independence with the Constitutional Act on the State Independence of the Republic of Azerbaijan.
40. In May 1992, the Milli Majlis adopted the national anthem of the Republic of Azerbaijan and, sometime later, the national flag and the state emblem of an eight-pointed star with a tongue of flame in the centre.
41. In June 1993, at the insistence of the people, a change of power took place and the second historical period in the country's independent statehood began. The country needed to be saved from the disasters awaiting it, from interference by anti-Azerbaijani forces, both

internal and external, from civil war, the continued occupation of lands of Azerbaijan and, finally, from the destruction of government independence and the dismemberment of Azerbaijan.

42. The return of Heydar Aliyev to power in Azerbaijan in 1993 was the point at which the revival of Azerbaijani statehood and the Azerbaijani people truly began. Standing at the helm of the young State, he strengthened its independence, making it irreversible, launched a comprehensive reform and brought Azerbaijan to an advanced position in the global arena.

43. The normalisation of the internal situation, the strengthening of social and political stability and the elimination of tensions that arose in the region between Azerbaijan and its neighbouring States – were all conditional on the existence of Azerbaijan as an independent State and its further development.

44. In September 1994, taking advantage of the relative peace in Azerbaijan and increased confidence and interest to the country from the international community, the first oil contract, the “Contract of the century”, was signed.

45. In proclaiming its national independence, Azerbaijan made a statement that it would work to build a democratic, secular State governed by the rule of law. In 1995, the process of establishing the necessary independent state institutions in Azerbaijan and the construction of the State came to fruition. The legal framework for this, adopted by nationwide referendum on 12 November 1995, is the Constitution of Azerbaijan.

46. Over the subsequent period, the country’s statehood became stronger and democratic principles became firmly established. The process of building a democratic, law-governed and secular State was conducted successfully and rapidly.

47. The country’s wealth of expertise, its precious natural resources and its unique geographical position on the path from Europe to Asia allow it to take its rightful place in the international community.

Armed aggression by the Republic of Armenia against the Republic of Azerbaijan

48. The conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan began in late 1987, in the period of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), with illegitimate and baseless claims of Armenia to the Karabakh region of Azerbaijan, which were in fact part of a long-standing plan to annex Azerbaijani ancestral lands. The assertion of territorial claims was accompanied by the systematic use of violence against Azerbaijanis and their expulsion both from the Karabakh region of Azerbaijan and from Armenia itself.

49. Already in November 1987, carefully planned attacks on the peaceful Azerbaijani population began in the Gafan and Meghri regions of Armenia. As a result of the policy of ethnic cleansing carried out by Armenia between 1988 and 1992, more than 250,000 Azerbaijanis living in Armenia were forcibly expelled from their historical lands, 216 of whom were brutally killed and 1,154 injured.

50. Late 1987–early 1988 were also marked by attacks on the Azerbaijanis in Azerbaijani territory, particularly in the town of Khankandi. On 22 February 1988, two young Azerbaijani people were killed by Armenian extremists on the Khankandi-Aghdam road, in Azerbaijan.

51. In late 1991–early 1992, Armenia unleashed a full-scale war against Azerbaijan. As a result of Armenian aggression, about 20 per cent of the territory of Azerbaijan was occupied, serious violations of international humanitarian law, including war crimes, crimes against humanity and acts of genocide, were committed in the course of the aggression, resulting in the killing of tens of thousands of people, ethnic cleansing of all occupied areas of more than 700,000 Azerbaijanis and the destruction and plunder of hundreds of cities, towns and villages in Azerbaijan, as well as its cultural and religious heritage.

52. The genocide against the Azerbaijani people in the town of Khojaly in February 1992, where 613 civilians, including 106 women, 63 children and 70 older persons, were killed with particular brutality, was the most tragic episode of the war unleashed by Armenia against Azerbaijan. The crimes committed in Khojaly were not isolated or random acts. They were part of large-scale, systematic and carefully planned policies and practices of Armenia towards Azerbaijani civilians both before and after the tragedy in Khojaly. In this context,

mention should also be made of the massacres of Azerbaijani civilians in the settlement of Karkijahan, the villages of Gushchular, Malibayli, Garadaghli, Balligaya, Aghdaban, Bashlibel, Baghanis Ayrim and in other settlements of Azerbaijan.

53. During its aggression against Azerbaijan, the Armenian side widely used extrajudicial executions and mass shootings, punishment, torture and other forms of cruel and inhuman treatment against Azerbaijani civilians, hostages and prisoners of war.

54. As a result of the armed aggression of Armenia against Azerbaijan in the early 1990s, 3,890 persons are still missing.

55. Between 1992 and 1995, the Security Council of the United Nations was actively addressing the armed conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

56. In 1993, in response to the continued acts of aggression, the Security Council adopted four resolutions – 822 (1993), 853 (1993), 874 (1993) and 884 (1993) – condemning the use of force against Azerbaijan, the occupation of its territories and attacks on civilians and bombardment of inhabited areas, reaffirming respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Azerbaijan, the inviolability of its international borders and the inadmissibility of the use of force for the acquisition of territory. In response to territorial claims and military actions, the Security Council confirmed that the Karabakh region is an integral part of Azerbaijan and demanded the immediate, complete and unconditional withdrawal of occupying forces from all the occupied territories of Azerbaijan. Similar provisions are contained in numerous decisions and documents adopted by other international organizations.

57. However, the main demands of the Security Council were not met by Armenia, while the mediation efforts conducted within the framework of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) did not bring any results due to the destructive position of Armenia, as well as the inaction of the co-chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group, who indulged this position.

58. Having used military force to occupy the territories of Azerbaijan, Armenia never negotiated in good faith and focused all its efforts on consolidating the results of the occupation with a view to annexing the seized territories. As a means of its annexation policy, Armenia carried out resettlement to the occupied territories from Armenia and from abroad and extensively exploited the natural resources and other wealth in those territories. Armenia has also systematically destroyed or appropriated the cultural heritage of the Azerbaijani people in those territories, organized or carried out illegal archaeological excavations and changed geographical names and toponyms. The main purpose of the actions of Armenia was to erase everything that would attest to the cultural and historical attachment of these territories to the Azerbaijani people. All of this constituted a clear and blatant violation of international law, including international humanitarian law, and fundamentally ran counter to the objectives of a political settlement of the conflict.

59. In an attempt to disguise its role and circumvent its responsibility as the aggressor, Armenia has installed and sustained the existence of the ethnically constructed puppet regime in the seized territories of Azerbaijan, in blatant and gross violation of international law and Security Council resolutions. Moreover, the leadership of Armenia has venerated war criminals and convicted terrorists as “national heroes” and overtly promoted the Nazi ideas of so-called ethnic incompatibility.

60. On 16 June 2015, the Grand Chamber of the European Court of Human Rights adopted a decision in the case of *Elkhan Chiragov and others v. Armenia*. The case, dating from 6 April 2005, was based on a claim by six citizens of Azerbaijan against Armenia; they were unable to return to their homes and had been deprived of their property in the Lachin district of Azerbaijan, having been expelled in 1992 as a result of the aggression of Armenia against Azerbaijan. In its judgment, the Court found continuing violations of the right to property, the right to respect for private and family life and the right to an effective remedy. The Court affirmed the right of internally displaced persons to property and to return to their homes. The Court concluded that Armenia, through its military presence and the provision of military equipment and expertise, had been significantly involved in the conflict from an early date and was responsible for violations of the rights of Azerbaijani displaced persons.

61. Illegal activities in the occupied territories have been accompanied by political and military provocations.

62. Armed provocations have resulted in casualties not only among military personnel but also civilians. For example, in April 2016, Armenia provoked large-scale hostilities along the front line in the territory of Azerbaijan, killing six Azerbaijani civilians and causing serious damage to civilian infrastructure and private and public property, including residential buildings, schools and kindergartens. On 4 July 2017, a targeted and deliberate attack by the Armenian armed forces on the village of Alkhanli in the Fuzuli district of Azerbaijan killed a 2-year-old girl and her grandmother and injured another woman.

63. The Armenian leadership has systematically undermined the peace process by claiming that “Karabakh is Armenia, full stop”, “Not an inch of land will be returned to Azerbaijan”, demanding changes in the format of the talks and attaching other absurd conditions. It carried out massive purchases of weapons, conducted illegal military exercises in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan and called for “a new war for new territories”. In addition, in July 2020, there was an attack on Azerbaijani army positions on the state border between Armenia and Azerbaijan, killing and wounding dozens of soldiers, as well as killing one Azerbaijani civilian. In August 2020 Armenia sent a sabotage and reconnaissance force to the Goranboy district of Azerbaijan, which was neutralized. All this points to the preparation of a new phase of military aggression by Armenia against Azerbaijan.

64. On 27 September 2020, Armenia perpetrated yet another act of aggression, subjecting the positions of the armed forces of Azerbaijan along the front line and the adjacent populated areas of Azerbaijan to intensive fire with the use of artillery, mortars and other large-calibre weapons. The combat actions that followed lasted 44 days.

65. Following the barbaric methods of warfare it employed in early 1990s, Armenia, with the direct participation of mercenaries and foreign terrorist fighters, again mobilized its forces to attack civilians and cause deliberate maximum harm to cities, towns and villages in Azerbaijan. The armed forces of Armenia have repeatedly used cluster munitions in their attacks on densely populated areas, involved child soldiers in combat operations, deliberately targeted medical facilities and ambulances and used kindergartens and schools for military purposes. There have also been multiple instances of extrajudicial executions and mistreatment of Azerbaijani prisoners of war, as well as the mutilation of dead bodies by Armenian military personnel.

66. Ganja, the second largest city of Azerbaijan, located outside the conflict zone, has been hit by targeted missile strikes by the armed forces of Armenia three times. Two strikes, on 11 and 17 October, with the use of Scud ballistic missiles were launched from the territory of Armenia, claiming the lives of 25 and injuring more than 84 civilians.

67. On 28 October, the city centre of Barda, which is also located outside the conflict zone, came under the massive fire with Smerch multiple rocket launcher systems, causing the death of 21 civilians and injuring more than 70 civilians.

68. A total of 101 Azerbaijani civilians, including 12 children, were killed as a result of direct and indiscriminate attacks by the armed forces of Armenia between 27 September and 9 November 2020. 423 civilians were injured. Almost 84,000 people were forced to leave their homes and over 4,300 private houses and apartment buildings and 548 other civilian objects were either destroyed or severely damaged. Hospitals, other medical facilities, schools, kindergartens, places of religious worship and cemeteries were also affected.

69. In order to deter the armed aggression of Armenia and ensure the safety of its civilian population, Azerbaijan carried out a counter-offensive operation in exercise of its inherent right to self-defence in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations. The Azerbaijani side acted solely on its sovereign land within internationally recognized borders. As a result of a counter-offensive operation of the armed forces of Azerbaijan, more than 300 cities, towns and villages of Azerbaijan that for years had been under occupation of the armed forces of Armenia were liberated, and Armenia was forced to make peace.

70. The Statement by the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia and President of the Russian Federation, signed on 10 November 2020, has put an end to the almost three-decades-old conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Armenia pledged to withdraw its troops from Azerbaijani territory and cease all hostilities. The Statement also included a number of elements related to maintaining peace, such as the opening of all communications in the region, unimpeded communication between the main part of Azerbaijan and its Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic, and the return of internally displaced persons. With the signing of the Trilateral Statement, Azerbaijan began the process of post-conflict rehabilitation, reconstruction and reintegration within the country, as well as post-conflict normalization of relations with Armenia at the interstate level.

71. The end of the occupation has become a triumph of justice and international law, including the Charter of the United Nations, and underlined again the necessity of strict compliance by States with their international obligations.

72. In the post-conflict period while visiting the liberated territories, it was once again recorded that, during the many years of occupation, Armenia systematically and methodically pursued a “scorched earth” policy there. The scale of destruction, vandalism, plunder and looting evidenced after their liberation is unprecedented. Virtually all civilian infrastructure, private homes, cultural and religious sites that existed there prior to occupation have been looted and razed to the ground in all the territories of Azerbaijan under occupation (except those inhabited by illegal settlers from Armenia). Almost all mosques and Islamic religious shrines in these territories have been destroyed, severely damaged and desecrated. Azerbaijani cemeteries have also been destroyed and vandalized.

73. To date, in the territories of Azerbaijan liberated from the Armenian occupation 67 mosques, 139 temples and 192 sanctuaries have been identified from historical and religious monuments. 65 out of 67 mosques (18 in Shusha, 5 in Aghdam, 19 in Fuzuli, 6 in Zangilan, 5 in Jabrayil, 8 in Gubadli, 3 in Lachin, 2 in Kalbajar, 1 in Khojavand) were completely destroyed, 2 were partially destroyed and rendered unusable.

74. The Armenian side, leaving the territories of Azerbaijan that were being returned to its control under the terms of the Statement of 10 November 2020, burned houses, schools and other civilian infrastructure, removed cultural property, including archaeological artefacts, severed electric cables and poles, destroyed hydraulic power stations and cut down trees and set forests on fire, thereby causing serious environmental damage.

75. Armenia is responsible for numerous war crimes committed by its armed forces, agents and officials and by mercenaries and terrorists under its control in the territories of Azerbaijan since the beginning of the conflict.

76. Moreover, most of the liberated from occupation territories, including even cemeteries and historical sites, had previously been subjected to massive mine contamination (according to preliminary estimates, more than 1.5 million mines) by the armed forces of Armenia. Particularly noteworthy is the fact that the armed forces of Armenia continued the intensive laying of mines in the districts of Aghdam, Kalbadjar and Lachin even after the signing of the Trilateral Statement, in gross violation of that document, which provides, inter alia, for the cessation of all hostilities. To date, the Armenian side has refused to hand over all maps of minefields to Azerbaijan, in violation of international humanitarian law, with the result that soldiers and civilians continue to be killed by mines in the liberated territories. This has created serious obstacles for the rehabilitation and reconstruction of these territories and for the return of hundreds of thousands of Azerbaijani internally displaced persons to their places of residence.

77. The accuracy of the maps that Armenia was forced to transfer to Azerbaijan under pressure from the international community turned out to be minimal. It is particularly noteworthy that approximately 25 per cent of the mine maps provided by Armenia are accurate. The refusal to fulfil its obligations to provide accurate maps of all minefields in accordance with customary international humanitarian law once again reveals the essence of aggressive and unconstructive policy of Armenia towards Azerbaijan in the post-conflict period. Overall, more than three thousand people have been victims of mines since the start of the military aggression of Armenia in the 1990s. Among them there are more than three hundred people who became victims of mines in the post-conflict period after the signing of the Trilateral Statement of 10 November 2020. More than half of these incidents occurred in locations for which Armenia had not provided data on minefields. This once again confirms the true intention of Armenia – to prevent the process of return of Azerbaijani internally

displaced persons, to cause as much damage as possible and to impede the post-conflict restoration of the liberated territories of Azerbaijan.

78. Only in the period from August 2022 to the present day, 3,166 anti-personnel mines produced in Armenia in 2021 were discovered on the territory of Azerbaijan. These mines pose an urgent humanitarian threat to people hoping for a speedy return to their homes and the restoration of normal, peaceful lives.

79. Given that Armenia's indiscriminate mining of the once-occupied territories of Azerbaijan is preventing the return of displaced persons to the liberated areas, as well as the reconstruction, rehabilitation and socio-economic reintegration of these areas, the government of Azerbaijan considers mine clearance activities to be a national priority. In this regard, Azerbaijan announced a national Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) on humanitarian mine clearance, to move towards a mine-free world. The national SDG implies demining areas liberated from Armenian occupation, ensuring peace and security, creating safe settlements in liberated territories and reintegrating the population, as well as strengthening medical and social rehabilitation and social protection of the population affected by mines and explosives. Given the global nature and scale of the problem, Azerbaijan is ready to take bold action to advance global mine action, recognizing that this activity is one of the prerequisites for sustainable development, progress towards achieving already agreed upon SDGs, as well as accelerating peace processes and sustaining peace. In this regard, Azerbaijan also actively advocates the adoption of mine action as a new, 18th global SDG.

80. After the end of the 44-day Patriotic War, Azerbaijan is eliminating the consequences of the past conflict in two different directions. At the domestic level, the main priority is post-conflict recovery, reconstruction and reintegration, which includes the reintegration of ethnic Armenians living in the conflict-affected territories of Azerbaijan as equal citizens of the Republic of Azerbaijan. In this regard, "I State Programme on the Great Return to the territories of the Republic of Azerbaijan liberated from occupation" covering 2022–2026 was approved according to the Order of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan dated 16 November 2022.

81. The Azerbaijani side will take all necessary measures to ensure that its citizens of Armenian origin are integrated into its political, social and economic framework. This is an exclusively internal process that must be regulated by the Constitution of Azerbaijan and relevant international instruments in the field of human rights, to which Azerbaijan is a party. In this regard, a person responsible for contacts with the Armenian residents of the Karabakh region of the Republic of Azerbaijan was appointed, and appropriate steps were and continue to be taken to develop dialogue between the central government and local residents of Armenian origin.

82. Large-scale restoration work continues in the territories liberated from occupation, for which the Government of Azerbaijan spent \$4 billion in 2021–2022. In 2023, it is planned to allocate at least \$2.8 billion for these purposes. New cities and villages are being built using modern urban planning and the concepts of "smart city" and "smart village". Two international airports in Fuzuli and Zangilan were put into operation. Work on the construction of an international airport in the Lachin district continues and will be completed by the end of 2024 – beginning of 2025. Within the framework of the "I State Programme on the Great Return to the territories of the Republic of Azerbaijan liberated from occupation" 128 families have already returned to the villages liberated from occupation of Aghali village of Zangilan district and Talysh village of Terter district, and 221 families have resettled in the city of Lachin. Given the scale of devastation caused by decades-long occupation, international assistance to Azerbaijan in this regard would help ensure the inalienable right of Azerbaijani internally displaced persons to return to their lands in conditions of safety and dignity as soon as possible.

83. At the interstate level, the process of normalization of relations between Azerbaijan and Armenia is underway. The successful continuation of this process in a constructive manner based on the norms and principles of international law laid down in the 5 basic principles that Azerbaijan presented to Armenia for the signing of the peace agreement are the foundation for establishing sustainable peace in the region. These principles are: mutual

recognition of respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity, inviolability of internationally recognized borders and political independence of each other; mutual confirmation of the absence of territorial claims against each other and acceptance of legally binding obligations not to raise such claims in future; the obligation to refrain in their interstate relations from undermining the security of each other, from threat or use of force both against political independence and territorial integrity, and in any other manner inconsistent with the purposes of the UN Charter; delimitation and demarcation of the state border, and establishment of the diplomatic relations; unblocking of the transportation and other communications, building other communications as appropriate, as well as establishment of cooperation in other fields of mutual interest.

84. The signing of a peace agreement based on the abovementioned principles will create conditions for the peaceful coexistence of the Azerbaijani and Armenian peoples. Azerbaijan presented a draft peace agreement to Armenia and the negotiation process in this direction continues. Direct bilateral negotiations on various dimensions of interstate relations between the two countries are the best way to advance this process. It includes three tracks – signing a peace treaty; border delimitation; and opening up regional communications.

85. However, Armenia does not fulfil its obligations, enshrined both in the Trilateral Statement of 10 November 2020, and as part of the process of normalization of relations. Armenia has still not completely withdrawn its armed forces and illegal military formations from the sovereign territories of Azerbaijan in accordance with paragraph 4 of the Trilateral Statement, which is the main reason for periodic tension in the region. Armenia continues to resort to military provocations to strain the situation and evade fulfilment of its obligations.

86. Of particular concern was the illegal use by the Armenian side of the Lachin road for illegal military purposes, including for the rotation of the composition of their illegal armed formations, the transfer and installation of new anti-personnel mines, as well as for the transportation of illegally exploited natural resources from the territory of Azerbaijan and illegal passage of citizens of third countries into the territory of Azerbaijan for nefarious purposes. The Lachin road, like other areas where the peacekeeping contingent is temporarily deployed, is part of the sovereign territory of Azerbaijan, and its use is provided exclusively for humanitarian purposes in accordance with the Trilateral Statement of 10 November 2020. This Statement does not provide for any extraterritoriality in relation to the Lachin road. Taking into account the widespread abuse of the road by Armenia, Azerbaijan has consistently emphasized the need to ensure order and transparency of traffic on the road. In addition, as protests by a group of Azerbaijani civil society activists along the road, which took place from 12 December 2022 to 28 April 2023, significantly reduced the likelihood of misuse of the road, Armenia began to look for alternative routes and made extensive use of bypass dirt roads to supply its military units that illegally stationed on the sovereign territory of Azerbaijan.

87. Taking into account the deteriorating security situation on the Lachin road due to its systematic and large-scale use for illegal purposes, on 23 April 2023, the Government of Azerbaijan decided to establish a border checkpoint on the interstate border between Azerbaijan and Armenia. Thus, transparency of traffic on the road, rule of law and security were ensured by establishing a border control mechanism at the starting point of the Lachin road, namely at the international border between Azerbaijan and Armenia. This step is fully consistent with the sovereign right of the Republic of Azerbaijan to control its borders, while ensuring that the Lachin road is used exclusively for humanitarian and civilian purposes, as provided for in the Trilateral Statement of 10 November 2020.

88. The establishment of a checkpoint does not affect the practical functioning of the Lachin road in accordance with its purposes.

89. Thus, in the post-conflict period, the consolidation of lasting peace and stability in the region requires strict adherence to the norms and principles of international law, such as respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, a decisive rejection of military and other provocations that undermine the process of post-conflict normalization, and political will to fulfil its commitments.

B. Constitutional, political and legal structure of the State

90. The constitutional, political and legal structure of the State is described in the Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan of 12 November 1995. State power in the Republic is based on the principle of the separation of powers: legislative power is exercised by the Milli Majlis of the Republic of Azerbaijan, executive power by the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan and judicial power by the courts of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

91. The Constitution provides that no one but the elected representatives of the people may represent the people, speak on behalf of the people or make appeals on behalf of the people.

92. The people of Azerbaijan exercise their sovereign right directly by means of nationwide referendums and through representatives elected by free, secret and personal ballot on the basis of universal, equal and direct suffrage.

93. The rules for the organization and conduct of elections of deputies of the Milli Majlis of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the municipalities, and also of general referendums, are laid out in the Electoral Code of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

94. Deputies are elected to the Milli Majlis on the basis of the majority electoral system and universal, equal and direct suffrage by free, secret and personal ballot. They serve five-year terms of office. The Milli Majlis meets for two regular sessions each year, in spring and autumn. Extraordinary sessions are convened by the Chair of the Milli Majlis at the request of the President or of 42 deputies.

95. The Republic's legislative body establishes its own procedures and forms any relevant bodies, selecting its chair and vice-chairs, organizing committees and commissions and setting up the Chamber of Auditors. The Milli Majlis adopts constitutional laws, laws and resolutions related to matters within its competence.

96. The President is elected for a period of seven years on the basis of universal, equal and direct suffrage by free, secret and personal ballot, by a majority of more than half of the votes of those participating.

97. Any citizen who has been permanently resident in the country for more than 10 years, who has the right to vote and stand for election, including having no previous convictions for a serious offence, and who has no obligations towards other States, has higher education and does not hold dual citizenship may be elected President of the Republic of Azerbaijan. The President has the right to immunity and his/her honour and dignity are protected by law.

98. In accordance with the amendments made to the Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan on the basis of the referendum held on 26 September 2016, the President may delegate the right to conclude interstate and intergovernmental international treaties to the vice-president, members of the Cabinet of Ministers or other persons appointed by the President.

99. Pursuant to the recent amendments to the Constitution, the President appoints and dismisses the first vice-president and the vice-presidents. A vice-president must be a citizen of the Republic of Azerbaijan who has the right to vote, has higher education and has no obligations towards other States. A vice-president has the right to immunity during his/her term of office.

100. To organize the implementation of executive power, the President establishes the Cabinet of Ministers, which is the highest executive body in the country and is accountable to the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan. The Cabinet consists of the Prime Minister, deputy prime ministers, ministers and other heads of central executive bodies. The Prime Minister is appointed by the President with the approval of the Milli Majlis; he/she enjoys personal immunity while in office.

101. In the municipalities, executive power is held by the heads of local authorities, who are appointed and dismissed by the President.

102. In accordance with Article 125 of the Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan, judicial power in the Republic of Azerbaijan is exercised only through the courts. Judicial power is exercised by the Constitutional Court, the Supreme Court, the courts of appeal, and the general and specialized courts of the Republic of Azerbaijan. The judicial system and procedures thereof are laid down in the Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan “On Courts and Judges” of 10 June 1997.

103. Judicial power is exercised through constitutional, civil and criminal legal proceedings and other forms provided for by the law. The Prosecutor General’s Office of the Republic of Azerbaijan and defense counsel (lawyers) take part in criminal proceedings. The organization of the courts and their rules of procedure are established by law.

104. Judges shall be citizens of the Republic of Azerbaijan who have the right to participate in elections, have higher legal education and at least five years of experience in specialized legal work; they are independent and inviolable. The courts render judgments on behalf of the State and execution of such judgments shall be obligatory.

105. Citizens of the Republic of Azerbaijan have the right to vote and be elected to state bodies, and to participate in referendums. The Constitution places restrictions on the right to participate in elections and referendums for persons recognized by a court decision as lacking legal capacity. In addition, the right to be elected may, by law, be restricted in respect of members of the military, judges, civil servants, religious leaders, persons deprived of their liberty in accordance with a court sentence that has come into force and other persons as specified in the Constitution and the law.

106. Citizens may participate in elections and referendums on a free and voluntary basis. No one may put pressure on citizens for the purpose of compelling them to participate or not to participate in elections or referendums, and no one may obstruct the free expression of their will. Citizens participate in elections and referendums on an equal footing.

107. Electoral legislation of the Republic of Azerbaijan guarantees the right to elections of representatives of all peoples and ethnic groups who are citizens of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

108. Under the Electoral Code of the Republic of Azerbaijan, elections and referendums are organized and conducted by electoral commissions. The electoral commissions are responsible for the preparation and holding of elections, for determining and confirming the results of the voting and the outcome of elections, and for upholding and protecting the electoral rights of citizens; they also monitor compliance with those rights.

109. The Parties represented in the Milli Majlis as a result of the elections held in 2020 are:

<i>Political Parties</i>	<i>Number of deputies</i>
New Azerbaijan Party (Yeni Azərbaycan Partiyası)	69
Independents (Bitərəflər)	37
Civic Solidarity Party (Vətəndaş Həmrəyliyi Partiyası)	3
The Motherland Party (Ana Vətən Partiyası)	1
Azerbaijan Democratic Enlightenment Party (Azərbaycan Demokratik Maarifçilik Partiyası)	1
Unity Party (Vəhdət Partiyası)	1
Democratic Reforms Party of Azerbaijan (Azərbaycan Demokratik İslahatlar Partiyası)	1
Great Order Party (Böyük Quruluş Partiyası)	1
Civic Unity Party (Vətəndaş Həmrəyliyi Partiyası)	1
Popular Front Party of Whole Azerbaijan (Bütöv Azərbaycan Xalq Cəbhəsi Partiyası)	1
National Front Party (Milli Cəbhə Partiyası)	1
Republican Alternative (REAL) Party (Respublikaçı Alternativ (REAL) Partiyası)	1

110. The Republic of Azerbaijan has a single electoral system. All elections and referendums held in the Republic are organized in accordance with electoral legislation by local and district electoral commissions that form part of the system and whose activities are managed by the Central Electoral Commission.

111. According to the Electoral Code of the Republic of Azerbaijan, electoral commissions operate for a period of five years. There are currently 125 district electoral commissions and more than 5,400 local commissions operating in the country. In line with electoral legislation, the Central Electoral Commission has 18 members, the district commissions have 9 members and the local commissions have 6 members each.

112. The establishment, operation, rules for reorganization and closure of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as legal entities and their activities, management and relations with the authorities are governed by the Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan “On Non-Governmental Organizations (Public Associations and Funds)” dated 13 June 2000.

113. NGOs are registered with the relevant executive authority (the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Azerbaijan) in accordance with the Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan “On State Registration and State Registry of Legal Entities”. NGOs receive legal status only after they are officially registered. The Law contains no restrictions on the activities of NGOs without state registration.

114. As of 1 January 2023, the following organizations were registered in Azerbaijan:

<i>The name of the legal structure</i>	<i>Number of organizations</i>
Non-profit organizations	5 028
Public organizations	3 680
Foundations	213

115. On the basis of the Decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan of 20 November 2013 On Measures to Improve the Provision of E-Services for NGOs, the Ministry of Justice established the “personal electronic window” information system. The system is a base for information exchange among NGOs, and between NGOs and government bodies, as well as for the provision of e-services.

116. The Concept for State Support for NGOs of the Republic of Azerbaijan was approved by the Presidential Decree dated 27 July 2007. The Framework outlines the main principles and forms of state support for NGOs, the main means of providing that support and the conditions for the allocation of state funding for programmes, projects and activities that address the substantive issues of importance to the State and society.

117. The government continues to take consistent measures to develop civil society in the country. In accordance with the Presidential Decree of 19 April 2021 on improving the administration of state support for NGOs in the Republic of Azerbaijan and the repeal of the Decree of 13 December 2007 on the establishment of the Council for state Support of NGOs under the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, on the basis of the Council for state support of NGOs under the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan the Agency for state support of Non-Governmental Organizations, a public legal entity, was established to succeed the Council and its statute was approved.

118. In accordance with its statute, the Agency works to develop NGOs, improve and promote mechanisms for the involvement of NGOs in public-private partnerships as well as NGO initiatives on issues of importance to the State and society, evaluate the topics of programmes and projects and give opinions on them, and foster international cooperation among NGOs.

119. Some Funds operate successfully in Azerbaijan such as: Azerbaijan Science Foundation which provides targeted funding in the form of grants for fundamental, applied and experimental research and other scientific activities in the natural, technical, humanitarian and public fields; Education Development Fund, which finances programmes and projects aimed at developing the education system in the Republic of Azerbaijan;

Educational Student Loan Fund, which organizes the issuance of educational student loans; Youth Fund, which organizes the implementation of projects and grant funding in the field of youth policy.

120. According to the Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan “On Courts and Judges” of 10 June 1997, the following courts in the judicial system of the Republic of Azerbaijan are responsible for the administration of justice in the Republic of Azerbaijan:

- District (city) courts.
- Grave crimes courts.
- Military courts.
- Administrative courts.
- Commercial courts.
- The Supreme Court of the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic.
- Courts of Appeals.
- The Supreme Court of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

121. The Presidential Decree of 3 April 2019 “On Deepening the Reforms in the Judicial-Legal System” laid the groundwork for comprehensive reforms of the judiciary and serves as a strategic road map. The Decree includes provisions on increasing the number of court judges, strengthening the social protection of judges, expanding the use of information technology to improve the work of the courts, the electronic enforcement of judicial decisions, establishing new specialized courts (for the adequate protection of the rights of entrepreneurs) and other fundamental issues.

122. As a result of this Decree, up to 400 amendments were introduced to the Criminal Code, the Code of Criminal Procedure, the Administrative Code and Code of Execution of Punishments with a view to continuing measures to make legislation more humane, abolish offences and further improve the accessibility and transparency of justice.

123. The “State Programme on the Development of Justice for 2019–2023” was approved by the Order of the Head of State on 18 December 2018 in order to ensure the sustainability of reforms in the administration of justice and to improve the activity of judicial bodies and the courts. The Programme identifies transparency, upholding human rights and freedoms in the activities of judicial bodies and strengthening cooperation with civil society institutions as core issues for the development of justice.

124. Other courts may also be established in the legal system of the Republic of Azerbaijan in accordance with the law. The number of judges in the judicial system of the Republic of Azerbaijan is determined in accordance with Article 109 (32) of the Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

125. The Supreme Court is the highest judicial authority for civil, criminal and other cases heard in the general and specialized courts; it administers justice in cassation and provides clarifications on judicial practice. The courts of appeal are courts of second instance for cases within their competence.

II. General framework for the protection and promotion of human rights

A. Acceptance of international human rights norms

126. The Republic of Azerbaijan became a party to all the major multilateral human rights treaties and regularly submits reports on their implementation to the relevant committees.

127. On 16 February 2023, Azerbaijan approved (ratified) the Protocol No. 16 to the Convention on the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, on the basis of which the Highest courts and tribunals of a High Contracting Party (in this case, the Supreme

and Constitutional Courts of the Republic of Azerbaijan) may request the European Court of Human Rights to give advisory opinions on questions of principle relating to the interpretation or application of the rights and freedoms defined in the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms or the protocols thereto.

128. On 8 March 2023, Azerbaijan signed the Protocol No. 13 to the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, concerning the abolition of the death penalty in all circumstances.

129. The provisions of international treaties may be cited in the courts and other administrative bodies within the framework of the national legal system. Under Article 12 (II) of the Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan, “rights and liberties of a person and a citizen listed in the present Constitution are applied in accordance with international treaties to which the Republic of Azerbaijan is a party”.

130. According to Article 148 (II) of the Constitution, “international treaties to which the Republic of Azerbaijan is a party shall be an integral part of the legislative system of the Republic of Azerbaijan”.

131. Article 151 of the Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan provides that “if a conflict arises between normative legal acts of the legislative system of the Republic of Azerbaijan (with the exception of the Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan and acts adopted by referendum) and inter-state treaties to which the Republic of Azerbaijan is a party, the international treaties shall apply”.

B. Legal framework for the protection of human rights at the national level

132. Chapter III of the Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan concerns fundamental rights and freedoms of man and citizen.

133. The Constitution lays out the rights and freedoms of everyone, from the moments of birth, and also guarantees: right to equality, right to protection of rights and freedoms of a man and a citizen, right to life and to liberty, right to property, right to intellectual property, right to live in safety, right to inviolability of private life, right to inviolability of home, right to marriage, right to work, to strike and to rest, right to social security, right to live in a healthy environment, right to culture, right to protection of health, right to education, right to housing, right to national identity, right to use native language, right to protect honour and dignity; freedom of thought and speech; freedom of conscience, freedom of assembly, freedom of information, freedom of creative activity, right to citizenship and guarantee of the right to citizenship, right to participate in political life of society and State, right to participate in administration of the State, right to elections, right to appeal, right to association, right to free enterprise, right to legal assistance, presumption of innocence and many other rights and freedoms.

134. In accordance with Article 60 of the Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan, everyone is guaranteed protection of his/her rights and liberties through the administrative remedies and in court. Everyone has the right to an unbiased approach to their case and to consideration of the case within a reasonable time period in the administrative proceedings and court. Everyone has the right to be heard in administrative proceedings and courts. Everyone may appeal against the actions and inaction of state bodies, political parties, legal entities, municipalities and their officials in administrative manner or in courts.

135. Under Article 26 of the Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan, everyone has the right to protect his/her rights and freedoms using ways and means not prohibited by law. In accordance with Article 68 of the Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan, everyone has the right to the conscientious treatment that excludes arbitrariness by state bodies. The rights of a person who has been a victim of a crime and abuse of power shall be protected by the law. A victim has the right to take part in administration of justice and demand for compensation of losses. Everyone has the right to compensation from the state for damages suffered as a result of the illegal actions or misconduct of state bodies or their officials. The State, together with civil servants, shall bear civil liability for damage caused to human rights

and liberties and for the violation of their guarantees as a result of unlawful actions and inaction of public servants.

136. The position of the Commissioner for Human Rights (Ombudsman) is enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan and international instruments supported by the Republic of Azerbaijan; it was established to ensure the restoration of human rights and freedoms violated by state bodies, local government bodies or public officials of the Republic of Azerbaijan, and the prevention of human rights violations in accordance with the Constitutional Law “On Human Rights Commissioner (Ombudsman) of the Republic of Azerbaijan”.

137. Not later than 2 months after the end of each year, the Commissioner for Human Rights shall submit to the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan an annual report on the protection of human rights in the country and lays that report before the Milli Majlis of the Republic of Azerbaijan. The annual report shall indicate the state and local government bodies or officials having violated human rights and failed to comply with the demands of the Commissioner, and of the measures taken in this connection. The report shall be submitted to the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Supreme Court of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Prosecutor-General of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

138. According to the provisions of the Constitutional Law “On the Human Rights Commissioner (Ombudsman) of the Republic of Azerbaijan”, everyone living in the country, regardless of nationality, has the right to appeal to the Commissioner. During the period of activity, appeals to the Commissioner for Human Rights were submitted by persons belonging to different religions and languages, and each appeal was considered in the manner established by the relevant Constitutional Law, and the necessary measures were taken.

139. Over the past three years, in order to ensure more efficient implementation of the activities of the Commissioner, a number of structural units have been created in the Ombudsman’s Office – Call Center 916 functioning 24/7; Division for cooperation with international organizations and civil society institutions; Division for the protection of the right to access to information; Sector for the protection of the rights of persons with disabilities; Sector for work with families of martyrs and war participants; Children’s rights protection Sector. In order to achieve a more effective organization of human rights protection, taking into account international experience and modern realities, consistent reforms are being carried out towards improving the activities of the Ombudsman institution.

140. Education in the Republic of Azerbaijan is secular and continuous and is a priority area of strategic importance that reflects the interests of citizens, society and the State. Education in the Republic of Azerbaijan is based on international human rights conventions and other international treaties to which the Republic of Azerbaijan is a party and develops on the basis of the priority of national, spiritual and universal human values as its foundation, through its integration into the global education system.

141. State education policy ensures a high level of literacy in the country. All citizens of the country receive free primary and secondary education. Law “On General Education” adopted on 29 March 2019 sets out the basic principles of public policy and the organizational, legal and economic basis for general education in the Republic of Azerbaijan. The Law also regulates the State’s responsibilities in the area of general education, the organization of general education, governance of the general education system, rights, duties and social protection of education subjects, economics of general education and other issues.

142. The Law “On Vocational Education” was adopted on 24 April 2018. The Law reflects the relevant public policy, which provides for respect for the fundamental rights of citizens to allow all sectors of the population to receive vocational education, irrespective of race, ethnicity, religion, language, sex, origin, property or official status, beliefs or membership of political parties, trade unions or other public associations.

143. As part of the project “Development of Community-Based Pre-School Education”, implemented since 2017, 15,177 children aged 3–4 years are enrolled in preschool education in 847 groups organized in 55 districts and cities of the country on a community basis. In

addition, the coverage of pre-school education for 5-year-old children has increased to 90 per cent.

144. In the period from 25 November 2021, when the Education Student Loan Fund began issuing educational student loans, to 30 November 2022, the Fund received more than 17,000 applications, of which more than 10,000 were approved. For the fall semester of the 2022–2023 academic year, more than 7,000 students applied, of which 4,265 applications were processed.

145. 23 new schools and 30 modular schools were commissioned in 2022. Maintenance was carried out in 682 schools, while major renovation was carried out in 87 schools.

146. In the academic year 2022–2023, about 8,900 foreigners (from 110 countries) and stateless persons are studying in higher and secondary educational institutions in the country. Compared to the previous academic year (7,332 people), this figure increased by 20 per cent, and compared to the academic year 2015–2016 (4,326 people) by 103 per cent.

147. Every year, educational opportunities are created in educational institutions of the Republic of Azerbaijan for persons with refugee status issued by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Persons with refugee status are given the opportunity to obtain higher education. 2 people in the academic year 2020–2021 and 1 person in the academic year 2021–2022 benefit from this right.

148. Gender equality is ensured in the education system, with special emphasis placed on girls' education. In the academic year 2022–2023, 795,463 girls are studying in general education institutions in the country, which constitutes 47 per cent of the total number of schoolchildren. In the current academic year, 99,829 girls (51.4 per cent) out of 194,011 are students in higher education institutions. The share of women employed in the field of science is also increasing every year. 1,807 (54.4 per cent) out of 3,321 doctoral students are women.

149. In accordance with Article 45 of the Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan, everyone has the right to use his/her native language and also to receive an education and carry out creative activity in that language. Nobody may be deprived of right to use his/her mother tongue.

150. To ensure the effective organization of the teaching of ethnic minority languages, considerable attention is paid to the preparation and publication of curricula, textbooks and teaching aids, teaching materials, guidelines, recommendations, etc.

151. Data on the teaching of languages of national minorities in the academic year 2022–2023 are reflected in the table below:

<i>Minority language</i>	<i>Number of schools</i>	<i>Number of students</i>
Talysh	257	18 390
Lezgin	99	12 721
Avar	20	1 670
Tsakhur	3	435
Udin	3	181
Khinalig	1	78
Kurdish	1	17
Total	384	33 492

152. There are 10 schools teaching in the Georgian language in regions densely populated by the Georgian minority.

153. In accordance with the “State Standards of General Education in the Republic of Azerbaijan” approved by the Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of 29 September 2020, in the process of teaching history, geography, language, literature and other subjects, schoolchildren receive information about human rights. Human rights are taught as a separate course at universities.

154. The main objective of youth policy in the Republic of Azerbaijan is to create the conditions for the physical, intellectual and spiritual development of young people, and to assist in realization of their capacities and skills.

155. In accordance with the Law “On Youth Policy” of 9 April 2002, youth policy is a system of measures by which the State creates the socio-political, socioeconomic, organizational and legal conditions and guarantees to ensure the comprehensive development of the young people of the country and their active participation in society.

156. Approved by the Order of the President of Republic of Azerbaijan dated 26 January 2015 the “Strategy for the Development of Azerbaijani Youth for 2015–2025” identified goals, tasks, mechanisms of implementation and expected outcomes for the development of the country’s youth until 2025.

157. The Youth Foundation under the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan was established pursuant to the Decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan of 19 December 2011. The Youth Foundation provides grants for public and socially important programmes aimed at the development of science, culture and other areas relating to the youth policy, and supports projects at the international level.

158. On 7 March 2018, the legal status of the Youth Foundation was changed, and a new Charter was approved, providing that, in addition to funding the individual projects of young persons and youth organizations, the Foundation is also covers the costs of education for young persons in need of social protection and fund the participation of young people in international events, carry out youth employment promotion programmes and fund innovative projects and start-ups in the form of subsidized loans.

159. According to the Order of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan dated 1 June 2017 the Division on youth and sports was established within the Presidential Administration.

160. By Order of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan dated 28 February 2022, the “State Programme for the Education of Young People at Prestigious Higher Education Institutions of Foreign Countries for 2022–2026” was approved. The main goal of this State Programme is to prepare competitive and highly qualified professional personnel who will flexibly master new technologies, which will ensure the sustainable development of Azerbaijan; acquire practical knowledge and skills; and meet the requirements of the modern and future labour market with the creation of opportunities for training youth in prestigious higher education institutions of foreign countries.

161. Currently, there are over 326 officially registered youth public organizations in the country.

162. In 2007, amendments were adopted to the Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan “On Youth Policy” of 2002, including an amendment regarding the creation of a network of Youth houses. According to the Law, in order to strengthen patriotic work among young people, organize their harmonious development and leisure, and provide them with legal, informational and psychological assistance, a network of social service institutions “Youth house” is being created. Currently, there are 33 Youth houses under the Ministry of Youth and Sport, 6 of them operate in Baku, the rest in the regions of the country.

163. The country’s successful socially oriented policy has made it possible to resolve problems related to health-care development and public health protection.

164. Measures are being taken to improve the legislation of the Republic of Azerbaijan in order to ensure its compliance with the needs of the population and the current situation in the healthcare sector. In December 2018, the Administration of the Regional Medical Divisions (TABIB) of Azerbaijan was founded – a state body for the management of medical institutions in the territory of the Republic, with the exception of those that were left under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Health of Azerbaijan.

165. At the same time, by the Decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, a document named “Azerbaijan 2030: National Priorities for Socio-Economic Development”, in which a healthy lifestyle of the population was indicated as one of the key pillars of one of the national priorities – “Competitive Human Capital and Areas of Modern Innovations” was adopted. The “Strategy for Socio-Economic Development of the Republic of Azerbaijan

for 2022–2026” pays special attention to improving the availability and quality of medical services.

166. With the aim to expand the volume of specialized medical services provided for 2018–2022 construction and major repair work have been carried out, and 25 medical institutions in the capital and regions of the country were provided with modern equipment and advanced technologies.

167. Measures are being taken to improve the quality and effectiveness of medical services in order to ensure public accessibility availability of compulsory health insurance and protect public health.

168. A constant increase in funds allocated for compulsory health insurance (CHI) of the population is ensured. From 1 April 2021, compulsory health insurance covers the entire territory of the country. According to data as of December 2022, 2,550 medical services are provided to the population as part of the compulsory CHI.

169. Services are provided to the population in accordance with CHI package of services in all institutions that are under the authority of TABIB.

170. As a result of the implementation of state programmes in priority areas of health care, such as sugar diabetes, hereditary blood disorders, chronic renal insufficiency, tuberculosis and immunization against infectious diseases, the quality of public health care and the level of services has increased, and the prevention and early identification of disease has improved.

171. The State programmes on the protection of maternal and child health are aimed at improving women’s reproductive health and family planning, fulfilling safe maternity objectives, reducing disease, disability and mortality among children, improving the quality of perinatal services and ensuring timely genetic diagnosis of congenital conditions during pregnancy. A significant reduction in neonatal mortality has been achieved over the past 5 years as a result of improvement of clinical protocols for obstetrics and newborn care, organization of a more intensive educational process and the exchange of expertise with the participation of international experts. The measures taken have resulted in a steady decrease in infant mortality which in 2022 stood at 7.8 per 1000 live births, when the maternal mortality rate was 14.7.

172. The draft Law “On the Protection of Reproductive Health and Family Planning” has been submitted to the Parliament of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Along with this, issues related to reproductive health are reflected in the State Programmes “Mother and Child Health for 2014–2022”, “Youth of Azerbaijan in 2017–2021”, as well as in the “National Strategy on Reproductive Health 2018–2025” and “Action Plan on Prevention of Sex-Selective Abortions for the period of 2020–2025”.

173. In order to speed up the socioeconomic development of the regions, including the improvement of infrastructure and social services, the “State Programme of Socioeconomic Development of the Regions of the Republic of Azerbaijan in 2019–2023” was approved by the Presidential Decree dated 29 January 2019. Moreover, the Order dated 2 February 2021 approved “Azerbaijan 2030: National Priorities for Socio-Economic Development”, which defines the main priorities of the country for the near future.

174. Based on the above-mentioned National Priorities, the “Strategy of Socio-Economic Development of the Republic of Azerbaijan for 2022–2026”, approved by the Order of the President of the country dated 22 July 2022, provides for the acceleration of the development of the private sector, including micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, through new, more effective incentives and conditions for development, increasing the activity of private and foreign investors in the country’s economy and expanding non-resource exports. In connection with this document, an Action Plan was defined.

175. On 7 July 2021, the Presidential Decree “On New Division of Economic Regions in the Republic of Azerbaijan” was signed aimed at the implementation of the “State Programme for Socioeconomic Development of the Regions of the Republic of Azerbaijan in 2019–2023”. By this Decree, the division of the country into the following economic regions was approved: Baku, Nakhchivan, Absheron-Khizi, Mountainous Shirvan,

Ganja-Dashkasan, Karabakh, Gazakh-Tovuz, Guba-Khachmaz, Lankaran-Astara, Central Aran, Mil-Mugan, Shaki-Zagatala, East Zangazur and Shirvan-Salyan.

C. Framework within which human rights are promoted at the national level

176. The “National Programme for Action to Raise Effectiveness of the Protection of Human Rights and Freedoms in the Republic of Azerbaijan” was approved by the Order of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan dated 27 December 2011. Under the Programme, efforts have been made to improve the legal framework, the activities of state bodies, protect the rights of different groups of the population and organize educational, scientific, analytical and awareness-raising events in the field of human rights.

177. In recent years, a number of important instruments have been adopted to guarantee citizens’ constitutional rights and freedoms; among which the Laws “On Citizens’ Appeals”, “On Public Participation”, “On Regulation of Inspections Conducted in the Field of Entrepreneurship and Protection of the Interests of Entrepreneurs”, “On Ensuring the Rights and Freedoms of Persons Detained in Prisons” can be mentioned.

178. By the Order of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan dated 4 April 2022, the “National Action Plan to Strengthen the Fight against Corruption for 2022–2026” was approved. The Action Plan provides for rules for identifying, analyzing and preventing corruption risks in the activities of state bodies, improving legislation in the field of assessment and management of property obtained by crime and subject to special confiscation, improving legislation on encouraging and protecting of persons reporting corruption offenses, and a number of similar measures.

179. On 30 December 2022, a new edition of the Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan “On the Prevention of the Legalization of Criminally Obtained Property and Financing of Terrorism” was adopted. The Law is aimed at identifying and preventing the legalization of criminally obtained property and financing of terrorism, as well as creating conditions that exclude the possibility of using the country’s economic system for illegal purposes; the Law also regulates relations regarding the implementation of effective internal and international cooperation in order to fulfil obligations in this direction, arising from international treaties to which the Republic of Azerbaijan is a party, as well as protecting the interests of the State and society.

180. In order to strengthen the fight against the legalization of property obtained by crime and financing of terrorism, as well as to ensure the continuity of systemic and comprehensive measures implemented in this area, the Decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan dated 28 February, 2023 approved the “2023–2025 “National Action Plan on the Prevention of the Legalization of Criminally Obtained Property and the Financing of Terrorism”.

181. The State Agency for Public Service and Social Innovations under the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan (ASAN) was established in 2012, with a view to improving the provision of high-quality services to citizens using innovative methods.

182. The work of ASAN service is considered as a symbol of innovation in public administration.

183. To date, there are 24 ASAN service centres in Azerbaijan, which provide over 370 services from both public and private institutions based on the “single window” principle, by using advanced innovations in the field of public services. Given that this model is aimed at achieving maximum citizen satisfaction, its activities directly contribute to strengthening transparency, accountability and effectiveness. Over the past 4 years, more than 60 million citizen requests have been registered in these centres. In addition, in order to ensure the availability of public services to all citizens, regardless of their location, 10 buses and an “ASAN Service” train were created to provide a mobile form of provision of services.

184. In 2015, the State Agency received a UN Public Service Award for its “ASAN Service” project. Moreover, in 2019, the State Agency won a United Nations special award for promoting digital transformation of provision of services.

185. The Agency for Sustainable and Operative Social Provision (DOST) was established in accordance with the Decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan “On Additional Measures Related to the Improvement of Management in the Areas of Population Employment, Labour, Social Protection and Provision” dated 9 August 2018 in order to provide state social services on a single platform, through a “single window”, and to ensure complete transparency, convenience and public satisfaction with social services. In accordance with the approved Charter, the Agency manages the DOST infrastructure and the organization of the provision of services in DOST centres in the fields of employment, labour, social protection, and security, as well as other areas of activity of the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Population of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Through its DOST centres, the DOST Agency, acting as a “one-stop-shop”, acts as a front-office liaison between citizens and relevant government agencies. DOST centres provide 154 services (including the services of Unified Coordination Centres) in 12 areas.

186. According to decisions made, it is planned to establish 17 regional DOST centres and 55 district branches by 2026, including the opening of a special DOST centre in the city of Shusha. Thus, DOST services will cover the entire territory of Azerbaijan and will be available to the entire population of the country. To date, the technical possibility to pre-register online has been provided to regulate the flow of citizens visiting DOST centres, with the help of mobile teams citizens with disabilities have been provided with services at their place of residence, and sign language translation has been provided for people with hearing and speech impairments.

187. To date, there are 6 DOST centres operating in Baku and Absheron District, the services of which have already been used by about one and a half million citizens of the country. In the village of Aghali village of Zangilan district, within the framework of the DOST programme “Karabakh and East Zangazur”, the first “Smart DOST” service point was put into operation. According to the report for 2022, the total number of services provided in the centres during the period of operation amounted to 1,269,442 people. According to the report for the 1st quarter of 2023, this figure has already exceeded 1.4 million people (1,450,799). At the time of submission of the report, the level of citizen satisfaction with the services of DOST centres was 98.5 per cent. Call Center 142 operates within the structure of DOST Agency, which receives calls from both mobile operators and landlines throughout the country free of charge. Over the past period, about four million calls were received. According to the monitoring results, the level of citizen satisfaction with Call Center 142 services is 93 per cent.

188. DOST services are aligned with international best practices and existing international standards. In 2021, the Agency began implementing the “Integrated Management System”, applied in accordance with the standards of the International Organization for Standardization (ISO). Based on the results of an international audit conducted from December 2021 to February 2022, the Agency was awarded certificates certifying compliance with the Quality Management System (ISO 9001:2015), Customer Satisfaction and Complaint Management System (ISO 10002:2018), Social responsibility (ISO 26000:2010), Anti-corruption management system (ISO 37001:2016).

189. For the purpose of development and international recognition, the DOST Agency works closely with the United Nations Population Fund, the United Nations Development Programme, the European Social Network, the International Social Security Association and other international platforms. As recognition of the level of organization of the service delivery process, in April 2022, DOST was awarded the European Social Network (ESSA2021) in the “Technological Tool” category, and the “DOST Volunteer Programme” project was announced as a finalist in the “Outstanding Team” category. In May 2022, the International Social Security Association (ISSA) awarded two DOST applications – “For Life with Dignity and Equal Rights”, and “Citizen’s Satisfaction Monitoring System” – with certificates of excellence, and the project “DOST: social protection for 65+” received certification and was presented at the organization’s Annual Forum. In August 2022, for successful completion of the ISSA’s Service Quality Recognition Programme DOST was awarded the ISSA Certificate of Excellence in Social Security Administration 2022.

190. An e-government portal has been set up with a view to protecting human rights and providing the citizens with a system for the effective and efficient use of public services. One

of the main goals in setting up the portal is protecting human rights and freedoms, combating corruption and ensuring transparency. The e-government portal (www.e-gov.az) facilitates the relevant communication between the state bodies and the authorities through the “single window”.

191. According to the Decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan dated 22 November 2022, competences related to the implementation of state policy and regulation in the field of e-government were assigned to the Ministry of Digital Development and Transport. The e-Government Development Centre, which was previously created under the State Agency for Public Service and Social Innovations, was merged with the Innovation and Digital Development Agency under the Ministry.

192. The “myGov” portal (www.my.gov.az) has been made available with the aim of transitioning from reactive to proactive e-government, easing the burden on citizens through e-services and ensuring transparency and efficiency. Through the “myGov” portal, citizens can find the information provided by government agencies, check its accuracy, make electronic service requests, receive electronic certificates and other documents, and manage the process of transmitting information to other agencies.

193. In order to ensure the accessibility, use and possible dissemination of public information for citizens, start-ups and information technology specialists, the portal “opendata.az” – “Open Data” was created in Azerbaijan and has been operating since 2015, where the relevant services for “open data” of institutions are located.

194. From 2022 a new generation digital signature – SIMA, based on cloud technologies, public key and access technologies, is available for the use by individuals and legal entities. The SIMA electronic signature based on a mobile application is free for citizens and makes it more convenient to receive electronic services from anywhere and at any time without the need to use additional tools. More than 200,000 users who have downloaded the SIMA mobile application can use more than 100 different services from public and private institutions.

195. Another important innovation is related to the creation of the “Electronic Prosecutor’s Office”. This information system is designed to ensure the use of modern information and communication technologies in the activities of the Prosecutor’s Office of the Republic of Azerbaijan. The creation of the “Electronic Prosecutor’s Office” information system was provided for by the Decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan dated 7 May 2021.

196. The range of electronic services provided to citizens by judicial bodies has been expanded, with new services such as electronic request for determining the status of consideration of appeals of individuals and legal entities, Obtaining information about municipal entities and Providing information to individuals and legal entities about adopted decisions, and also electronic services in the field of state registration of acts of civil status.

197. The organization of mobile services in the field of justice is of special importance. Along with mobile applications improved in application such as “Mobile Court”, “Mobile Notary”, the application “Mobile Population” was recently launched. Documents related to registration of birth and death, information about family members and citizenship status, etc. are obtainable in this application.

198. A new version of the information resource “Electronic Database of Legislative Acts of (e-qanun)” has also been developed. The mobile version of the “Unified Electronic Database of Legal Acts” was launched with special attention to the application of innovations, especially with regard to increasing the accessibility of judicial services and services in the field of justice.

199. The Probation Service of the Ministry of Justice monitors the serving of sentences of convicts sentenced to non-custodial sentences, and also applies electronic bracelets to convicts sentenced to a penalty of restriction of freedom, those sentenced to a conditional sentence by a court decision, and those released on parole. Currently, electronic bracelets are used on more than 4,000 prisoners.

200. In 2020, amendments were made to the Criminal Code, Code of Execution of Punishments, and the Code of Administrative Offences in terms of effective execution of

non-custodial sentences, as well as the use of modern technical means in the process of executing sentences and administrative penalties in the form of public works in accordance with the “State Programme on the Development of Azerbaijani Justice for 2019–2023” approved by the Order of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan dated 18 December 2018, and the use of electronic devices developed by the relevant institutions of the Ministry of Justice.

201. The Office of the Ombudsman organizes awareness-raising events at the Academy of Public Administration under the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Police Academy, the Academy of Justice, the Academy of Labour and Social Relations of Azerbaijan, the training centre of the Prosecutor’s Office and military training institutions, based on the curricula of the educational establishments concerned, for young people, persons taking specialized courses, judges, lawyers and public officials, which have increased knowledge through the teaching of human rights.

202. Every year, the State Committee for Family, Women and Children Affairs together with state bodies and NGOs, conducts events aimed at raising human rights awareness, both among public officials and professionals and through the media.

203. The Training and Education Centre of the State Migration Service and international partners regularly organize courses on the topics of human rights and freedoms, the rights of migrants in the context of human rights, the prohibition of torture, violence and inhuman treatment and the measures to be taken in this regard, the worst forms of child labour and ways to eradicate them, the identification of victims of human trafficking, including persons engaged in forced labour, the prevention and combating of illegal migration and asylum and readmission, which are attended by the staff of the Service’s various units and the entities within its system. Thus, over the period covering 2016–2023, about 1,000 employees of the Service and representatives of other government agencies have participated in relevant trainings conducted on the above-mentioned topics. The Training and Education Centre also organizes free classes for foreigners and stateless persons. Since the classes were launched, about 7,000 foreigners and stateless persons have taken part in about 3,000 courses conducted to study the Azerbaijani language, history, culture, as well as legislation on the rights and responsibilities of foreigners and stateless persons.

204. In addition, within the framework of the project “Supporting the Establishment of a Regional Training Centre on Migration in Azerbaijan”, launched on 1 November 2020 at the initiative of the State Migration Service in cooperation with the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the educational process in the field of migration was improved, and a number of trainings were conducted in this area by attracting experts from different countries and international organizations. During 2021–2022, as part of this project, employees of the Service and representatives of relevant state bodies were involved in training on human rights and freedom, the prohibition of torture, violence and inhuman treatment, the fight against human trafficking and other similar topics.

205. Pursuant to the Order of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan dated 1 October 2009, the Scientific and Educational Centre was set up under the Prosecutor General’s Office of the Republic of Azerbaijan. The main tasks and functions of the Scientific and Educational Centre are the organization of training for candidates who have successfully passed the competition for admission to the Prosecutor’s Office, prosecutorial workers in order to increase their theoretical knowledge and professional training; the organization of trainings to improve the professional training of employees of other law enforcement agencies and foreign partners; the organization of activities to improve the professional training of employees of the Prosecutor’s Office working in positions that do not provide special titles; conducting scientific, theoretical and practical research; publishing educational and methodological literature and etc.

206. By the Order of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan dated 10 June 2020, a new structure of the Prosecutor General’s Office was approved, which was formed taking into account best international experience, with more flexible, mobile and dynamic management. As part of the structural reforms, the Department for Legal Support and Human Rights Issues of the Prosecutor General’s Office of the Republic of Azerbaijan was established on the basis of the abolished Department for Legal Support.

207. Over the past 5 years in the Ministry of Internal Affairs, about 13 thousand employees have been involved in events held online in Azerbaijan and abroad on issues of human rights and freedoms. In order to benefit from international experience employees are also sent abroad for training through the Council of Europe, OSCE and other international organizations.

208. The activities of the 102 emergency call service and the “Safe City” system, which carry out urgent operations to prevent unlawful acts against persons and provide constant monitoring of respect for the rule of law, take the individual as their most important point of reference.

209. The Central Election Commission within its educational programme pays special attention to informing youth and first-time voters and, in order to encourage more active participation in elections, it organizes various seminars, discussions and meetings in collaboration with relevant state bodies and civil society institutions.

210. Extensive use is made of the media during electoral or referendum campaigns to explain electoral legislation, to improve the legal knowledge of those involved and to give the voters information about the candidates or referendum questions during the pre-election or pre-referendum campaigns, through presentations, interviews, round-table discussions and websites and the use of visual aids such as videos, posters and booklets.

211. The official web page of the Central Election Commission plays a special role in raising the awareness of voters, other persons involved in elections (referendums) and the media. The web page, which is regularly updated, offers all the information about the elections and referendums conducted in different years. Throughout the electoral process and beyond, users of the active web page can find all the information of interest to them. In addition to the web page, e-services provided by the Commission in 10 different areas have been integrated into the e-government portal and made accessible to voters.

212. Pursuant to the Presidential Order dated 13 January 2009, the implementation of functions of the national preventive mechanism (hence NPM), as provided for under the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, was assigned to the Ombudsman. In this regard, by introducing amendments to the Constitutional Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan “On the Human Rights Commissioner (Ombudsman) of the Republic of Azerbaijan” was ensured the inclusion of the provisions of the Optional Protocol into national legislation.

213. The National Preventive Group (hence NPG) was established in the Office of the Ombudsman pursuant to the Constitutional Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan of 24 June 2011 “On Amendments to the Constitutional Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan “On the Human Rights Commissioner (Ombudsman) of the Republic of Azerbaijan”.

214. The activities of the NPG under the Ombudsman are independent. According to the Constitutional Law, a member of the NPG cannot be forced to testify regarding facts that become known to him in connection with the exercise of his functions, or to disclose these facts in any other way. This guarantee also applies after the person leaves the NPG.

215. On the basis of the Constitution, when performing functions of the NPM, the Ombudsman and the members of the NPG have the right at any time, without hindrance and prior notification, to visit police stations, places of temporary detention, pre-trial detention centres, penitentiary institutions, military guardhouses, psychiatric institutions and other places, which detained persons cannot leave on their own will; to meet privately or when deemed necessary with participation of an expert or interpreter, meet and talk with detained persons, as well as with any other persons who may provide relevant information; and to get acquainted with and obtain copies of the documents confirming the lawfulness of detention; including those relating to the treatment of persons and conditions of detention; draw up acts, record the progress and results of the measures taken. The necessary amendments have been made to laws and regulations, including the Code of Execution of Punishments, Law “On Protection of the Rights and Freedoms of Individuals Kept in Places of Detention”, as well as appropriate changes were made to the internal regulations of pre-trial detention centres and correctional institutions.

216. Members of the NPG are appointed by the Commissioner for Human Rights for a period of 3 years on the basis of transparent procedures. 5 representatives of NGOs and invited specialists are involved as experts and regularly participate in visits. When forming the composition of the NPG, the Commissioner, along with many criteria, also focuses on gender balance. Representatives of national minorities are also represented among the NPG members.

217. The Public Committee, which comprises prominent human rights defenders and representatives of civil society institutions, has been functioning successfully since 2006 (for more than 15 years).

218. The adoption of the Law “On Public Participation” served to further expand cooperation with civil society institutions. In 2014, in accordance with the Law, the rules governing the activities of the Public Committee to monitor penal institutions were amended in order to further expand its powers. The amendments included an increase in the Committee’s period of operation (from one to two years) and provision for the Committee’s active participation in areas of the justice system beyond the prison system.

219. In accordance with legislation, from 2022 the activities of the Committee were continued by the Public Council under the Ministry of Justice. As of 1 January 2023, Members of the Council made 13 visits to penitentiary institutions and provided legal assistance to more than 1,780 convicts.

220. Pursuant to the Decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan dated 17 August 2006 “On the Development of Judiciary”, the Academy of Justice has been set up under the Ministry of Justice. The Academy is a research and methodological institution, which offers professional development for persons with higher legal education in view of their appointment to posts in their area of specialization and professional training for judicial and other legal professionals and serves to meet the needs of society for qualified legal staff.

221. On 29 March 2019, the Law “On Mediation”, which regulates alternative dispute settlement procedures involving a mediator, was adopted. In February 2020, the Mediation Council was established, and the Academy of Justice was registered as an educational institution in the field of mediation. On 30 June 2021, the general meeting of the Mediation Council was held, at which the Council’s composition was established and its chair was elected. More than 470 persons have now been certified as mediators.

222. In order to develop the institution of mediation, the Ministry of Justice carries out outreach activities in various spheres of public life, evaluates the effectiveness of mediation for resolving legal disputes. As of 31 March 2023, 34 mediation organizations were registered in Azerbaijan.

223. The Academy of Justice, the Judicial-Legal Council and the Judicial Selection Committee organize the judicial selection process in the country. The Academy of Justice attached to the Ministry of Justice is a leading academic institution with a broad mandate for the training of legal staff. The Academy is a structural unit of the Ministry of Justice with general directorate status.

224. The Agreement signed in 2000 between the Government of Azerbaijan and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has given ICRC representatives broad latitude to make unimpeded visits to convicted prisoners in places of detention.

225. In order to more reliably protect the rights and legitimate interests of taxpayers, the Institute of Tax Ombudsman was established in May 2019 as an additional tool designed to participate in the consideration of taxpayers’ appeals addressed to it, with the aim of pre-trial resolution of the situation and satisfaction of complainants. During the activity of the Tax Ombudsman, taxpayers addressed 138 appeals and asked for admission 62 times. As a result, 68 complaints on various aspects of taxation were resolved in favour of taxpayers.

D. Reporting process at the national level

226. Reports of the Republic of Azerbaijan on the international human rights treaties to which Azerbaijan is a party are prepared in accordance with the Order of the President of the

Republic of Azerbaijan of 20 September 2018 on improving cooperation with the United Nations human rights bodies.

227. The President of the Republic of Azerbaijan signed an Order on 20 September 2018 by which a working group has been established in order to prepare periodic reports of the Republic of Azerbaijan for the United Nations human rights treaty bodies and the universal periodic review mechanism of the Human Rights Council and to monitor the implementation of the recommendations issued in relations to the Republic of Azerbaijan. The working group consists of representatives of the relevant state bodies and its activities are led by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

228. The media provide coverage of the preparation of reports and their submission by government delegations to the United Nations treaty bodies.

E. Other related human rights information

229. Measures are being taken to further improve national legislation in the area of migration. National legislation on migration is based on the principles of respect for human and civil rights and freedoms, the rule of law, equality before the law and the courts, the conformity of migration legislation of the Republic of Azerbaijan with the generally accepted rules of international law and the application of innovative methods to ensure transparency.

230. The State Migration Service of the Republic of Azerbaijan, set up pursuant to the Decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan dated 19 March 2007, implements government policy on migration, develops the system for the governance, management and forecasting of migration processes and coordinates the activities of the relevant state bodies in this area.

231. The Migration Code defines government policy on migration and regulates migration processes and the legal status of foreign nationals and stateless persons in the country.

232. In accordance with the Decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan dated 4 March 2009, the principle of a “one-stop-shop” in the management of migratory processes has become a key feature in the development of a migration management system; taking international practice into account, it has helped to regulate migration processes in the country on the basis of more flexible and effective mechanisms, improve and simplify the migration management mechanism and ensure responsiveness and transparency in the area.

233. The network of services provided by the State Migration Service has expanded. 8 regional offices have begun operating and the work of the Service is carried out in the 24 ASAN service centres. Migration units providing 24-hour services have begun operating at checkpoints across the state border, the Service’s call centre now operates round the clock and the services provided to foreign nationals are now provided in electronic form. In addition, the official mobile application MIGAZ has been launched, to simplify access to e-services and reduce the time taken to submit requests to the Service.

234. As a result of recent work to improve and introduce new innovative technologies, the number of electronic services provided by the State Migration Service has been increased to 20.

235. Applications from persons wishing to obtain refugee status are examined in accordance with the Law “On the Status of Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)” of 21 May 1999 and the Rules of consideration on applications for refugee status, approved by the Decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan of 13 November 2000.

236. Taking into account the establishment of an effective asylum system in the Republic of Azerbaijan, as well as ensuring the rights of all foreigners and stateless persons without any discrimination to apply for refugee status, on the basis of an agreement between the State Migration Service and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner from 1 July 2020, the Office suspended the issuance of a Guardianship Document to asylum seekers by the Mission, and from this date, applications from asylum seekers are considered only by the State Migration Service and national courts.

237. In order to ensure the right to free movement outside the country of persons who have received refugee status, from the beginning of 2020, the State Migration Service has begun issuing biometric Travel Documents prepared in accordance with ICAO standards to persons who have received refugee status in the Republic of Azerbaijan.

238. In accordance with the Law on “Citizenship of the Republic of Azerbaijan”, foreign nationals and stateless persons who obtain refugee status in Azerbaijan may be granted citizenship of the Republic of Azerbaijan upon application. In such cases, the duration of their permanent residence in the national territory is calculated from the date on which they obtained refugee status. On 23 February 2017, amendments were made to the procedure for consideration of applications for refugee status, relating to the procedure for unaccompanied children to apply for refugee status. In accordance with the amendments, unaccompanied children are treated on an equal footing with children in Azerbaijan who have lost their parents or are deprived of parental care. Their social protection is guaranteed by the State and their rights and interests are protected in accordance with the law.

239. In order to monitor and improve the system for assessing compliance with the rights of unaccompanied children in the country, in accordance with the Decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan dated 22 July 2022, a subsystem “Information on Unaccompanied Foreigners under the Age of 18 and Stateless Persons” was created in the Unified Migration Information System of the State Migration Service and access to this system was provided to the relevant state bodies.

240. In order to regulate issues related to the social protection of children, in accordance with the relevant rules, ensuring an effective and efficient national referral mechanism in the field of child protection, as well as improving the legal framework and institutional structure in the field of child protection in 2021 under the leadership of the Committee for Family, Women and Children Affairs a Working Group was created consisting of authorized representatives of relevant government agencies. One of the main activities of this Group is to take appropriate measures to ensure the education, health and social rights of refugees and asylum seekers in the country, as well as foreigners and stateless persons under the age of 18 who are part of a vulnerable group.

241. Furthermore, in order to coordinate the reduction of cases of statelessness and documentation of stateless persons in the Republic of Azerbaijan, a Working Group was created with the State Migration Service having the status of a coordination structure.

242. Pursuant to the amendments introduced in 28 December 2018 to the Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan “On the State Register of the Population of the Republic of Azerbaijan”, foreign nationals and stateless persons who have obtained refugee status along with citizens of the Republic of Azerbaijan, were included in the “population” category.

243. Also, in accordance with the amendment made on 3 December 2019 to the Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan “On Health Insurance”, foreigners who have received refugee status in the Republic of Azerbaijan and taken under the care of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in the Republic of Azerbaijan are on an equal basis with citizens of the Republic of Azerbaijan, were included in the category of insured persons.

244. The Government of Azerbaijan continues to implement a series of comprehensive measures to improve the socioeconomic conditions of refugees and internally displaced persons and their temporary integration into society, taking into account their right to return safely to their homes in the future.

245. Currently, targeted work is being carried out towards the restoration of the territories of the Republic of Azerbaijan liberated from occupation, ensuring the voluntary, safe and dignified return of internally displaced persons, creating safe conditions and the necessary infrastructure for living in the relevant territories. The process of gradual resettlement of families of internally displaced persons to territories liberated from occupation has already begun.

246. In order to strengthen social protection and improve living conditions, internally displaced persons are given a single monthly allowance. Also, a limit of 300 kW/h per person per month has been established for internally displaced persons living in places of compact

temporary settlement that are not provided with natural gas on an individual basis, and payment for such relevant services has been ensured from the state budget.

247. Expenses for education of internally displaced persons studying on a paid basis at the bachelor's ((basic higher) medical education) and master's (residency) levels at state institutions of higher education of the Republic of Azerbaijan and at the master's level of the Azerbaijan National Academy of Science, as well as at state institutions of secondary specialized education, are paid from the state budget.

248. According to preliminary estimates, it is planned to build 523 educational institutions in the liberated territories of the Republic of Azerbaijan, including 1 vocational education institution, 265 kindergartens and 257 general education institutions. On 10 May 2022, the foundation of the vocational education lyceum in Fuzuli was laid. The territory of the institution will occupy an area of 3.2 hectares and will include educational, laboratory and sports buildings. On 15 September 2022, the first day of school took place at the secondary school in the Aghali village of Zangilan district. The school is designed for 360 students.

249. The national legislation regulates the right to free, unhindered and equitable access to information, the legal framework for information processing, storage, retrieval and distribution and the creation and use of information systems, technologies and support resources, based on the principles of an open society and a democratic State governed by the rule of law, and the relations arising in connection with the protection of information and determination of the rights of those involved in information processes.

250. A policy framework on the "Government Cloud" was approved by the Decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan of 3 June 2019 on the creation of the Government cloud (G-cloud) and measures in the field of providing cloud services. "Transition Plan of State Information System and Resources to Government Cloud" was approved by the Resolution No. 428 of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan dated 29 October 2020. In accordance with the Transition Plan, a gradual transfer of information systems of government agencies to the "Cloud" began.

251. Current national legislation does not contain any provisions on the termination or restriction of access to the Internet, telecommunications networks or websites. According to the Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan "On Telecommunications", the use of telecommunications networks, facilities and structures may be suspended, limited, or special rules for the use of communications may be applied only in emergency situations, in state of emergency and martial law. In addition, the restriction may be applied in the case of posting information, the dissemination of which is prohibited in accordance with the Law "On Information, Informatization and Information Protection".

252. In accordance with Article 6.3 of the Civil Code of the Republic of Azerbaijan, civil rights may be restricted only by law and if this is necessary to protect public safety, order, health or morals or the rights and freedoms, dignity and reputation of others.

253. In recent years, major steps have been taken in the area of employment, social security and protection of vulnerable groups.

254. To ensure transparency, complete electronization of public services in the field of labour, employment, social protection, as well as innovative management using information technology and the provision of services to the population on the basis of a single platform, a "Centralized Electronic Information System" (MEIS) was created based on the information systems of the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Population.

255. As a result of the implementation of a large digitalization programme in the social sphere in recent years, the level of electronization of services of the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Population exceeded 90 per cent. More than 140 out of 153 services are provided in electronic format. In connection with the introduction of a mechanism for proactive assignment of social services since 2019, 51 proactive services have been put into operation.

256. The electronic subsystem "Employment" (MAS) ensures the provision of employment services to unemployed and job-seeking citizens, as well as employers, on an electronic platform. This system includes a register of the employed population, a register of

unemployed and job-seeking citizens, an automated vacancy bank, as well as all electronic services provided by the State Employment Agency (<https://e-sosial.az/#/index> <https://www.e-gov.az/>).

257. Since 2022, a new subsystem “Labour Relations and Employment” (EMAC) has been put into use to resolve all issues in the field of labour and employment through an operational single platform. This system, built on the basis of innovative solutions, opens up new opportunities for regulating labour relations, preventing informal employment, developing the labour market, and expanding employment opportunities for the population.

258. During 2022, monthly benefits were paid to 403 thousand individuals (4 per cent of the population), one-time benefits were paid to 75 thousand individuals (0.7 per cent of the population), social benefits were paid to a total of 478 thousand individuals (4.7 per cent of the population), 368 thousand individuals (3.6 per cent of the population) received a presidential pension.

259. In total, in 2022, social benefits and pensions were assigned electronically to 208 thousand citizens.

260. The payment of targeted state social assistance to improve the financial well-being of low-income families continued during 2022. 290,000 family members from 65,000 families received targeted state social assistance in 2022. The average amount of social benefits per family amounted 392 manats, which means an increase of 40 per cent compared to 2021 (424 manats in the first quarter of 2023 (an increase of 42 per cent)).

261. The Strategy for Employment in the Republic of Azerbaijan for the period 2019–2030 was approved by the Order of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Large-scale action to support more than 4.8 million citizens has been taken with a view to facilitating employment and social welfare.

262. In order to expand employment opportunities for unemployed and job-seeking citizens, as well as develop their entrepreneurial abilities, starting from 2017, the State Employment Agency has been implementing a self-employment programme. Being one of the most effective employment programmes, over the five years of implementation, the coverage of persons involved in the programme was increased 15 times and reached more than 16 thousand persons per year in 2022. In the first quarter of 2023, this figure was 994 persons. During the entire implementation period, small family farms were created for more than 60 thousand families.

263. In the post-war period, the “Employment Marathon” project was implemented to encourage the active participation of employers in the employment of family members of martyrs and veterans who suffered in the Patriotic War. As a result of the project, 2,538 people were employed.

264. In total, as a result of employment-related measures taken in 2022, 40 thousand people were provided with suitable work. It should be noted that unemployment insurance payments were assigned to 6,333 individuals (the average monthly amount was 348 manats). In the first quarter of 2023, 13 thousand people were provided with suitable work and 2,179 people received unemployment insurance payments (the average monthly amount was 402 manats).

265. As a result of the successful implementation of the state employment strategy, active employment programmes, a reliable mechanism for guaranteeing labour rights and preventing informal employment, over the past five years the State Employment Service has provided 382 thousand people with suitable work, and 14 thousand people have been involved in vocational training. The organization of vocational training is carried out both at the request of the unemployed and together with employers, on the basis of agreements concluded with them. Only for 3 months of this year 2.2 thousand people were covered by vocational training in cooperation with employers, and advanced training courses were organized for about half of them in private educational institutions.

266. A new active employment measure launched in 2020 – a programme for financing (subsidizing) wages of workers together with the employer, is aimed at supporting the employment of not only the unemployed, but also employers. Under this programme, 1,926 people have already been provided with jobs and this process continues.

267. From 1 January 2023, social payments, depending on the type, were increased from 15 per cent to 66.67 per cent. Over the past 5 years, the minimum pension has increased by 133.8 per cent. In addition, the salaries of persons working in organizations funded from the state budget or receiving financial support from the budget increased by an average of 50 per cent. These increases had a monetary value of 2.3 billion manats and covered 4.2 million people.

268. In accordance with the Law “On the Minimum Subsistence Wage in the Republic of Azerbaijan in 2021”, the subsistence minimum in the country was set at 196 manats and the minimum wage (250 manats) is 27.6 per cent higher than the subsistence minimum in the country. Currently, the average monthly wage is 856,20 manats, the average pension is 372,13 manats and the retirement pension is 400,50 manats. The need criterion for 2022 was 200 manats, and the subsistence minimum was 210 manats. Thus, the need criterion for 2022 has increased by 17.65 per cent or 30 manats compared to the figure for 2021 (170 manats), and the subsistence minimum for 2022 has increased by 7.14 per cent or 14 manats more than the subsistence minimum for in 2021 (196 manats). According to the Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan on the limit “On Threshold of Need Criterion in the Republic of Azerbaijan for 2023” the need criterion for 2023 is 246 manats, and according to the Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan “On the Minimum Subsistence Wage in the Republic of Azerbaijan in 2023”, the subsistence minimum is set at 246 manats.

269. According to the Decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan “On Additional Measures to Improve the Social Welfare of the Population”, the minimum monthly wage has been raised by 15 per cent to 345 manats since 1 January 2023. The average monthly labour pension was 372 manats in 2022 (a 12 per cent increase compared to 2021), and it was 423 manats in 2023 (a 16 per cent increase compared to 2021). The retirement pension amounted to 399 manats in 2022 (an 11 per cent increase compared to 2021), 456 manats in the first quarter of 2023 (a 15 per cent increase compared to 2022).

270. The Law “On the Rights of Persons with Disabilities” was adopted on 31 May 2018. The Law covers all matters relating to the rights and freedoms of persons with disabilities provided for in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

271. Some 17 new laws and regulations intended to better protect the rights of persons with disabilities have been adopted in application of the Law.

272. In the post-war period, 30,675 rehabilitation means were provided to 1,793 disabled veterans of war. In total, in 2022, 66,299 rehabilitation funds were transferred to 12,181 persons with disabilities. In the first quarter of 2023, 19,939 rehabilitation devices were provided to 3,547 persons with disabilities.

273. Since 2020, persons with disabilities have been offered electric wheelchairs and high-tech prostheses. In 2022, 379 military personnel were provided with 394 high-tech prostheses (411 military personnel were provided with 428 high-tech prostheses, including the first quarter of 2023).

274. Thirteen rehabilitation centres have been opened to expand the coverage of rehabilitation services.

275. Major efforts have now been made regarding social protection for the families of fallen soldiers or disabled veterans of war.

276. According to the relevant Decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the monthly amount of the presidential pension paid to the families of those killed in the Patriotic War has been increased to 600 manats.

277. In 2022, 16,011 social payments were assigned to 8,018 family members of 3,037 martyrs (7,772 presidential scholarships, 5,591 social payments, 2,648 pensions). Social benefits were provided to 3,708 disabled veterans of war. In addition, in 2022, a one-time payment was provided to military personnel and employees of internal affairs bodies who were identified as disabled as a result of injury (wound, injury, contusion) or illness while performing military duties in connection with the protection of the territorial integrity, independence and constitutional system of the Republic of Azerbaijan or during active military service until 2 August 1997 (for the first quarter of 2023, 16,034 social

payments were assigned to 8,024 family members of 3,038 martyrs (7,778 presidential scholarships, 5,597 social benefits, 2,659 pensions). Social payments were assigned 3839 war invalids. A one-time payment was assigned to 17.1 thousand persons (insurance payments to 3.5 thousand persons).

278. According to the relevant Decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan “On Increasing the Amount of Social Benefits”, from 1 January 2023, the amount of the benefit is set at 270 manats for persons with disabilities in connection with 81–100 per cent impairment of body functions, 220 manats for persons with disabilities in due to 61–80 per cent impairment of body functions and 150 manats for persons with disabilities due to 31–60 per cent impairment of body functions.

279. In total, 57,473 people were diagnosed with disability in 2022 (a decrease of 7 per cent compared to the same period in 2021), of which 19,935 persons were diagnosed with primary disability, and 37,538 persons were diagnosed with secondary disability. Rehabilitation services were provided to 50,366 persons with disabilities. 1,590 persons with disabilities were provided with one-time financial assistance to solve social and everyday problems. In total, in the first quarter of 2023, 13,003 persons were diagnosed with disability (a decrease of 18 per cent compared to the same period in 2021), of which 6,034 persons were diagnosed with primary disability, and 6,969 persons were diagnosed with secondary disability. Rehabilitation services were provided to 14,722 persons with disabilities. 463 persons with disabilities were assigned one-time financial assistance to solve social and everyday problems.

III. Information on non-discrimination and equality and effective remedies

280. The Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan establishes the basic principles for the country’s national policies, ensuring the full equality of all its citizens, regardless of their ethnicity, religion or race. At the same time, as a result of its historical, economic and cultural specificities, the outlook of the country’s population is based on the principles of tolerance and respect for the culture, religious beliefs, customs and traditions of other ethnic groups and national minorities.

281. The Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan uses the existing legislative framework as a basis for the country’s policy aimed at ensuring that the different peoples living there, of different ethnic origins, maintain relations of mutual trust, understanding and friendship. No manifestation of ethnic, national, racial or other forms of discrimination in the country is tolerated.

282. In meeting the provisions of international conventions aimed at eliminating and preventing all forms of discrimination, the Government focuses particularly on strengthening the traditions of religious tolerance and ensuring a sustainable living situation in conditions of understanding, peace, prosperity and dialogue for ethnic minorities.

283. Article 25 of the Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan states that all persons are equal before the law and the courts. Men and women have equal rights and freedoms. The State guarantees equality of rights and freedoms for everyone, regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, language, sex, origin, wealth or official status, beliefs or membership of political parties, trade unions or other voluntary associations.

284. Human and civil rights and freedoms may not be restricted on the grounds of race, ethnicity, religion, language, sex, origin, beliefs or political or social affiliation.

285. In its article 47, the Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan prohibits campaigns and propaganda that incite racial, ethnic, religious, social or any other form of discord or hatred.

286. Article 69 provides that foreign nationals and stateless persons in Azerbaijan may enjoy all the same rights and are subject to the same obligations as citizens of the Republic of Azerbaijan, unless otherwise provided by law or an international treaty to which the Republic of Azerbaijan is a party.

287. The rights and freedoms of foreign nationals and stateless persons who are permanently or temporarily resident in the country may be restricted only in accordance with rules of international law or the laws of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

288. Article 70 of the Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan states that, in accordance with generally recognized rules of international law, the Republic of Azerbaijan grants political asylum to foreign nationals and stateless persons.

289. On 16 December 2022, the new Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan “On Political Parties” came into force, which establishes provisions prohibiting restrictions on membership in a political party on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion, language, sex, origin, beliefs and social class, also not allowing the creation and operation of political parties whose activities are aimed at the violent overthrow of the constitutional order of the Republic of Azerbaijan, violation of its territorial integrity, seizing or retaining power by force, open calls for mass riots, terrorism, propaganda of terrorism, religious extremism, violence and cruelty, as well as discrimination on the basis of race, religion, origin, sex, ethnicity and other discrimination, as well as actions contrary to the protection of health and the environment, incitement to racial, religious or national hatred.

290. Article 2.1.6 of the Law “On Personal Data” of 11 May 2010 provides that information relating to racial or ethnic origin, family life, religion and beliefs, health or individual legal records is classed as personal data of a specific category.

291. In its Article 6.2, the Law “On Culture” of 21 December 2012 provides that the State guarantees every individual’s enjoyment of rights and freedoms in the field of culture, irrespective of sex, race, language, religious or political beliefs, ethnicity, social status, social origin, health or membership in public associations, while Article 43 provides that cultural events which include calls promoting or advocating war or superiority based on social, racial or ethnic origin, religion, class or birth, or the restriction of human and civil rights and fundamental freedoms in the area of culture, irrespective of race, ethnic origin, religion, language, social affiliation, official status, beliefs or membership in public associations, are not tolerated.

292. The Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan amending the Law “On the Freedom of Religious Belief” of 8 May 2009 introduced provisions to Article 1 of the mentioned Law to ban advocacy for religious beliefs or religious lifestyles that involve violence or threats of violence or are aimed at establishing racial, ethnic, religious or social discord or hatred; and according to Article 12.1, the promotion of religious beliefs or lifestyles that involve violence or threats of violence, or are aimed at establishing racial, ethnic, religious or social discord and hatred, coercion to express or demonstrate religious beliefs, the conduct of or participation in religious ceremonies of, or dissemination of or propaganda for, a religion or religious movement that diminishes human dignity or contradicts the principles of humanism, and religious extremist activities are considered a basis for the dissolution of the religious organization according to court procedure.

293. In accordance with Article 5.2 of the Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan “On Education” of 19 June 2009, the State guarantees access to education for each citizen, regardless of sex, race, language, religion, political views, ethnicity, social status, origin or health, and the prohibition of discrimination.

294. In accordance with Article 23.2 of the Law “On Protection of the Rights and Freedoms of Individuals Kept in Places of Detention” of 22 May 2012, detained persons may not acquire, possess or disseminate publications that advocate war, violence, extremism, terrorism and brutality or that incite racial, ethnic, religious or social discord and hatred or are pornographic in nature, and persons under arrest may not subscribe to such publications.

295. Under the Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan of 28 April 2015 amending the Law “On Physical Culture and Sports”, in order to prevent violence and ensure public safety and public order during the holding of mass sports events and sports competitions, the promotion of violence, racial, ethnic or religious discrimination or war through the use of posters or other media is prohibited in the grounds of sports facilities and places for spectators at mass sports events.

296. Article 11 of the Code of Criminal Procedure of the Republic of Azerbaijan states that in the Republic of Azerbaijan the criminal proceedings are conducted on the basis of the equality of all before the law and the courts.

297. The authorities conducting criminal proceedings shall not accord any participant in the criminal process any advantage for reasons of citizenship, social status, sex, race, ethnicity, political or religious affiliation, language, origin, wealth or official status, beliefs, place of residence, location or other considerations not founded in law.

298. Article 61.1.6 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Azerbaijan provides that, where the commission of an offence is motivated by ethnic, racial or religious hatred or fanaticism, such motives shall be considered to constitute aggravating circumstances.

299. Article 109 of the Criminal Code establishes criminal responsibility for the persecution of any group or organization on political, racial, national, ethnic, cultural or religious grounds, or on the grounds of sex or other grounds prohibited under the norms of international law; that is, a gross violation of people's fundamental rights on the grounds of their membership of such groups or organizations, where the act is linked to other crimes against the security of humankind, is to be considered a criminal offence.

300. Article 154 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Azerbaijan provides for criminal punishment in the case of violation of the equality of individuals on grounds of their race, ethnicity, religion, language, sex, origin, wealth or official status, beliefs or membership in political parties, trade unions or other public associations, whereby their rights and legitimate interests have been harmed.

301. Under the Criminal Code of the Republic of Azerbaijan, crimes such as racial discrimination (apartheid) (Article 111), genocide (Article 103), incitement to commit genocide (Article 104), destruction of a population (Article 105), slavery (Article 106), deportation or forcible resettlement of a population (Article 107), persecution (Article 109) and enforced extermination (Article 110) are considered as criminal offences.

302. The court treats all persons participating in a case equally, regardless of their race or ethnicity, religion, language, sex, origin, wealth or social status, personal beliefs, membership of political parties, trade unions or other public organizations, the location, reporting line or form of ownership of a legal person or other circumstances not provided for in law.

303. Under Article 16 of the Labour Code of the Republic of Azerbaijan, no discrimination may be tolerated between workers in privileges and benefits awarded or restrictions imposed on rights, whether directly or indirectly, on grounds of citizenship, sex, race, religion, ethnic origin, language, place of residence, wealth, social origin, age, family status, beliefs, political views, membership of trade unions or other voluntary associations, official status or other factors unrelated to the professional qualities, professional skills and job performance of employees.

304. The Law "On Guarantees of Gender (men and women) Equality" of 10 October 2006 contains provisions on the elimination of gender inequality and the conducting of gender analysis and establishes basic guidelines for state policy on gender equality and the promotion of equity in education and entrepreneurship, in obtaining equal wages and work choices etc.

305. In addition to the provisions mentioned, others relating to the prohibition of racial discrimination are also enshrined in individual regulations governing judges and public officials, including codes of conduct.

306. Thus, in line with Article 8 of the Ethic Code of Judicial Conduct, approved by a Judicial Legal-Council decision of 22 June 2007, judges must treat all persons involved in proceedings (including the parties, lawyers, public officials, witnesses, etc.) equally. A judge may not give preference to any of the participants in proceedings. A judge shall not show any view in respect of race, sex, religion or ethnicity, nor allow any form of discrimination.

307. Given the religious diversity that exists in society, state policy of the Republic of Azerbaijan on religion is based on freedom of thought and expression, freedom of conscience, interreligious dialogue, tolerance and understanding. At the same time, the state policy in the

field of religion is based on the principles and norms of international law, international treaties to which the Republic Azerbaijan is a party, the Constitution and other laws and regulations.

308. On 29 November 2019, by the Order of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, a Department for Inter-Ethnic, Multicultural and Religious Affairs was created under the Presidential Administration. This Department is directly involved in determining state policy on inter-ethnic relations and freedom of religion, and in preserving and developing multicultural traditions.

309. By the Decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan of 10 October 2017, the Spiritual Values Promotion Foundation attached to the State Committee on Religious Associations was established. The main purpose of the Foundation is to provide state support for the implementation of educational activities in Azerbaijan in the field of religion, the protection and development of spiritual values and the preparation and implementation of targeted programmes involving relations between religion and the State, to ensure that citizens and religious organizations enjoyed religious freedom and to implement social projects in this area.

310. In accordance with the Order of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan of 8 February 2023, funds in the amount of 3,100,000 manats were allocated from the President's reserve fund in order to support religious faiths in the country and improve their financial situation. Of this amount, 350,000 manats was allocated to the Baku and Azerbaijan diocese, 350,000 manats to the religious community of Mountain Jews of the city of Baku, 350,000 manats to the Baku Religious Community of European Jews, 350,000 manats for the religious education of the Apostolic Prefecture of the Catholic Church in the Republic of Azerbaijan, 350,000 manats to the Albanian-Udi Christian Community of the Republic of Azerbaijan, as well as for the purpose of material support for other non-Islamic religious communities, 350,000 manats were allocated to the Spiritual Values Promotion Foundation, subordinate to the State Committee on Religious Associations of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

311. The Baku International Multiculturalism Centre was established by the Decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan on 15 May 2014. The Centre's statutes identify it as a legal person, a non-profit entity that protects tolerance and cultural, religious and linguistic diversity, in accordance with the idea of Azerbaijanism, which has brought the country worldwide fame as a centre of multiculturalism, researching and developing existing models of multiculturalism.

312. In 2008, the Republic of Azerbaijan put forward the "Baku Process" for the establishment of a dialogue among cultures. As part of this process, over the past 11 years, the World Forum on Intercultural Dialogue has been held every two years since 2011, and the Baku International Humanitarian Forum has been held on six occasions. The seventh Global Forum of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (25–27 April 2016), the fourth World Forum on Intercultural Dialogue (4–6 May 2017), on the theme "Advancing Intercultural Dialogue – New Avenues for Human Security, Peace and Sustainable Development", and the fifth World Forum on Intercultural Dialogue (2–3 May 2019), on the theme "Building Dialogue into Action Against Discrimination, Inequality and Violent Conflict", were all held in Baku in recent years.

313. In the report of the Secretary-General on the "Promotion of a Culture of Peace and Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue, Understanding and Cooperation for Peace", submitted at the seventy-second session of the General Assembly in September 2017, the particular emphasis placed on the successful implementation of the Baku Process since 2008 should be seen as a recognition at the international level of the contribution that Azerbaijan has made to intercultural dialogue in recent times and the role it has played as a bridge between civilizations since ancient times.

314. In this connection, the Order of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan dated 17 November 2017 on holding the 10th anniversary of the "Baku Process" was signed. Pursuant to this Order, the Baku International Humanitarian Forum was successfully held in Baku on 25–26 October 2018.

315. Real qualitative changes have been achieved as a result of the comprehensive legislative, organizational and other measures adopted by the Government in recent years to extend the prison system reform in order to meet international standards on respecting the rights, freedoms and legitimate interests of persons under investigation and convicted prisoners.

316. On 22 May 2012 the new Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan “On the Rights and Freedoms of Individuals Kept in Detention Facilities” was adopted, which significantly changed and humanized the legal provisions of detainees and remand prisoners.

317. On 10 February 2017, the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan signed the Order “On Improving Work in the Penitentiary System, Humanization of the Punishment Policy and Expansion of Alternative Punishments and Procedural Enforcement Measures not associated with Isolation from Society”. The purpose of the Order was to modernize the approach to penal policy, criminal legislation and ways of ensuring the rights of convicted persons, and to improve the prison system, making use of global best practice in the area.

318. The Government of Azerbaijan continues to take the necessary measures to combat domestic violence. On 27 November 2020, the “National Action Plan to Combat Domestic Violence for the period 2020–2023” was adopted.

319. To ensure the implementation of the measures provided for in the National Action Plan, the State Committee for Family, Women and Children Affairs, in cooperation with the United Nations Population Fund, opened a domestic violence hotline on 1 December 2020.

320. In 2013, the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Population established the first Commission for the Accreditation of Non-State Support Centres for Victims of Domestic Violence. To date, the Commission has accredited 8 non-governmental support centres.

321. In accordance with the Decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan of 2019, a shelter and rehabilitation centre for vulnerable groups was established under the Social Service Agency of the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Population. This institution is a public legal entity that provides social services to vulnerable groups of population. It should be noted that a division for the social rehabilitation of victims of domestic violence has been operational at this institution since 1 August 2021. The division provides socio-legal, medical, social, welfare services and social counselling assistance to victims of domestic violence (women and children).

322. In addition, 11 family and child support centres operate under the State Committee for Family, Women and Children Affairs. These centres play a significant role in the individual development of children and adolescents and provide legal, psychological, and social support services to protect the rights of at-risk women and children in the regions. Since November 2020, the employees at the centres have been implementing a psychosocial support project to help families affected by war.

323. In the regions, local authorities have established monitoring groups, with local authority representatives, to look at gender-based violence and violence against children. The main objective of the groups is to analyse and assess the situation, to verify the effectiveness of measures taken, to identify families at risk and provide them with assistance, to examine and analyse the causes of specific cases, including by discussing serious cases, and to take prompt and urgent measures to protect victims of violence.

324. In accordance with the “Rules of State control on the Realization of Children’s Rights” approved by the Decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan dated 8 May 2012, state control in accordance with the areas of activity determined on the basis of the laws of the Republic of Azerbaijan is carried out by the State Committee for Family, Women and Children Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Ministry of Science and Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Population of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Ministry of Youth and Sport of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Food Safety Agency of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the State Agency on Mandatory Health Insurance, the Commission on Minors’ Affairs and

Protection of their Rights, and guardianship and trusteeship bodies of local executive authorities.

325. The Law “On the Protection of Children from Harmful Information” was approved by the Decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan on 30 October 2018. The Law prohibits the promotion of violence, cruelty, narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, alcoholic and energy drinks and tobacco products, pornographic content and provides for the development of international cooperation in this area. The types of harmful information specified in the Law include information harmful to the institution of the family or containing profanity or erotic or disturbing material. The Law contains a paragraph requiring the manufacturer or distributor of information products to indicate the appropriate age category on the product or packaging. After the adoption of the Law, relevant changes were made to the Code of Administrative Offences, and a relevant mechanism of responsibility was provided for violation of the legislation on protecting children from harmful information.

326. On 30 December 2021, the Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan “On Media” was adopted. The Law defines the organizational, legal and economic framework for activities in the field of media, as well as the general rules for receiving, preparing, transmitting, producing and distributing mass information. In accordance with this Law, the protection of users, especially children, from the effects of harmful information is included in the responsibilities of the State in the field of media.

327. The “National Action Plan for the Early Prevention and Treatment of Childhood Disabilities for the period 2018–2020” was approved by the Presidential Order on 10 May 2018.

328. The “Strategy on Children of the Republic of Azerbaijan for 2020–2030” was approved by the Presidential Order on 2 June 2020. The main goal of the Strategy is to bring the child protection system in Azerbaijan fully into line with the Constitution and the principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, create equal opportunities for all children in Azerbaijan, protect their interests, improve the protection of the rights of children in need of state care and provide them with social support services in accordance with modern requirements. The “Action Plan for the Implementation of the Strategy for Children for 2020–2025” was approved to ensure the implementation of the Strategy. In order to ensure the implementation of the above-mentioned Action Plan, the Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan dated 13 January 2023 approved the “Rules for Ensuring Equality in Children’s Safe Access to Education, Social and Other Services in Cases of Emergencies, Pandemics and Similar Special Situations”.

329. The Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan dated 13 January 2023 approved the “Procedure for Ensuring Equality in Children’s Safe Access to Education, Social, and Other Services Cases of Emergencies, Pandemics and other Similar Special Situations”. This procedure determines the measures implemented by state bodies in the field of ensuring equality in children’s safe access to education, social, medical and psychological services in emergency situations, during a pandemic and other similar special situation.

330. On 27 April 2020, a document on the rights of the child and the development of juvenile justice was approved; it is based on the relevant provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

331. On 11 February 2023 the Rules on the organization of inclusive education were approved. According to the rules, the period of participation of children with disabilities in classroom, group and individual classes is determined by an individual curriculum approved by the head of the institution, taking into account their health capabilities. The institution guarantees that a child with disabilities spends at least 50 per cent of the learning process in an inclusive education class. The implementation of the “State Programme for the Development of Inclusive Education for People with Disabilities in the Republic of Azerbaijan for 2018–2024” continues. 160 students are enrolled in inclusive classes in 22 schools in the 2022–2023 academic year.

332. On 22 October 2019, the Law on the Approval of the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (Lanzarote Convention) was adopted.

333. Conventions “On the International Recovery of Child Support and Other Forms of Family Maintenance” dated 23 November 2007 and “On the Service Abroad of Judicial and Extrajudicial Documents in Civil or Commercial Matters” dated 15 November 1965, adopted within the framework of the Hague Conference on Private International Law were approved in accordance with the laws of the Republic of Azerbaijan of 30 September 2022.

334. The Fourth Additional Protocol to the European Convention on Extradition of 2012 was approved by the Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan dated 11 October 2022 as well as the Second Additional Protocol to the European Convention on Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters of 2001 was signed.

335. On 16 February 2022, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe adopted a new Action Plan for Azerbaijan for 2022–2025, covering 22 priorities. This Action Plan covers the various areas in which the Council of Europe has a mandate, including improving the implementation of the European Convention on Human Rights and the criminal justice system, ensuring fundamental freedoms, strengthening the capacities of the media, enhancing information security and personal data protection, promoting gender equality, combating violence against women and domestic violence, protecting and promoting children’s rights, ensuring social rights and increasing the independence and effectiveness of the judicial system and etc.

336. As part of the Cooperation Programme between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) for 2021–2025, the Children’s Fund, the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Ministry of Justice in May, 2021 approved the Action Plan for Children in Justice for 2021–2022.

337. The State Programme “On Combating Drug Addiction and the Illicit Trafficking of Narcotic Drugs, Psychotropic Substances and their Precursors for 2019–2024” has been adopted and is being successfully implemented. The Programme is aimed at improving the quality of care, diagnosis and treatment measures, setting up rehabilitation centres for drug addicts, organizing extensive educational activities, and carrying out anti-drug campaigns among the population and health-care workers and at educational institutions, media outlets and so forth. Access to quality health services is ensured through the implementation of harm reduction programmes among high-risk groups in close cooperation with representatives of civil society. This includes the provision of sterile injection equipment and personal protective equipment, referrals for substitution therapy, information on HIV transmission and prevention methods, as well as programmes for safe behaviour, psychological support and rehabilitation. In addition, integrated drug addiction/HIV services are being improved.

338. In order to protect individuals and society from any manifestation of trafficking in persons, prevent any form of exploitation, especially of women, children and other high-risk groups, protect victims of human trafficking, ensure their social rehabilitation and restore all their rights, the “National Action Plan on Combating Human Trafficking for 2020–2024” was approved by the Order of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan on 22 June 2020.
