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**Statement by H.E. Mr. Elmar Mammadyarov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan
at the General Debate of the 71st session of the United Nations General Assembly**

New York, September 23, 2016

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Mr. President,
Mr. Secretary General,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the outset, I would like to congratulate Mr. Peter Thomson on his assumption of the presidency of the General Assembly at its seventy-first session and to wish him every success in fulfilling that highly responsible duty. We are also grateful to Mr. Mogens Lykketoft for all his hard work in presiding over the Assembly at its seventieth session.

A year ago we had gathered here to witness the adoption of a comprehensive and people-centered post-2015 Sustainable Development Agenda. There are milestones in history when universal values are translated into political commitments that change the course of events. We hope that the adoption of the Sustainable Development Agenda will be one of them.

While reaching an agreement on SDGs, we all had been motivated by the success story of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which proved to be instrumental in promoting development worldwide.

Azerbaijan has adapted its national development strategy taking into account the SDG targets, and continues to implement large-scale programs on improving good governance, sustainable growth, strengthening the rule of law, ensuring respect for human rights, providing facilitated access to public services, and promoting inclusive societies.

Despite global economic crisis and sharp decline in oil prices, Azerbaijan has managed to retain its economic growth.

Sustainable economic growth has enabled Azerbaijan not only focus on its national development strategy, but also actively support the international development. Azerbaijan has rendered international humanitarian and development assistance to a number of countries through Heydar Aliyev Foundation and Azerbaijan International Development Agency (AIDA) under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

This year in June, Azerbaijan has been elected to the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations for the years of 2017-2019 with the vote of 176 countries out of 184 member states participating in the voting at the UN General Assembly. Since the ECOSOC is the central platform for professional deliberations on sustainable development, this will constitute yet another opportunity for us to contribute to the international development.

In support of the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 16, Azerbaijan initiated a draft resolution entitled “Prevention of corruption by promoting transparent, accountable and efficient public service delivery through the application of best practices and technological innovations”, which was unanimously adopted at the 6th session of the Conference of States Parties to the UN Convention against Corruption, held on 2-6 November 2015.

Against the background of various threats and challenges facing the world nowadays, it is critical to persistently stress the importance of promoting key values of different cultures, enhancing better understanding among diverse communities and encouraging mutual respect. Located between the two great continents of Asia and Europe, Azerbaijan is a unique place, where the East and the West meet, where the world’s main religions peacefully coexist and where the values and traditions of different cultures harmoniously complement each other. It is not a coincidence that the 7th Global Forum of the UN Alliance of Civilizations was held this year in Azerbaijan.

Mr. President,

Unresolved armed conflicts, terrorism, violent extremism, aggressive separatism, intolerance and discrimination on ethnic and religious grounds continue to represent the most serious challenges and are among the main obstacles to development.

The outcome document of the United Nations summit for the adoption of the post-2015 development agenda stated that there could be no sustainable development without peace and no peace without sustainable development, recalling the rights and obligations of States under international law and reaffirming the need to respect the territorial integrity and political independence of States.

Mr. President,

Over the period passed since the last General Debate, no substantive progress has been achieved in the settlement of the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict. Armenia continues to occupy the territories of Azerbaijan, including the Nagorno-Karabakh region and seven adjacent districts, in flagrant violation of international law and resolutions 822, 853, 874 and 884 adopted in 1993 by the United Nations Security Council. Its engagement in the conflict settlement process is nothing but imitation.

Azerbaijan cannot use economic potential of the occupied territories. The disruption of communications as a direct consequence of military occupation of territories is the serious obstacle to full-fledged socio-economic development of our country and the realization of region’s untapped economic perspective. Similarly, full potential of the region for intra and trans-regional connectivity remains under-utilized.

The humanitarian consequences of the conflict are equally harsh and necessitate urgent solutions. As a direct impact of massive displacement of people from their places of origin, close to one million refugees and IDPs continue to be deprived of their basic human rights and fundamental freedoms, most notably, the right to home and property. Further continuation of this situation is intolerable.

Armenia’s policy and practices in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan undermine the prospects of achieving a political settlement of the conflict and pose an imminent threat to peace, security and stability in the region.

The Republic of Azerbaijan has made it clear on numerous occasions that the unlawful presence of the armed forces of Armenia in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan is the major destabilizing factor with the potential of escalation at any time with unpredictable consequences and the main cause of tensions and incidents in the conflict zone.

Instead of engaging in negotiations in good faith, Armenia demonstratively disrupts any attempt to settle the conflict by peaceful means. In total disregard of the demands of the UN Security Council and in flagrant violation of international law, Armenia refuses to withdraw its troops from Azerbaijan, prevents the hundreds of thousands of Azerbaijani forcibly displaced persons from returning to their homes, and tries to further consolidate the *status quo* by altering the physical, demographic and cultural character of the occupied territories – a worrying development that was confirmed by the OSCE fact-finding missions.

Moreover, it frequently resorts to armed provocations trying to divert attention from the core, substantive issues of the peace process to technical aspects of the ceasefire. Most recently, in early April this year Armenia conducted large-scale attacks against the civilian population of Azerbaijan. It subjected the densely populated areas of Azerbaijan, including schools, hospitals, and places of worship, to intensive fire with heavy artillery and large-caliber weapons. As a result of Armenia's reckless attacks, large number of Azerbaijani civilians, including children, women and elderly were killed or seriously wounded. Without timely use of effective civil defense measures, the number of casualties among the population would be significantly higher. Armenia also systematically mutilated the bodies of fallen Azerbaijani soldiers.

During those attacks, 34 towns and villages in Azerbaijan suffered severe destructions. Substantial damages were inflicted upon private and public property, including civilian critical infrastructure. In particular, hundreds of civilian buildings, among them residential houses, schools, kindergartens, cultural centers and other civilian facilities were ruined.

Armenia's direct and deliberate attacks against the Azerbaijani civilian population, as well as inhuman acts against Azerbaijani military servicemen, during its offensive action in April this year, constitute yet another serious violation of international humanitarian and human rights law by Armenia.

By its deliberate, offensive actions, Armenia undermined the ceasefire regime established in 1994 and endangered the prospects for the political settlement of the conflict. Having received an effective response from Azerbaijan, Armenia was forced to ask for a ceasefire, which was agreed under the mediation efforts of the Russian Federation on April 5, 2016, in Moscow, at the meeting of Chiefs of Defence of Armenia and Azerbaijan. Despite that, it continues to violate the ceasefire. Moreover, Armenia is amassing forces and building heavily reinforced military fortifications in the seized Azerbaijani territories. Lately, Armenia started on September 19 this year, intensive military activity in the occupied Aghdam district of Azerbaijan. With all these, Armenia continues to challenge and tries to undermine the efforts of the international community, including the Presidents of the OSCE MG Co-Chairing countries, aimed at reaching a breakthrough at the peace talks and getting Armenia's troops out of sovereign lands of Azerbaijan.

Armenia must realize that relying on the status quo and armed provocations is a grave miscalculation. Its attempts to hypocritically mislead the international community on the root causes of the conflict by presenting themselves as a suffering side is doomed to fail.

Azerbaijan expects from Armenia to halt its military build-up in the occupied territories, and engage in negotiations with Azerbaijan in good faith so as to find a political solution to the conflict, which is long overdue.

The conflict can be resolved only and only on the basis of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Azerbaijan within its internationally recognized borders. The sooner Armenia reconciles with this reality and withdraws its armed forces from the occupied territories of Azerbaijan, the earlier the conflict will be resolved, and Armenia and its population will benefit from the prospects of cooperation and economic development.

Azerbaijan will spare no effort towards achieving the settlement of the conflict and ensuring peace, justice and development in the region.

Thank you.