Statement by President Ilham Aliyev

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[Excerpt from full remarks transcribed by the Parley Policy Initiative]

Every country and every leader faces its own challenges, but this cannot be speculated on. This is, as they say, the internal work of the house, everyone should do this work not only by articulating the issue of peace in the daily agenda, but also by convincing the public and working on an actual peace agenda.

But where is this agenda? What did we see in the two years after the war?

Armenia has not done any of the things it should have done. If we leave aside the rhetoric and this intonation of complaints, it has done nothing but complain in every meeting with the heads of foreign states. I can't find another name for it. This is just petty gossip and slander. I would call it anonymous, but it is not anonymous, everything is said on behalf of specific people.

Therefore, I think that in this context, the Armenian authorities should take full responsibility and be ready to sign a peace agreement. I said when we put forward these five principles that it should not be some kind of a multivolume document. It should be a very simple paper, a simple document outlining the fundamental principles.

Of course, there cannot be a conversation about our internal problems and all issues related to Karabakh. In my opinion, this is one of the reasons why the Armenian leadership is prolonging the issue. Because they have to make decisions and essentially state the issues that were recorded in Prague and then confirmed in Sochi in October. After all, the reference to territorial integrity and sovereignty, the Almaty declaration, clearly shows that they recognize Karabakh as an integral part of Azerbaijan. Immediately after that meeting, I declared that yes, this is our success, because Armenia has officially recognized the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Azerbaijan at last.

Anyone with a basic understanding of terms would know what sovereignty over the whole country and over the whole territory means. But they don't want to say “B” after saying “A”. They are bending over backwards to include the Karabakh issue in a possible peace agreement, and actually block it.

It is completely unacceptable for them to ignore the meeting of ministers in Moscow, referring to the happening of some events. But why did they ignore the meeting held in Prague on October 6? After all, an incident had happened at the border less than a

month prior to that too. Quite serious events had happened there. I don't want to go back to the details of how this ended for Armenia.

For some reason, the Armenian side went to Prague to meet with Macron, but did not go to Moscow. Then the comments of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs about the purely protocol behavior of the Armenian side are further evidence of that. In other words, it is both convenient and suitable to take the position of an offended party, but this position is very harmful to both the person and the country. As they say, pity is not the best tool in a politician's arsenal, especially when, if we speak in the accepted parlance, it is all fake.

In my opinion, this year will bring clarity to many issues.

By the way, I sincerely believed that we will be able to sign the agreement before the end of the year. But it didn't happen. What is Armenia waiting for? Perhaps they are waiting for some geopolitical changes, perhaps for something someone promised to them. Because it does look like that someone has promised them something. Because an objective analysis of the situation in the region, the balance of forces and the world's reaction to the events that happened two years ago, as well as the events that happened in September of last year and are currently happening on the Lachin-Khankendi road, shows that rescuing the drowning people is their own responsibility.

We can help. Only we can help them not to drown completely in this quagmire of Azerbaijanophobia and hysteria. How can we help? By saying yes, let's make peace.

Believe me, it is very difficult for me to say this, both as President and as an ordinary person. When I go to territories liberated from occupation, I go through the same as you and every Azerbaijani does. There is no need to talk about the feelings that inspire us all. Nevertheless, despite the suffering, the pain, the destruction of everything dear to us, we are speaking of peace. Do you understand that it is not easy both from a political point of view and from a humanitarian point of view. However, since we understand that it is in the long-term interests of Azerbaijan, we propose it.

But it will be on the table for a while. Then, as they say, we will not be particularly active. If they are not interested, we don't need it either. If they are not interested in delimitation, we don't need it either. This means that the border will pass where we believe it should. I am already compelled to use such terms. If the border has not been delimited, then who can say that the border passes here, and not there? I think it should be here. I have reasons to say this – historical, cartographic reasons.

Therefore, this issue should concern them more than us. We can live like this for a long time, there is no need for a peace treaty. But what will happen then? Time will tell. This

is why I think they will hear my messages and draw the right conclusions. Again, I don't want to be seen as someone putting pressure in this case. Under no circumstances have I shown any disrespect, not even in relation to someone not deserving any respect. I just have to point it out again. Because I think this year will be the last chance for them. Because then 2024 comes, and then in 2025, Russia's peacekeeping mission ends. They need to see slightly farther than their noses.