Right of reply by the Delegation of Azerbaijan
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General debate: item 4

Madame President,

We would like to exercise our right of reply with regard to the statements made by Denmark on behalf of the EU and Norway respectively.

There are no political prisoners in Azerbaijan. Individuals have not been charged for their political views or activities but concerning relevant criminal acts. There is no definition and criteria of the term of “political prisoner”. We believe that these criteria should be defined first of all. This politically exploited phenomenon has not found its proper legal assessment and definition neither in the CoE nor in the OSCE framework. In that regard, Azerbaijan does not recognize the mandate mentioned in EU statement and is not in a position to extend an invitation to this mandate.

There are no restrictions on the activities of NGOs in Azerbaijan. All NGOs duly registered in our country are enjoying all rights and freedoms in Azerbaijan. They should respect and abide by the requirements of national legislation regulating the activity of NGOs. In that regard, NGOs should sign an agreement with the relevant state agency for the state registration. The requirements of NGO legislation are referred to all NGOs and the any discriminative attitude has not been the case in that regard. The specific NGO referred by Norway has to hold discussions in the relevant state agency of Azerbaijan for registration procedures and the HRC forum is not suitable for raising such issues as it will not yield any positive or productive results for it.

With regard to the freedom of media in Azerbaijan, we would mention that this is a field where the Government of Azerbaijan makes its utmost efforts. At present, there are more than 3500 mass media outlets in our country, including 30 information agencies and 44 electronic mass media outlets. The speed of the internet and the number of internet users are on the constant rise in our country and more than 50 percent of the population. The internet is totally free in Azerbaijan and there are no restrictions on the ground. We believe that free use of internet is an important indicator of freedom of media and expression in the country. The State Fund for the Development of Media has become fully operational and contributes to the improvement of overall situation in the country.

Freedom of association is fully respected in Azerbaijan. According to the relevant legislation prepared jointly with the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe and received its positive feedback certain locations are offered for people to exercise their right of assembly and association and they are properly informed.
Construction and rebuilding projects in Baku city are ongoing according to the Master Plan of Baku City and resettlers have been informed well in advance and provided with the relevant amount of compensations. The renovation and reconstruction activities in Baku city are already ongoing for two years. We cannot understand why the delegation of Norway expresses its concern about an issue without studying it and having consultation with the authorities concerned.

We would call on the interested stakeholders not to use the cliché expressions and take into account the most serious problems of our country such as violation of human rights and basic freedoms of more than 1 million refugees and IDPs as a result of foreign military aggression.

In conclusion, Madame President, instead of making inaccurate remarks with regard to Azerbaijan, we would recommend Norway to pay more particular attention to the implementation of recommendations concerning the human rights situation of Sami people in the country reflected in the report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples submitted to the 18th session of HRC.

Thank you.