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Speaking at the opening of the conference, Education Minister Misir Mardanov noted the importance of the event and stressed that the work to improve the welfare of children is taken very seriously by the government. He added that, the aim of the event, organized by the Ministry of Education of Azerbaijan, UNICEF, Azerbaijan Teachers Institute and International Council for Education of People with Visual Impairment (ICEVI), is to find ways to involve disabled people in inclusive education, specify the prospects on their integration into society and environment without the barriers, as well as create conditions for professionals working in this field to become familiar with the successful experience of other countries.

The Minister stressed that the policy pursued by national leader Heydar Aliyev to protect children, is successfully continued under the leadership of the President Ilham Aliyev. He also noted the work implemented by the President of the Heydar Aliyev Foundation, Goodwill Ambassador of UNESCO and ISESCO, and MP Mrs. Mehriban Aliyeva in this direction.

He noted that during the years of independence, Azerbaijan became a part of several international agreements and conventions on human rights, and performs all the obligations undertaken by him within these documents. He noted that, currently, there are 60 thousand disabled children living in the country; 1105 children receive an education at special schools, 2664 – at special boarding schools (1353 of them stay overnight); 7750 children involved in homeschooling and 268 children get inclusive education.

Noting that the right of disabled people to education is enshrined in the Education Act of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Misir Mardanov stressed that the Ministry of Education implemented Development Programme for the education of disabled children to develop inclusive education in Azerbaijan in 2005-2009. According to him, considerable work has been done within the program to ensure the right of disabled children to education, implement the transition to inclusive education, create equal conditions for children at schools, strengthen the social protection of children, who are wards of the state, register and involve in the education all categories of disabled children, as well as conform the logistical and educational base of education institutions to international standards. Noting the exceptional contribution of the Heydar Aliyev Foundation to the implementation of programme, the Education Minister touched upon steps taken within the State Programme on de-institutionalization and alternative care (2006-2015).

Misir Mardanov noted that in order to enhance the ability of inclusive education, the Ministry in cooperation with UNESCO, developed and submitted to the Parliament the Draft Law on inclusive education to make appropriate changes to the education legislation. The Minister also stressed that “State programme for the development of inclusive education” was developed and presented to the Cabinet of Ministers by the technical support of UNESCO.

In his speech, the Minister also touched upon other issues related to inclusive education and underlined that planning and implementing measures aim to ensure the right of every disabled child to education. Minister of Education proposed the establishment of Research Center for Inclusive Education at Azerbaijan Teachers Institute by following best practices of other countries represented at the conference.

Next, head of the UNICEF Office in Azerbaijan Mark Hereward, Deputy Chairman of State Committee for Family, Women and Children Aynur Sofiyeva, Deputy Minister of Labour and Social Protection Natig Mammadov, head of the department of the Cabinet of

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Ministers Gurban Amirov, Rector of the Azerbaijan Teachers Institute Agiya Nakhchivanli noted the importance of the conference, and talked about measures undertaken in the country on inclusive education, study of international practices in this field, and also expressed their views and suggestions on issues of cooperation with international organizations.

Next, Professor of the Fontys University, the Netherlands, H. Schuman, rector of Institute of Special Pedagogy and Psychology, St. - Petersburg, DBiolSc, Prof. L. Shipitsyna, and director of the Institute for Integrative (Inclusive) Education of MGPPU, S. Alyokhina have given scientific reports.

On October 15, a seminar will be held at Azerbaijan Teachers Institute and the participants will be able to access the speakers on matters of mutual interest and receive information. Moreover, an exhibition of handmade and drawings prepared by the disabled children will be held at the conference as well.