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On September 20, President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev participated in the opening of Garabagh University in the city of Khankendi following its renovation.

The head of state met with the academic staff and students of Garabagh University and delivered his remarks.

### **Remarks by President Ilham Aliyev**

- Good morning. First, we would like to sincerely congratulate you and all the people of Azerbaijan on the occasion of State Sovereignty Day. We are celebrating this day together in KhimKhankendi, and I am sure that from now on, September 20 will be extensively celebrated across Azerbaijan.

Exactly one year ago, the heroic Azerbaijan Army fully restored our state sovereignty. As a result of the anti-terrorist operation that lasted less than a day, separatists were expelled, Azerbaijan fully ensured its state sovereignty, international law triumphed, and Azerbaijan demonstrated its strength once again. We always remember with immense gratitude our heroic soldiers who granted us this day. We cherish and will always cherish the dear memory of our martyrs who died for the homeland. May Allah rest the souls of all our martyrs in peace. More than 23,200 of our heroic sons rose to the peak of martyrdom during the Patriotic War and the anti-terrorist operation. The courage and patriotism of our other heroic soldiers were key contributors to our Victory. More than 90,000 young Azerbaijanis participated in the Second Karabakh War for the sake of the homeland.

As you know, our glorious Army advanced every day for 44 days, and settlements were liberated from the invaders daily. As far as I know, there have been no similar military operations in the world's military history. We did not step back even for a single day. Several villages, towns, and cities were liberated on a daily basis. Not a single person abandoned the battlefield.

In the meantime, according to Armenia's own officials, there were more than 12,000 deserters in the Armenian army. What does this indicate? Of course, it shows the high moral qualities of our people. At the same time, it shows that the young people who stepped forward were brought up in a spirit of patriotism, and the liberation of the Motherland was the most honorable mission for them. The young people who stepped forward and were prepared to die carried the mission of restoring our national dignity, and we did exactly that.

Therefore, the moral and psychological edge once again shows our overall superiority. As a country that has gone through a war, and as Commander-in-Chief, analyzing the factors that determined the outcomes of the war, I can say with full confidence that the national spirit and moral preparedness are paramount. Of course, professionalism, heroism, and the availability of equipment – all these are also important factors. But without moral superiority, without national thinking, not even the strongest army can ever achieve victory.

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As you know, there are wars, military conflicts, and clashes happening in many countries around the world these days. Their number is not decreasing; it is actually increasing, and everything is quite clear. We have sufficient opportunities and information to make comparisons. For 44 days, we broke through five, six, and at times even seven lines of enemy defense in this difficult geographical terrain, advancing every day, climbing from the bottom to the top, sustaining losses, and liberating the impregnable fortress of Shusha by climbing its steep rocks with only light weapons. What other army has displayed such heroism and shown such professionalism in modern history? This is the truth.

Of course, we are rightfully proud of this Victory and our soldiers, and we always will be. However, I am confident that every impartial analyst, military expert, and objective observer should be able to reach the same conclusion after analyzing the entire 44-day history of this heroism.

As for the anti-terror operation, the operation, which lasted only a few hours, ended with a complete victory for the Azerbaijani Army. The military contingent of the Armenian army, numbering more than 15,000, was completely paralyzed, and after just a few hours, we began discussing terms of surrender with them. It is said that it took 23 hours; yes, the whole process took 23 hours. However, the military component of this process lasted only a few hours.

All this is further evidence of the strength of our state, the determination of our people, and the upbringing and skills of the young generation. The Second Karabakh War and the anti-terrorist operation allowed Azerbaijan not only to restore international law, not only to restore its national pride, but also to demonstrate to the whole world that injustice cannot last forever.

During the occupation, I had many meetings with former IDPs. As you know, the government implemented several important projects to improve their living conditions. Almost every year, we relocated 15,000-20,000 former IDPs to new settlements, houses, and apartments, and thus their standard of living kept on improving. More than 300,000 formerly displaced people had already been moved from those dormitories, those unsuitable places and kindergartens.

However, at the same time, every time I met with them, I told them that this was only their temporary residence, and that the day would come when better conditions would be created for them in the liberated lands. I believed it, they believed it, all our people believed it, and we all lived with this idea. At the same time, over the years, I could see that their hopes were slowly dwindling. And this was natural because the occupation lasted nearly 30 years.

Thousands, even tens of thousands of former IDPs did not live to see this day of Victory. They passed away. Of course, when analyzing the processes going on in the world, the current injustices, the failure of international law, the great powers backing Armenia, and

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when analyzing all this, the geopolitical situation, some people could have thought that we had to live under this occupation forever.

We have shattered all these theses and paradigms! We have demonstrated that with strong will, professionalism, patriotism, and a young generation raised in the national spirit, no force can stand in the way of a nation like that. Not the 6th, 7th, 8th, 9th, or 10th defense lines, nor the geographical advantage of the Armenian army, which was positioned on all the hills, and not even the great powers or countries that armed Armenia and provided it with moral and physical support.

When all these factors come together, no one can stand in the way of such a nation. We have shown the entire world and the peoples still suffering from occupation or even colonialism today that they should have faith. Faith must never be broken. If faith is lost, then justice can never prevail. But there is still justice in the world. As President, I also thought at certain times that there was no justice in the world. But I knew that in order to achieve this justice, one must secure it themselves, as it will not fall from the sky.

Truth can be on your side, the whole world may acknowledge and know that you are right, but still there will be no result. Therefore, this should be the basis for our future endeavors. Of course, our example serves as a beacon of hope for many people still suffering from occupation and facing injustices today. This is important. But the primary goal for our people in the future is to rely on our own strength, to remain resilient, to build a powerful state, and to depend on no one, bowing down to no one.

Of course, there must be a state policy to ensure this, and there is. There must also be a unity in our society, and there is. The 44-day Patriotic War showed that there is probably no other country where society would demonstrate such unity as ours. The generation coming after us, the young people, should also follow this path. First of all, they should be educated in the national spirit, they should be attached to their culture, traditions, and moral values. They should not be influenced by anyone and should not be misguided by various promises.

This 30-year occupation of our lands showed it. Almost all the great powers, all of them, sought to perpetuate this occupation. No one wanted our people to free themselves from this occupation. In other words, they wanted to keep us under constant pressure, to use this occupation as a tool of influence, to secure their own interests, and, as a result, force us to come to terms with this situation.

During the occupation, visitors from different capitals repeatedly said that there was no military solution to this issue, to this conflict. You may also remember that there was a thesis - there is no military solution, and it should be solved peacefully. At the same time, it was not called 'the First Karabakh War' at that time, but the results of the Karabakh War should also be taken into account. In other words, what did they want us to come to terms with? They wanted us to accept defeat. They wanted our people to come to terms with that defeat.

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Another thesis was that it was necessary to start cooperating with Armenia. Various seminars were held through non-governmental organizations. Certain people in our society sold themselves to foreign circles, attended those trainings, mingled with Armenians, made deals, and organized joint meetings with them. What contacts could we have with the bloodthirsty enemy who had committed the Khojaly genocide and razed all our cities and villages in the Karabakh region to the ground? But the goal of those who wanted to perpetuate this occupation was that the future generation, the young generation, should no longer want war, that we should make peace with Armenia and thus the occupation would remain in place. We, the people of Azerbaijan, shattered all these plans, we overturned them.

This is exactly why we have come under pressure to this day. Every morning, I review the media, including the articles about Azerbaijan published in different parts of the world. Early this morning, I again came across many baseless accusations leveled against us. Politicians and officials from different Western countries, as well as official representatives of some other countries, make unacceptable statements that Azerbaijan has allegedly occupied Karabakh. This is the peak of hypocrisy. How can a country occupy its own land? Our war was the one of liberation. Those claiming this, those making these accusations against us know this perfectly very well. Simply put, it is double standards, hypocrisy, Islamophobia and enmity towards our people. We must never forget this and the young generation must remember this.

Of course, you did not live in those years and read about that period from history books. Therefore, teachers in both secondary schools and universities have a great responsibility on their shoulders. I would like to specifically mention our teachers and their work today. Because they have played a huge role in educating our youth in the spirit of patriotism, and they are still playing this role today. There are two sources of education - family and teachers. Fortunately, family values prevail in Azerbaijan and this should always be the case. This stems from our traditions. At the same time, in some Western countries, family values have completely deformed, and all of us are rightly disgusted about that. Therefore, family values and family education should always be protected! I repeat that teachers are working hard and effectively to improve the knowledge of children and young people while also educating them in the spirit of patriotism.

The Second Karabakh War showed this. Young people who had never seen Karabakh were prepared to die for it, they were ready to die. Some became martyrs, others were wounded. And yet they did not stop and secured this Victory. Many of our servicemen in military hospitals were asking the doctors, "Put me back on my feet as soon as possible and let me go back to the war again." There were many of them. After treatment, lightly wounded servicemen volunteered to return to the war zone.

We are also inaugurating the Garabagh University today. This opening could be held on any day, but I thought it would be best if we held it on September 20. Because this is our glorious history, I believe that the establishment of Garabagh University is a historic milestone, and a relevant order was signed last November. Then I arrived here. This is my third visit here, and all the instructions have been given. The Ministry of Science and Education took all the necessary measures promptly. You can say that the building has been reconstructed. This building was constructed by Azerbaijani architects and builders

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during the Soviet era. During the occupation, certain changes were made to make it appear Armenian.

Those signs have now been completely erased. The front yard of the building has been opened and a beautiful park has been created. A master plan has been developed, i.e. new educational buildings will be established in the coming years, perhaps in the next three years. A beautiful dormitory has been created and I visited it today. Most importantly, young people, i.e. students, have started to come here with great enthusiasm. I was told that there are 1,200 students. There are students from every region of our country. Those who have performed well in admission tests, including those who scored more than 600 points, are attending this meeting and have come here with enormous enthusiasm. The academic team has also been formed. I am aware that teachers are also very enthusiastic about this work, and I do hope that the Garabagh University becomes one of our leading universities.

There are all possibilities to do this. According to the information available, six faculties have already been established. A medical faculty will also be established in the coming years. The Faculty of Agrarian Sciences will operate in Khojaly and Faculty of Tourism will be based in Shusha. In other words, it will be a university spanning several cities. Of course, former IDPs who will return to Karabakh, their children will study here, and young people from all over our country will come here.

This is our historical land, and I am sure that there is no one in Azerbaijan who does not know this. They know all over the world that the city of Khankendi was an ancient Azerbaijani settlement and its name indicates that it was Khan's village. However, as a result of the policy of hostility against Azerbaijan and our people, our control here was either weak or completely non-existent for many years. The three agreements signed at the beginning of the 19th century – Kurakchay, Gulistan, and Turkmanchay – actually paved the way for subsequent occupation. It was after these agreements that Armenians, who had never lived in the land of Karabakh before, were moved here en masse from Iran and Eastern Anatolia.

This is the truth; this is an accurate account of history. Armenia and Armenian scientists, as always, tried to create a fictional history by distorting facts and managed to mislead the international community to some extent through their lobbying networks.

At the beginning of the 20th century, further hostile steps were taken against our people. In 1923, the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast was created in Karabakh, within the Azerbaijan Soviet Republic, without any basis whatsoever. This region was subordinated to the central authority of the Soviet Union. This was yet another step to sever this region from the rest of Azerbaijan. Three years prior to that, they had taken Zangezur away from us, i.e. West Zangezur, in a completely unjustifiable manner. They did this in November 1920, a few months after the fall of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic.

In 1923, they planted another time bomb, and then a policy of massive Armenianization was carried out here. The Soviet government deliberately brought Armenians here from

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in various places, including Armenia itself, in order to increase the number of Armenians within the former autonomous province. At the same time, there was no proper response to the separatist tendencies here. However, after National Leader Heydar Aliyev came to power in Azerbaijan, in 1969, all of the separatist nests here were eliminated and stability was set in. In the former Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast, the number of Azerbaijanis increased from 9 percent to approximately 30 percent. The railway was built so that Azerbaijanis from different regions could come here faster. A railway station was built in Khankendi and major infrastructure projects were implemented - the Sarsang and Sugovushan reservoirs, which the Armenians used to deprive us of water during the occupation. Several enterprises were established, and Azerbaijanis working in those enterprises came here from different regions, including the Karabakh region. All this was going on.

However, after Heydar Aliyev had resigned in 1987, separatists rose their head yet again, and this time it cost our people very dearly. The young people are probably unaware that two weeks after Heydar Aliyev's resignation, a Soviet Armenian scientist published an article in the French newspaper L'Humanité suggesting that the "Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast" should be severed from Azerbaijan and annexed to Armenia. In a matter of two weeks - Heydar Aliyev was no longer in power - a movement started here in Khankendi and in Armenia and various organizations were created.

The central government, i.e. the leadership of the Soviet Union, turned a blind eye to that. It actually encouraged separatists, Armenian nationalists, inciting them to become more active. The task was to separate Nagorno-Karabakh from the rest of Azerbaijan. Unfortunately, the then-leaders of Azerbaijan showed weakness, cowardice and even betrayal. Both in the late 1980s and early 1990s, we lost lands as a result of the treachery and cowardice of the Communist and Popular Front government.

Azerbaijanis were driven out of Khankendi, after then, four months after the declaration of independence, the Khojaly genocide was committed in February 1992. Shusha and Lachin were occupied in May 1992 and Kalbadjar in April 1993. Thus, if we look at the map, we can see that this entire region went out of our control and a geographical link was actually created between Armenia and the Karabakh region. This was our history.

Again, paying tribute to the memory of the National Leader today, we reiterate that had he not returned to Azerbaijan in 1993 at the request of the people, Azerbaijan could have completely disappeared from the world map. Stability was established, development was initiated and forming of a nation began. The logical result of that was November 8, Victory Day, the liberation of Shusha and the capitulation of Armenia. Subsequent history is already well known. If we analyze all our steps and the work we did from November 2020 to September 2023, we can see that each step was a logical continuation of the previous step, and the ultimate goal of each step was September 20, State Sovereignty Day.

Let me greet you from the bottom of my heart again! I can talk a lot about the history of Azerbaijan because I have lived this history, the history of the last 30 years, and visiting Karabakh, the free Karabakh today, seeing you, seeing the smiling faces of the students in the dormitory, on that balcony is a truly enormous happiness. There can hardly be any

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g greater happiness than this! I wish our teachers and students every success! Work hard and study well, so that Azerbaijan always gets the upper hand, so that Azerbaijan is always on top on the battlefield, if necessary, in the economic field and in the political field! I congratulate you.

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