**Remarks by Mr. Ulvi Aliyev, Chief of the International Cooperation Department of the State Migration Service of the Republic of Azerbaijan at the International Dialogue on Migration session on the theme “COVID-19 crisis: Reimagining the role of migrants and human mobility for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals”**

**Panel 5: Social cohesion and community resilience: countering discrimination and xenophobia against migrants**

**Good afternoon,**

It is an honor for me to join this panel on behalf of the State Migration Service of the Republic of Azerbaijan and availing myself of this opportunity I would like to express sincere appreciation to the International Organization for Migration as the role and activity of the organization became increasingly crucial in supporting vulnerable migrants and Member States to overcome consequences of the coronavirus pandemic during these challenging times.

The COVID-19 and challenges faced by the world countries as a result of this pandemic, as well as restrictions it caused on daily lives of people are among the most discussed and addressed topics, recently. As an infection spreading mostly through human-to-human contact, the COVID-19 urged states to take preventive measures such as national isolation, travel restrictions, closure of borders, and application of social distancing rules in order to protect from the virus. As a result, mobility and migration in the world became one of the areas affected severely by the pandemic, along with health and economy.

A standstill position of mobility and migration as a main catalyst of economic development in the world, as well as restriction measures on movement is going to have inevitable short-term and long-term effects. If during the first months of COVID-19, post-pandemic situation was being discussed in the world, currently life and economy parallel to pandemic is the topic of negotiations. Fine tuning all activity types in accordance with social distancing requirements and restrictions of movement, addressing needs of people, restoring economic dynamics requires application of new approaches and innovative solutions. These approaches and solutions should cover every aspect of migration management in order to pursue inclusive policies that make sure no one is left behind.

In order to have a proper response mechanism several components should be taken into account when adjusting policies and strategies with crisis situations, in our case with COVID-19. First of all legislative and institutional framework that is able to cope with the sudden emergencies should be already in place. Taking this into account one of the key priorities in governance of international migration in our country, in Azerbaijan is future adoption and implementation of the “National Strategy on Migration of the Republic of Azerbaijan”. The Strategy is envisaged to serve as a road map in effective management of migration in the country, establishing and improving relevant policies providing protection of migrants’ human rights, and implementation of the 23 objectives and 10 guiding principles laid down in the GCM. It also exclusively includes preparation of programme related with management of migration in emergency situations.

In order to turn the words into action we need to have capable executing systems which rely on cutting edge IT solutions, adapts changing environments. In this regard, Azerbaijan built its migration policy on maximum convenience of migrants, reducing administrative procedures to the possible extent, almost close to zero and digitalization. After the restriction on transportation of passengers by all means between Azerbaijan and other states was applied, especially with neighbouring states we kept borders open under special conditions for the crossing of nationals of those states, while other states organized charter flights. During this period, temporary staying period of migrants in the country who did not want to go back to their countries due to various reasons, including due to these lockdowns and restrictions was extended until the borders will be opened and no additional document was required for this. Main purpose of these actions is to extent the protection mechanism of the Government towards all migrants, regardless of their status, presenting in the country.

The most effective way of implementing legalization measures within the social distancing rules and special quarantine regime is application of online services. Indeed, in our experience, one of the natural consequences of the COVID-19 period was rapid increase on demand to e-services and emergence of need to further facilitate this process. From the first days of pandemic we kept an eye on measures towards increasing the number of rendered e-services, updating them and ensured the implementation of all required services online during this period.

These issues bring up another important component which is awareness-raising. The Office the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in its Recommendation on the human rights of migrants during the COVID-19 period, published on 7 April 2020, emphasized the importance of awareness-raising in all areas. During COVID-19, it is especially important for migrants to be regularly informed in different languages about the prevalence of the pandemic in the country, as well as their movement within the requirements of the special quarantine regime.

Various awareness raising tools, video instructions were developed for persons who face difficulties in using e-services. Furthermore, those persons and migrants are able to contact the Call Centre of our Service operating non-stop in 3 languages and also there were special conditions in order to apply via social networks for assistance. It is also possible to get access to e-services via mobile application of the Service (MigAz). During this period, the State Migration Service regularly disseminated information on each issue that is related with the status of migrants, as well as restrictions of movements through all possible means of awareness-raising.

As an integral part of inclusive migration management with whole of society approach, introduction of new ideas and innovative methods, sharing of best practices and achievements could not be possible without partnerships. To this end the State Migration Service has developed structured dialogue mechanisms with relevant stakeholders of migration. Be it international organizations through various platforms, be it civil society organizations through Public Council, or be it private sector via Advisory Board. It aims to increase roles of various segments of society on formation of migration policy, as well as to ensure their direct participation in the management of migration processes. Several social assistance projects were carried out in partnership with these structures in order to support migrants suffering from the outcomes of COVID-19. These social assistance projects are extensively targeted categories of vulnerable migrants, such as refugees, asylum seeker, and stranded migrants in order to ease the pain of the outcomes of the COVID-19.

We also highly appreciate our close cooperation with our international partners, such as IOM, UNHCR and many others. When it comes to collaboration with international partners the Government of Azerbaijan has been closely cooperating with the United Nations relevant bodies and submits regular reports about the implementation of the rights and freedoms enshrined in international instruments. During this period, close cooperation with the International Organization for Migration continued. IOM shared with SMS important policy documents, information and guideline and initiated further activities during the COVID-19 period.

Meanwhile, under the overall outcome of promoting migrant-inclusive response to COVID-19 and assisting migrants in vulnerable situations, a regional emergency response project by IOM providing humanitarian assistance to stranded, vulnerable migrants (foreign nationals) is being conducted and we appreciate work of IOM in this regard.

In conclusion, as a representative of multiethnic and multi-religious country I would like to note that multiculturalism and diversity should be at the center of attention at all levels of policymaking and planning by protecting legitimate interests of persons belonging to minorities. In the spirit of traditional tolerance and harmonic coexistence of different groups, the equality of all citizens without any ethnic, religious or linguistic definition should be guaranteed by the law. Only with these in hand we can talk about effective fight against discrimination and xenophobia.

Last but not least, we should focus on eliminating the root causes of this phenomenon and express solidarity for joint action. And one of the root causes is conflicts in global hot spots which lead to forced displacement. This in turn deprive people from their homes and expose them more to human rights violation, discrimination and xenophobia by making them vulnerable.

**Thank you.**