



SPEECH AT THE OPENING CEREMONY OF THE WORLD LEADERS SUMMIT

by

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*Distinguished Secretary-General of the United Nations,
Distinguished heads of state and government,
Ladies and gentlemen,
I welcome you all to Azerbaijan.*

Many of our guests are visiting Azerbaijan for the first time. I hope they will have a chance to get acquainted with our country, its history, traditions, and culture.

I would like to thank the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. António Guterres, and the Secretariat of the UNFCCC for their support of Azerbaijan on the path to COP29. I congratulate my dear brother, President of the UAE, His Highness Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, and all his team on the landmark UAE consensus achieved at COP28 in Dubai, and their support in the preparation for COP29 in Baku.

Last December, by a unanimous decision of almost 200 countries, Azerbaijan was honored to host COP29. We consider this decision as a sign of respect for our country, as well as an appreciation of our active role on the international arena.

Azerbaijan is a country where East and West, North and South meet, and this is not only about geography. We can build political, cultural, energy, trade, and transportation bridges between different international actors. The mega projects initiated by Azerbaijan have already changed the energy and transportation maps of Eurasia and have led to the establishment of fruitful multinational cooperation formats.

Despite the 30-year-long occupation by Armenia of almost 20% of the internationally recognized territories of Azerbaijan, despite ethnic cleansing and the deportation of 1 million Azerbaijanis from their ancestral lands, we managed to build a strong country with a self-sufficient economy and independent policy. Four years ago, we celebrated the historical Victory in the Second Karabakh War.

A year ago, we fully restored our sovereignty in accordance with the UN Charter, international law, and UN Security Council resolutions, which had remained on paper for 30 years. We implemented these resolutions ourselves and restored international law, justice, and put an end to the Armenian occupation. As the President of COP29, Azerbaijan will do its best to find a common understanding between developed and developing countries, between the Global South and the Global North. For four years, by unanimous

decision of 120 countries, Azerbaijan successfully chaired the Non-Aligned Movement, the second international institution after the United Nations.

Azerbaijan is also an active member of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, which unites almost 60 countries. Azerbaijan has signed agreements and adopted declarations on strategic partnership with 10 members of the European Union. All this allows us to think that we may be very helpful and useful in building bridges between different important actors on the issue of climate change. Azerbaijan is an active supporter of multilateralism. At the same time, we play an active role in intercultural dialogue.

Together with the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations, every two years, we organize the Intercultural Dialogue Forum in Baku. Multiculturalism is our state policy and, at the same time, it is our lifestyle. The people of Azerbaijan, regardless of their ethnic or religious identity, live in peace and harmony as one family.

Now, I'd like to say a couple of words about Azerbaijan's green agenda. Our technical potential for renewable energy is estimated at 135 gigawatts onshore and 157 gigawatts offshore. Last year, Masdar from the UAE inaugurated the solar power plant of 230 megawatts, the biggest in our region. ACWA Power from Saudi Arabia is currently constructing a wind power station with a potential capacity of 240 megawatts.

During COP29, an agreement will be signed with bp from the UK to build a 240-megawatt solar power station in the district of Jabrayil, which was liberated from Armenian occupation four years ago. This project will provide decarbonization of one of the biggest oil and gas terminals in the world, the Sangachal terminal.

By 2030, we plan to build solar, wind, and hydro power stations of approximately six gigawatts. But this is not all of our plans. Contracts and MoUs for 10 gigawatts of renewable energy projects have been signed.

We are also looking at export markets and working actively with our partners in order to implement another important energy security project—the Black Sea Caspian energy cable.

This will allow us to export green energy to Europe, and the technical potential of this cable – by the way, feasibility studies will be ready very soon—is close to four gigawatts. But again, this is only the beginning. Our green agenda also covers different regions of Azerbaijan, so Nakhchivan, Karabakh, and East Zangazur regions of Azerbaijan have been declared green energy zones, and this is about the quarter of our territory.

Now, a couple of words I'd like to say about another segment of energy security, which is oil and gas. I understand that this topic is not very popular at a climate change conference, but without that, my comments would not be complete. Just to begin with information, the world's first industrial oil well was drilled in Azerbaijan, in Baku, in 1846. It is situated not far from this place. Maybe it may take a 10–15 minute drive. The first offshore oil well was also drilled by Azerbaijani oilmen in the Caspian Sea in the middle of 20th century. In the 19th century, Azerbaijan produced more than half of the world's oil.

If, then, some Western politicians and media called us a petrostate, that would probably have been acceptable. But when they call us a petrostate now, today, this is not fair, and it only demonstrates a lack of political culture and knowledge. Today, Azerbaijan's share of global oil production is 0.7%, and its share of global gas production is 0.9%. But the fake news media of the country, which is the number one oil and gas producer in the world and produces 30 times more oil than Azerbaijan, calls us a petrostate.

They had better look at themselves, or at least at their neighbor, which produces 10 times more oil than Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan's share in global gas emissions is only 0.1%. I have to bring these figures to the attention of our audience because right after Azerbaijan was elected as the host country of COP29, we became the target of a coordinated, well-orchestrated campaign of slander and blackmail.

Western fake news media, so-called independent NGOs, and some politicians seemed to be competing in spreading disinformation and false information about our country. To accuse us of having oil is the same as accusing us of having more than 250 sunny days a year in Baku.

Countries should be judged by other criteria. For instance, the level of unemployment in Azerbaijan, it is 5.4%, the level of poverty, it is 5.2%, our green agenda—I have already described our plans – how countries manage their foreign debt – in Azerbaijan, it's only 7.5% of GDP.

These, along with many other important criteria, should serve as the basis for evaluating the country's performance, rather than its natural resources, which are a gift from God. I said this several months ago, and now those who want to attack me, particularly the international media, simply quote me saying that this is a gift from God.

And I want to repeat it here today: it is a gift from God. Every natural resource, whether it's oil, gas, wind, sun, gold, silver, copper, they are all natural resources. Countries should not be blamed for having them, and should not be blamed for bringing these resources to the market because the market needs them. The people need them. So, this is my message. As the President of COP29, of course, we will be strong advocates for the green transition, and we're doing it, but at the same time, we must be realistic.

Another point of accusation is that two years ago, Azerbaijan and the European Commission signed a Declaration on strategic partnership in the field of energy. But it was not our idea. It was a proposal from the European Commission. The President of the European Commission came to Baku two years ago to sign this document with us. Because they needed our gas due to the change of geopolitical situation, and they asked us to help. And we said, "Okay." We are always ready to help if our help is needed. We said, "Okay, we will help Europe with the energy security." When we signed this declaration two years ago, the number of countries, which were receiving our gas, I mean, European countries, was equal to two. So now, it's eight countries.

Eight out of ten countries, which have access to Azerbaijani gas are in Europe. The European Commission also asked us to double the gas supply to Europe by 2027, and this is reflected in the Declaration, which was signed by the President of European Commission and myself two years ago in Baku. Unfortunately, double standards, the habit of lecturing other countries, and political hypocrisy have become a kind of modus operandi for some politicians, state-controlled NGOs, and fake news media in some Western countries.

My last message is for those who, for almost one year, have been advocating for a boycott. They used all the tools in their possession to launch a campaign to boycott COP29 in Baku. I have bad news for them. We have 72,000 registered participants from 196 countries. Among them are 80 presidents, vice-presidents, and prime ministers. So, the world has gathered in Baku, and we say to the world: Welcome to Azerbaijan.

Thank you.