The 3rd World Forum on Intercultural Dialogue took place on May 18-19 in Baku, Azerbaijan, in close collaboration with the government of Azerbaijan, UNESCO, the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC), the World Tourism Organization, the Council of Europe and Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO).

Azerbaijan is one of the unique places where different cultures and civilizations meet at the crossroad between the East and the West, the North and the South. At the same time, being a member of both Islamic and European organizations, Azerbaijan absorbs the values of these civilizations, thus enabling it to assume a role of genuine bridge. Dialogue between cultures, the oldest and most fundamental mode of democratic conversation, is an antidote to rejection and violence. Its objective is to enable the peoples of the world to live together peacefully and constructively in a multicultural world, to develop a sense of community and belonging. “Baku Process” for the promotion of intercultural dialogue was initiated by Mr. Ilham Aliyev, President of the Republic of Azerbaijan in the Conference of Ministers of Culture of Europe and its Neighboring Regions held in Baku on 2-3 December, 2008.

The 3rd World Forum with main title “Culture and sustainable development in the post 2015 development agenda” focused primarily on projects and programs dedicated to the 21st of May World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development declared by the UN General Assembly, as well as the role of faith, religions, or beliefs, in order to create, at the national, regional and global levels, an environment conducive to respect for cultural diversity, human rights and mutual understanding.

President Ilham Aliyev made the remarks at the opening ceremony. “Azerbaijan plays a very positive role on the regional scale. Our initiatives are aimed towards strengthening regional cooperation, issues related to energy security. Azerbaijan’s projects and initiatives go far beyond the region, noting these are the projects that connect countries and continents. He also mentioned that education is the best guarantee against terrorism, extremism and fundamentalism, adding that Azerbaijan’s young generation is very patriotic”. Touching upon the negative tendencies, Azerbaijani president pointed out the “dangerous trends of the neo-fascist movement, calling on the leaders of the international community to demonstrate a serious attitude to this issue”.

UNESCO director general Ms. Irina Bokova highlighted the importance of the World Forum on Intercultural Dialogue, saying Baku Process teaches dialogue and interaction to young people. She also stressed that today the people need more freedom of expression. “It is necessary to show the power of the peoples’ cultural heritage regardless of their differences and to render more support to the youth”.

Speaking at the forum, Mr. Othman Alswajri, ISESCO director general said multiculturalism is what the world should seek today. “The time in which we live in is critically important and requires the courage to hold a dialogue. This dialogue can ultimately lead to mutual understanding and respect. Multiculturalism is something that the world should seek today”, Alswajri said.

Plenary and working sessions dedicated to the role of education, the youth, arts, tourism in the rapprochement of cultures and their dialogue, “Dialogue of Culture Capitals” meeting, 2nd World Conference of Ministers of Culture and Tourism was held as part of the forum. Azerbaijan hosted the 1st World Forum on Intercultural Dialogue in 2010, 2nd World Forum on Intercultural Dialogue was held on May 29 – June 1, 2013 in Baku, under the motto “Living together peacefully in a diverse world”. Program implied several sessions as “How to build the world future together?”, “How to build the popular support for cultural diversity?” The New Era of Globalization: Hybridity of cultures in changing world, “Supporting Intercultural Actions” encompassing side events prepared and led by partner organizations, including the celebration of “Do one thing for Diversity and Inclusion”, Intercultural Innovation Award ceremony for Central Asia, Black Sea and Mediterranean regions, 1st Alumni Summit of the “Emerging Leaders”, conference of “Global Network Towards a global intercultural cities learning community”, the workshop “Intercultural Dialogue through History Teaching: Best Practices and Challenges”, the sessions of “Tourism as a key driver of mutual understanding and tolerance among cultures, intercultural dialogue through faith and science”, etc.

Placing intercultural dialogue and cultural diversity higher on the international agenda is critical for human security and a prime responsibility of our time. Mentioned forums have reached remarkable achievements by bringing together heads of governments, ministers, various international organizations, senior policy makers, cultural professionals, goodwill ambassadors, experts, journalists, practitioners, prominent intellectuals and activists. The World Forums became an international platform to enable and encourage people, countries and organizations around the globe to take concrete actions to support diversity, dialogue and mutual understanding among nations by raising awareness on the importance of intercultural dialogue worldwide.