**The Joint Statement**

**of The Leaders of Religious Denominations Operating in Azerbaijan**

**In the Name of the One Almighty Creator!**

We, the members of the Consultative Council of the Leaders of religious denominations operating in Azerbaijan, on the occasion of the centenary of Heydar Aliyev, the respected person who has a special place in the history of Azerbaijan, the National Leader of the Azerbaijani people, declare the following.

The National Leader Heydar Aliyev, the Founder and the Savior of the Independent State of Azerbaijan, has an outstanding role and service to the history of our Statehood. Above all, we pay a special importance to the high spiritual values of this prominent person. Along many years, this spirituality was the essence of the National Leader's service to the country and the Nation. After returning to power at the call of the people in the independent Azerbaijan, at the oath ceremony of the President of Azerbaijan, he laid the tradition of the oath on our Holy Book along with the Basic Law - Constitution, and visited the religious temples, and addressed believers "Let us all be one in the way of God". By all this, the wise Heydar Aliyev actually demonstrated his respect for the religion and importance of the spiritual values in the life of people. Visiting the Holy House of Kaaba, the National Leader prayed there for the God blessing of the people and the state of Azerbaijan, for our independence to be eternal, and for the restoration of our territorial integrity. Being a wise Head of State, Heydar Aliyev was attaching a great importance to the role of religious and moral values in the development of the Nation, and its spiritual renaissance, and the close interweaving with lofty goals and aspirations. After the restoration of the Martyr Bibiheybat Mosque, the call to prayer from the Heydar Minaret became a symbol of devotion and respect for religious and spiritual values in Azerbaijan.

National leader Heydar Aliyev saved our Statehood by defeating the intentions of those who wanted to divide our country on the ethnic separatism and religious grounds, to weaken it spiritually, and to provoke sectarian discrimination. Great Leader Heydar Aliyev created a lasting foundation of Azerbaijani statehood by mobilizing all our citizens around the ideology of Azerbaijanism, regardless of their national and religious identity. All our victories as a people, and as a state, and especially the Great Victory, which we are proud of today, are the triumph of Heydar Aliyev's policy. Karabakh victory is a masterpiece of the Great Leader and the worthy follower of his political course, the honorable President Ilham Aliyev. "There is no Karabakh without Shusha, there is no Azerbaijan without Karabakh" - said the Great Leader, and his biggest dream came true. Putting an exclamation point over the sentence "Karabakh is Azerbaijan", President Ilham Aliyev followed the will of the Great Leader, liberated Shusha, restored historical justice, so the right cause of our people has won. The grounds of these achievements were prepared by the Great Leader's outstanding efforts during the first years of his presidency, aiming to build a strong economy, to create a modern army responding highest requirements, and to increase the military potential. The National Leader Heydar Aliyev's hard work and outstanding diplomatic struggle to spread the realities of Azerbaijan all over the world at various international events and platforms during many years have paid off. Azerbaijan entered the stage of peaceful and sustainable development and construction, and the work of ensuring the interests of our country was carried out on the international scale. The "Contract of the Century" signed in 1994, the pipelines that ensured the export of Azerbaijani oil and gas to the world markets made our country to take its special place in the world oil policy. Today, the foundations of Azerbaijan's transformation into an important transport corridor of the world have been laid. Through the International Conference on the Restoration of the Historical Silk Road, the International Symposium on "Islamic Civilization in the Caucasus", and hundreds of geopolitically important and prestigious international events, National Leader Heydar Aliyev made a great contribution to the promotion of Azerbaijan as a place of economic cooperation, inter-civilizational and intercultural dialogue, and tolerance on a global scale. His Excellency Heydar Aliyev, had an equal approach towards Azerbaijani citizens of all denominations, and respect to the time-tested customs. Together with compatriots, he was participating in the holidays of various communities, and greeting them all. In 1998, the Baku diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church was established, the Church of “Myrrh-Bearing Women” was restored. It was a big step towards meeting the religious needs of the Orthodox community of our country. Also, a new synagogue was built for the Jewish community of Azerbaijan, and a church was built for the Catholic community as well. During the presidency of the Great Leader, influential religious figures of the world started to visit Azerbaijan as a place of tolerance. Patriarchs of Georgia and Russia have visited Azerbaijan many times. At the invitation of Heydar Aliyev, Pope John Paul II of the Roman Catholic Church visited Azerbaijan in 2001. Inviting that widely-known personality to our country, the Great Leader attracted attention of the international community to Azerbaijan and realized the mission of promoting the success story and challenges of the young, independent state of Azerbaijan. Thus, a solid ground of the interreligious and intercultural relations with the Vatican and other World religious centers was laid.

It was Heydar Aliyev who started the tradition of sharing the joy of Ramadan by coming together around the Iftar table along with representatives of various confessions, and this became an example of the religious and spiritual harmony. Even so, our Great Leader exponentially demonstrated the ethno-religious solidarity and multiculturalism of the Azerbaijani people. Azerbaijan is a place distinguished by its respect for national and human values. Respect for these values became a nationwide issue during the Great Leader`s times, and tolerance and multiculturalism became a state policy. Saying that "high tolerance is a manifestation of high culture", Great Leader created grounds of the policy of multiculturalism, meeting the leaders of different denominations of Azerbaijan, in the frame of various events and ceremonies, especially related to the International Day of Tolerance. Like all the initiatives of the Great Leader for the sake of the happy future of our Motherland, his endless respect for national and spiritual values is alive today in a dignified manner, particularly, in his family hearth. It`s a state of our happiness that the light of faith is kept today in the hearth of the Aliyev family, and we witness that in the activities of Excellencies Ilham Aliyev and Mehriban Aliyeva.

Today, the fruits of the large-scale works initiated by Heydar Aliyev in all spheres of the country's life serve the Statehood and the people of Azerbaijan. While the State of Azerbaijan exists, Heydar Aliyev's school will last, and his political course will continue to be pursued by his followers, and his name and dear memory will always live in the hearts of the people of Azerbaijan. Today, we commemorate the Great Leader Heydar Aliyev and his faithful companion of life Zarifa Aliyeva with great love, respect and gratitude, and pray for their souls. May the soul of the Great Leader rejoice!

**Sheikh-ul-Islam Allahshukur PASHAZADEH,**

**Chairman of the Caucasus Muslims’ Board**

**Milix YEVDAYEV,**

**Head of the Mountain Jews community in Azerbaijan**

**Archimandrite ALEXIY NIKONOROV,**

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**Bishop Vladimir FEKETE,**

**Ordinary of the Roman Catholic Church in Baku**

**Alexander SHAROVSKY,**

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**Robert MOBILI,**

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