

## **DECLARATION OF INTERNATIONAL COALITION OF “RECOGNIZE TO RECONCILE” INITIATIVE**

In times of unprecedented challenges, we are entering an era where, it is the obligation for active players of international relations, to decrease our planet’s conflict potential. This is particularly true, where opportunities for transition from conflict to peace exist.

Sustainable peace can’t not be achieved but with Justice. The latter is a fundamental building block for the former, thus it needs to be addressed at once.

One such important opportunity emerged in the critical region of South Caucasus, when Nagorno Karabakh conflict effectively ended in November 2020. That is why, international community’s efforts are vital to help in building sustainable peace between two neighbouring countries, namely Azerbaijan and Armenia.

This latest development also offers high momentum, for international civil societies, in particular community of peacebuilders, to support these efforts by building bridges of dialogue, trust, and reconciliation, between peoples of two countries in parallel to normalization process.

**As Justice and peace go hand in hand**, it is important to address the conflict related atrocities, war crimes and mass violations of international law, to lay a solid ground for peace to come. In this regard, it is important to state that this year is the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Khojaly massacre, which constitutes the gravest and the most massive human rights violation during the Nagorno Karabakh conflict. But it also presents an utmost challenge but a unique opportunity and possibility of peace building in the region.

Those who do not know the region, Khojaly was a town with more than 6000 strong Azerbaijani population. On the night of 26 February 1992, the Armenian armed forces seized the town and brutally murdered 613 innocent civilians, including 63 children, 106 women and 70 elderlies as well as severely injured 487 persons. Armenian forces took 1275 civilians as hostages. The inherent elements of this well documented tragedy qualify the incident as an act of genocide, as defined by the international law, including the **Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide**.

As leaders both in Armenia and Azerbaijan have recently announced their willingness “to turn the page” and start “era of peace in the region”, we think that it is time for strong international mediation to help communities to overcome the shadow of Khojaly tragedy through recognition, dialogue, and ultimate reconciliation.

In this regard, we welcome the timely initiative under the title “**Recognize to reconcile**” of the Budapest Centre for prevention of genocide and mass atrocities, which was announced at the discussion panel, which was held on 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2022, in OSCE Headquarters in Vienna.

We express our commitment to work during the entire year of Khojaly's tragic anniversary, with a view of achieving 3 specific objectives of the initiative:

- a) To provide and support education of civil society in both Armenia and Azerbaijan, on the importance of both elements of the initiative - "reconciliation and recognition".
- b) To raise awareness, at national and international level, to invite and encourage Armenia to properly recognize Khojaly massacre and offer a public apology to its victims. This would be an important cornerstone for reconciliation efforts
- c) To facilitate, direct dialogue between Azerbaijanis and Armenians, aimed at overcoming memories of conflict and jointly find ways for reconciliation and sustainable peace
- d) To launch a coalition of international civil society organizations to achieve these ends

We invite all civil society actors in Europe and beyond, to join this yearlong activity and share their experience, resources and knowledge, in supporting its noble causes of **Justice and Peace** in the South Caucasus and beyond.