**Opening of the High Level Meeting**

“**FREEDOM FROM VIOLENCE: PEACE, SECURITY AND CONFLICT PREVENTION IN THE 2030 DEVELOPMENT AGENDA”**

**Italian Senate, Rome 27 November 2019**

**Your Excellency Mrs. President of the Italian Senate,**

**Excellencies,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

**It is a special honour for me to be here in the historic City of Rome and to address the Opening of the 19th High Level Meeting of the Nizami Ganjavi International Center.**

**I would like to thank the Organizers very much for their kindest invitation and to express my deepest thanks to Her Excellency the President of the Italian Senate, Mrs. Elisabetta Casellati,**

**for her warm hospitality inside the Italian Senate, this symbolic building, the temple of democracy for the Italian Republic.**

**In this significant international gathering,**

**we have prominent speakers that will highlight the different aspects and approaches of violence and its prevention, through synergies and dialogue, understanding and co-operation.**

**And such occasions are really important**

**as we have only one decade left to reach the goals of the 2030 Agenda that our leaders have set in order the future generations to witness sustainability in our world, in our societies, in our planet.**

**I would like to speak as a Goodwill Ambassador of UNESCO and to humbly share with you my outmost faith on education, arts and culture as the three prisms through which we can see the perspective of our world,**

**becoming better and more humane.**

**Education as our window to the future, arts as our common language and culture as our identity.**

**In his book “Turning back the clock” Umberto Eco wrote that “*Our only hope is to work on local peace*”.**

**Indeed, while global peace seems so difficult to be achieved, “local peace” is one of the keys for sustainable societies.**

**Education, arts and culture are so deeply rooted in peoples’ lives and they can help them bring the change in their communities, in their cities, in their countries.**

**They broader aspirations for peace, human rights, diversity and inclusion and they speak in the minds of people, reforming attitudes in a way that no rule, law or policy can impose.**

**Let us all remember the Preamble of the UNESCO Constitution in 1945, almost 75 years ago, declaring that “since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed”.**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

**Culture is both the vehicle and the destination for sustainable development. I am particularly pleased by the opportunity we have to talk about it further, here in Italy, in the country whose spirit, art and history have been emblematic and prized worldwide, constituting a bridge across cultures and continents for centuries.**

**We all agree that our shared future lays in our hands.**

**And in these significant years to come, humanity is called to cultivate three great moral qualities that His Holiness Pope Francis pointed out in his recent message at the UN Global Climate Summit:**

**honesty, responsibility and courage.**

**Let us all recall these three words in our future efforts.**

**Our today’s Meeting in Rome starting with the blessing of His Holiness was a memorable occasion that filled our heart with hope and inspiration.**

**I feel deeply grateful for this enlightening moment and for His Holiness’s invaluable support to all of us!**

**Wishing all the best for the success of this Meeting, allow me to express my thankfulness to H.E. the President of the Italian Republic Mr. Sergio Mattarella, to the Italian Government and to Mr. Franco Frattini for embracing it so warmly.**

**I would also like to thank Their Excellencies the President of Azerbaijan Mr. Ilham Aliyev and the Vice President Mrs. Mehriban Aliyeva for supporting “Nizami Ganjavi International Center” during all these years.**

**Excellencies, dear friends,**

**We will be very pleased to welcome you to Athens in January 21st and 22nd for the 20th High Level Meeting.**

**It will be held under the auspices of H.E. the President of the Hellenic Republic**

**Mr. Prokopios Pavlopoulos and it will be dedicated on the very important theme of "Climate Change and its impact on the Life and the Cultural Heritage of the Mediterranean" .**

**This is very fortunate because in 2020**

**we celebrate 2.500 years from the Battle of Thermopylae and the Battle of Salamis against the Persian Empire.**

**The most glorious loss and the greatest victory of the Ancient Greeks that gave the opportunity to the Golden Age of Athens, and therefore democracy, philosophy and arts, to flourish and to become the foundations of the European civilization.**

**On this occasion, we will be honored to include in the program two important scientific events under the auspices of the President of the Hellenic Republic.**

**They will both reflect our common aspirations and will highlight the importance of co-existence and cultural correlation of small and big countries, sending the message of peace and of our common heritage and future.**

**Closing, I would like to express my warmest congratulations to our Co-Chairs, Dr Vaira Freiberga and Dr Ismail Serageldin,**

**and all our fellow Board Members on their remarkable work that makes the “Nizami Ganjavi International Center” a shining example of what the international community can achieve by working together on major humanitarian and social issues.**

**It is an honour for me to be part of this great team!**

**Grazie mille!  Thank you very much!**