

## **Mugham as a Vector for the Dialogue among Civilizations**

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Your Excellency, Madame First Lady,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great privilege for me to be invited to such an important gathering where an important aspect of humanity's intangible cultural heritage will be discussed. Over centuries, Mogham served as a major tool to celebrate, preserve and pass to succeeding generations a special part of our common cultural heritage. It can be seen as a unique phenomenon in the history of the world's civilizations - where indeed the East was always the creator of exceptions.

Mogham as an exception to the written form of music was born in Greater Persia as the purest form of compositions, singing and songs marrying all forms of regional musical arrangements comprising Kurds,

Azeri, Gilaki, Baluchi and Khorasani. Recently, mugham music in Khorasan has been recognized as an aspect of intangible cultural heritage representing the rich poetry and philosophy of its ancestry. We must recall that Khorasan in its ancient configuration covered a vast geographical area reaching as far as Turkmenistan and the Chinese borders. The commerce route linking the West and the East of the Eurasian continent, which is known as the Silk Road, carried over the centuries not only precious merchandise but transmitted also culture, knowledge and belief and thus had a profound impact on Eurasian peoples' lives. Centuries-old connections served for mutual enrichment of different civilizations.

Contemporary Azerbaijani Mugham reflects Azerbaijan's history and its contacts with Persians, Armenians, Georgians and Turkish peoples. This musical genre shares artistic characteristics with the Iraqi Maqam, the Persian Radif and the Turkish Makams.

To adapt and adjust to the necessity of modern world, a new and fresh version of mugham namely the "industrial mugham" has been promoted in today's Azerbaijan. The name itself conjures up images of East vs. West, tradition vs. modernity. This innovation combines the elements of mugham with the rhythms of modern "techno-house" music.

UNESCO has acknowledged the authenticity, richness and cultural significance of mugham in the context of both national and global culture, when it declared it in 2003 as a "Masterpiece of Oral and Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity". The announcement reads as follows:

*Considered to be the classical music of Azerbaijan, Mugham is a traditional musical form characterized by a large degree of improvisation and draws upon popular stories and local melodies. The recent evolution of the cultural industry has threatened the*

*improvisational nature and the ear-to-ear transmission of this art form. During his official visit to the country in August 2005, the Director-General of UNESCO, in the company of President Aliyev and several Goodwill Ambassadors, attended a foundation stone-laying ceremony of a Mugham Centre. In 2004, Mehriban Aliyeva, the First Lady of Azerbaijan, was named as a UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador for the oral and musical traditions.*

As a result, an international recognition of Mugham's importance has been bestowed on this musical genre, not only for its historic role as a crucial element of humankind's cultural heritage, but also as a vector for dialogue among civilizations and cultures in our contemporary world.

Having said this let me also make a personal confession. During my 26 years of economic and political work at the United Nations, it never occurred to me that one day I would promote music as a powerful and unique tool of diplomacy to create peace, to resolve conflict, to promote cultural diversity, a dialogue among civilizations and thus extolling a model for social engagement.

It is nevertheless highly rewarding to observe the immediate and tangible result of this experimentation. The Association that I preside has promoted multicultural dialogues through music as a new and innovative means of communications. We are great believers that music has no border and is inclusive by its very nature. Through various concerts and discussion forums, we have provided a new modality, if not a breakthrough in promoting mutual understanding among people and peoples who share respect for universal values and can help create a much needed culture of peace within our global community. It was in one of the concerts we organised on the occasion of 60th Anniversary of UNESCO in Paris that Franghiz Alizadeh - the outstanding composer, musician and artist of this great country, who carries the wonderful designation as UNESCO Artist

for Peace - exposed to the audience the fascinating universe of contemporary music in a dialogue with the rhythm of Mugham, taking advantage of its improvisational nature. I wish to replay a few seconds of this unforgettable performance. (Video).

The Association „Melody for Dialogue among Civilizations“ has since its inception chosen a practical approach to dialogue and harmony by organizing major multi-cultural concerts and has produced written literature and recordings of its events to facilitate outreach and wide dissemination of its messages.

In full knowledge of the fact that music has the ability to cross cultural barriers, the question remains: To what extent are artists and activists effective agents of dialogue among civilizations and cultures or to what extent can they contribute to socio-political change?

In the written paper I am submitting to this Forum a number of important achievements by musicians and musical performances are discussed. It is my hope and aspiration that one day this important element of human connectedness becomes a recognized global means of communication permitting societies and people not only to understand and respect different expressions, but also to embrace the oneness of our One World. As the Persian poet Saadi said, we are all membranes of the same body.

I for one am a great believer that the language of music has a momentum of its own and possesses an inner driving force that is ageless. That is why the language of music for dialogue is more needed now than ever before. Let us hope that the discussions at this Forum will put in perspective how this universal means of communication can be enhanced and to do so by recognizing the invaluable role of Mugham as a vector of dialogue and peace.

Thank you for your attention.