410 words

**Opening Remarks**

By

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On

Bridging Gaps to Create Inclusive Societies

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Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Welcome to Baku.

For our returning friends, we have much to look forward to as we resume a dialogue that has taken us to an ever expanding appreciation of the concept of “Shared and Sharing Societies” … For those who join us for the first time, we welcome you to join us as we embark on three days of reflections and discussions… A wonderful journey of exploration and discovery…

Today we stand at the epicenter of profound shifts in global affairs….

Three years ago, the world had achieved a consensus on Sustainable Development and on Climate Change, on trade and on peaceful coexistence, on the rights of the citizen and on the desirability of a governance system based on law. Exceptions existed, but the vast majority of humanity had formally adopted these goals. But suddenly the promise of that consensus seemed to be whisked away, as new voices entered the political fray, and exposed the cracks and the gaps that lay hidden underneath that apparent harmony within and between countries.

Suddenly distant conflicts came to the once secure borders. Suddenly immigration became an issue for every country. Suddenly terrorism was not the echo of a distant conflict but a real threat at home. Suddenly, new voices were raised to give substance to whispered doubts and growing fears.

New arguments were raised in a paroxysm of national or sub-national pride as minorities and majorities eyed each other with suspicion and distrust. New champions emerged. The political consensus based on democratic processes was being put to new and rigorous tests. Gaps emerged.

Gaps, that started small like but in some cases quickly became chasms like cracks in the arctic ice; cracks and gaps in the institutional constructs we had taken for granted; cracks and gaps in the body politic of practically every country

The gaps are widening, as the politics of hate and fear emerge in every country

fed by growing inequalities, by an accelerating revolution in Science and Technology that leaves old skills and bygone standards in the dust, and that make the spread of false information and fake news incredibly easy.

And so, for this sixth Global Baku Forum, we meet under the banner of “Bridging Gaps to Create Inclusive Societies”. And to launch us on our journey of reflection, exploration and discovery, it is my distinct honor and privilege to call upon the patron of this entire enterprise, HE President Ilham Aliyev, President of Azerbaijan…