

In pursuit of excellence

PROFILE OF MEHRIBAN ALIYEVA

FOUNDER OF THE HEYDAR ALIYEV FOUNDATION



MEHRIBAN ALIYEVA was born in Baku. In 1988, she graduated with an honorary diploma from the 1st Moscow State Medical Institute and subsequently worked in medical research at the Scientific-Research Institute in Moscow. Mehriban Aliyeva heads the Heydar Aliyev Foundation, founded in 2004, to study the legacy of the National Leader of Azerbaijan. She was awarded the title of Goodwill Ambassador of UNESCO in August 2004 and Goodwill Ambassador of ISESCO in November 2006. She has since been awarded the 'Ruby Cross' order of 'The Patrons of the Century International Charity Fund' of Russia for her public, philanthropic and charity activity and the World Health Organisation Prize for her contribution to the protection and strengthening of mother, child and family health.

Mehriban Aliyeva, Azerbaijan's first lady, had already been active for more than a decade promoting Azerbaijan's health, education, and culture when, in 2004, she founded the Heydar Aliyev Foundation, a non-governmental organisation committed to continuing the progressive legacy established in these areas by the former president whose name it bears.

Mrs Aliyeva says that Heydar Aliyev was an inspiration to her. "Besides being a great example to my generation, Heydar Aliyev was part of our everyday life due to his strong character, his unique leadership and statesman's skills, his erudition, capacity for work, love for art, and full support for practitioners of all art forms," she says. Mrs Aliyeva has proved an effective president of the Foundation and in the four years since it was founded the organisation has made significant progress. Its achievements can be seen in a wide range of areas: preparing and implementing programs and projects in science, education, culture, health, sport, public health, social affairs and the environment.

Children's issues

Mrs Aliyeva highlights the Foundation's commitment to children's issues, saying that after carrying out extensive surveys of the country's child welfare institutions, it has identified four main priorities: support, education, health, and social activities. "Our activities include helping orphans from the conflict with Armenia and we pay special attention to children with mental and physical disabilities. At the same time we are developing IT technologies for children with visual and aural handicaps. We have also implemented a range of health projects for children," she says.

Throughout the country, some 29 children's homes have been repaired, along with the construction of associated support buildings and living quarters, all equipped through funding provided by the Foundation.

Education

The Foundation has already made a positive impact on the nation's education through its *New School for the New Azerbaijan* programme of building, repairing, and improving village schools. Mrs Aliyeva is tireless in promoting the Foundation's work in this regard, and her calendar is filled with openings at educational facilities throughout the country.

Around 200 new secondary school buildings – providing access for up to 70,000 new students – were built during a two-year program up to 2006, all of them supplied with state-of-the-art teaching equipment. Meanwhile, the *Support to Education* project has seen schoolbags and stationary provided for 60,000 students from less well-off families. "Multilateral support for the development of education is one of the priorities of the Heydar Aliyev Foundation. Since its establishment the Foundation has made a huge contribution to the development of education in the country. Education for children in boarding schools is also of special significance to us," says Mrs Aliyeva. She says that the Foundation is also working on setting up a Heydar Aliyev University. "This will be the university where the intellectual elite of the country will be formed. We have consulted educational experts at home and abroad, and I believe we will manage to create an educational model that brings together our national experience and European standards," says Mrs Aliyeva.

Under the Foundation's auspices, schools throughout the country have been equipped with reading material, and computer equipment has been installed. Mrs Aliyeva says that in keeping with the philosophy of the late Heydar Aliyev, 'in pursuit of excellence', schools are being encouraged to organise music and arts festivals and competitions, along with sporting activities.

Health

A qualified physician from an academically distinguished family, Mrs Aliyeva has been involved for a long time in addressing health care issues, and particularly the problems of early childhood. The Foundation has overseen a nationwide construction and renovation project covering hospitals, emergency centres, clinics and pharmacies. It has also set up the *Best Care for Diabetic Children Programme* to provide treatment for children suffering from diabetes. The Foundation has also been active in combating the spread of the genetic blood disorder thalassemia in Azerbaijan, with plans to establish a diagnostics centre.

UNESCO role

A UNESCO cultural Goodwill Ambassador since 2004, Mrs Aliyeva has been successful in establishing stronger ties with the international community to promote Azerbaijan's rich cultural heritage. At the same

time the Foundation is committed to safeguarding the country's cultural heritage, especially its oral traditions and expressions, performing arts, and traditional craftsmanship. Mrs Aliyeva's role in promoting the country's culture goes back to the early 1990s, when she set up *Friends of Azerbaijan Culture*, a charitable foundation, which continues to increase knowledge of Azerbaijan's cultural wealth, while working to ensure its conservation at national and regional levels through festivals, exhibitions, cultural events, and concerts.

Mrs Aliyeva has also been active within UNESCO in helping secure World Heritage Site status for Baku's old walled city, as well as the unique Gobustan Rock Art Cultural Landscape, an outstanding collection of more than 6,000 rock engravings bearing testimony to 40,000 years of rock art. The site also features the remains of inhabited caves, settlements and burials, all reflecting intensive human use, by the inhabitants of the area, during the wet period that followed the last Ice Age, from the Upper Paleolithic to the Middle Ages.

The Foundation has also helped restore many monuments and historical buildings and mosques throughout the country. This has gone hand-in-hand with a programme of museum-building in the regions that will also serve as training centres for academic research into the country's rich cultural heritage. Among her successes in promoting the country's music tradition has been the Mugham Centre in Baku to promote the traditional classical music of Azerbaijan at international level.

International cooperation

Through her role as UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador, Mrs Aliyeva has succeeded in organising a range of international conferences that have brought the world's specialists to the country to discuss key issues in education, health, and social welfare. Such events have played a key role in raising Azerbaijan's profile on the world stage.

"The Heydar Aliyev Foundation will continue to strengthen its cooperation with UNESCO, and show its support for this organisation. In this regard, the Foundation is implementing several joint projects and programmes. In 2007 UNESCO, the Azerbaijani Government, and the Heydar Aliyev Foundation signed the agreement on the implementation of the project for the development of vocational education in our country," she says. Azerbaijan has also strengthened its relationship with the Islamic Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation, ISESCO, of which Mrs Aliyeva is also a Goodwill Ambassador.

In 2002 Mrs Aliyeva was elected the President of the Azerbaijan Gymnastics Federation. The fruits of her endeavours have included the International Gymnastics Federation's decision to hold the 2005 World Rhythmic Gymnastics Championships in Azerbaijan. In 2004, she

was elected to be the executive member of the Azerbaijan National Olympic Committee. A national survey held in Azerbaijan earned her the title of the Woman of the Year in 2005. She is also the first woman to become a Knight of the Ruby Cross, an honour awarded by the *Patrons of the Century International Charitable Fund* in recognition of her philanthropic work.

Mrs Aliyeva was elected a member of the Azerbaijani parliament in 2005, and says that she will be using her position to further the activities of the Heydar Aliyev Foundation and to strengthen the legacy of the man considered by Azerbaijanis as the founding father of the modern nation. Mehriban Aliyeva sums up her mission: "My generation continues to learn new lessons about life from Heydar Aliyev. The focus of this is the importance of faith in the power of the will and character of humankind, and the invincibility of the human spirit." **E**

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