

Dear guests,

I am happy to see you all here. Today we celebrate the launch of our Foundation. We have come a long way. Our foundation, our work, our initiative is not just short-term formal work. We have been part of Oxford University for almost 4 years. The Nizami Ganjavi Programme represents Azerbaijan in Oxford University. This Programme is not just an exchange project between two universities. We have created a new academic structure, which is a full part of Oxford University. We are part of the university's full academic process. Our work in Oxford University is the first stable and serious contact between the university and Azerbaijan. Our main goal is to become part of Oxford University forever. We want to be part of world intellectual community. We understand, it is not an easy path. We understand our challenges. But thanks to the support of our colleagues in Oxford University we have already made important first steps.

United Kingdom is a great country with strong traditions and great history. My country, Azerbaijan, also has many things to be proud of. In the Muslim world, the first parliamentary democratic republic was created in Azerbaijan in 1918. All citizens of independent Azerbaijan were equal in 1918. No nationality or religion mattered. The first university was created. The Parliament had many parties. Men and women had same rights in it. In November 1919 the press was freed from censure. 60 newspapers and magazines were published. Satirical magazines with caricatures mocked religious fanaticism. First professional mugham opera in the East, first secular girls' school, new genres of Azeri literature, performance art and theater

were created. The ancient eastern city became home to European architecture. This way Baku became the city that united East and West. In December of 1918 the tricolored flag of Azerbaijan was permanently raised on top of the parliament building in Baku. This was the order of British general Thomson - governor of Baku then.

Yes, Azerbaijan is my motherland. I love her and can speak about her much longer. Today, independence is Azerbaijan's biggest gain. Azeri culture is important for the world culture in general. It includes Turkish and Persian worlds with many European and Russian elements. Great poets like Nasimi, Fizuli and famous Shakh Ismayil Khatai wrote in Azeri. The legendary hero Dede Gorgud also sang his ballads in Azeri dialect of Turkic languages.

It is a great honor that the first event of our foundation is in Victoria and Albert museum. The British crown has collected and valued all world cultures; past and present. The Shaykh Safi carpet from south Azerbaijan and other unique pieces of Islamic world are open to the world here. They are also kept safe for the future generations.

The golden ages of Islam gave the world great heritage. Sadly, today, we don't always see the great and beautiful traditions of the East. It is important that Islam gets its great image back. I think that openness between universities and honesty of real scholars will prevent many humanitarian catastrophes. This is how people were saved during the Great Terror, and the Cold War. Imagine that the dance of twist and love for jazz were dangerous then in Soviet Union. The ideological stamp had blocked information of Soviet and Azeri scholars and they had to use fake methodology. Nevertheless, real scholars were at work.

They say, it is better late than never. Our work today is for future generations. I hope this British foundation will succeed in this mission. What have we done until today? With Oxford University we have finished two archaeological seasons. We have five students: Master's and Doctors, two conferences and very important work – English translation of famous Russian orientalist Yevgeniy Bertels's book: The Great Azerbaijani Poet, Nizami. We will soon have the presentation of this book.

The name of our foundation includes the Caucasus region. Caucasus is a multicultural and multiethnic region. We want to bring together all we know about the Caucasus and expand its study at Oxford University together with our colleagues. I hope one day the study of the history of all Azeris, south and north, 40 million Azeris of the world, will be based on real and objective academic work. All of this will be possible thanks to most people present here.

So, I am very happy today.

First of all I would like to thank our trustees: Lord Malcolm Bruce, Professor Robert Hoyland, Professor Robert Gleave and Professor Andrew Peacock. All my colleagues in Oxford University, especially, director of Nizami Ganjavi Centre at Oxford, Professor Edmund Herzig. I would like to thank Mr Iskandar Khalilov for his first financial support of the Oxford Nizami Ganjavi Centre.

This year we will celebrate 20th anniversary of Anglo-Azerbaijan society in UK. My colleague, the co-chairman of the society Lord Mike German is here – thank you for coming. I would like to thank our guests from Baku, Naila khanim, Anar muellim, Akif muellim, Vasim muellim, Mr Gordon Birrell and business groups from Azerbaijan. Also everyone who helped in the organization of this

event. I got letters from British Ambassador in Azerbaijan Dr Crofts, director of British Council Azerbaijan Ms White and head of BP Mr Dudley – thank you for your attention. I would like to thank the colleagues of the Moscow State University and Baku State University, my students who always support me. I would also like to thank all Azeris who don't know us personally, but still support us. Nothing is possible without you all.

University is my second home since 1978. For me nothing is better. On this happy day, please let me thank two very precious people in my life: my grandmother Govher khanum and my grandfather famous journalist Nasir Imanguliyev. I learned from her: power of a song is not loudness. My grandfather was my best support. He gave me confidence and faith in others. Thank you so much for your attention and enjoy the evening!

