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Education Minister Misir Mardanov welcomed conference attendees and gave a presentation on the implementation of "State Program for the placement of children living in state-owned child institutions in families (deinstitutionalization) and alternative care in the Republic of Azerbaijan (2006-2015)."

Noting the importance of conference presentation on the implementation of State Program given annually at the end of each year, the Minister underlined the education field as one of the important directions of sustainable development strategy in Azerbaijan. According to him, a favorable economic, social and cultural environment should be created for children to develop their potential.

The Minister also talked about the events implemented to improve the level of education and children welfare, and underlined the importance of "State Program for the placement of children living in state-owned child institutions in families (deinstitutionalization) and alternative care in the Republic of Azerbaijan (2006-2015)" in terms of children protection. Noting the Ministry of Education cooperates closely with Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Interior Affairs, Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of Population, Ministry of Health, State Committee for Family, Woman and Children Affairs and local executive authorities in the implementation of the State Program, the Minister also stressed the support of the different international and local non-governmental organizations for the program. Mr. Mardanov underlined a special care provided by the President of the Heydar Aliyev Foundation, goodwill ambassador of UNESCO and ISESCO, MP Mehriban Aliyeva for the successful implementation of the Program.

The Minister gave information on the implementation of pilot projects for "Placement of children living in state-owned child institutions in families and alternative care" and "Development of Foster Care Cooperative and family-based services with local authorities" within the State program. According to him, a memorandum of understanding on the implementation of the project for "Placement of children living in state-owned institutions in families and alternative care" signed between the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of Population, State Committee for Family, Woman and Children Affairs and UNICEF was approved by the Presidential order. The existing legislation relevant to the protection of children was analyzed comprehensively and "Exemplary Statute on small group homes" and "Exemplary Statute on foster care family" were developed and submitted to the Cabinet of Ministries of the Republic of Azerbaijan for approval.

Moreover, Mr. Mardanov shared his views regarding measures implemented within the State Program in 2012 and forthcoming duties. He highly praised the steps taken to transform a number of state-owned institutions. According to him, 8589 children have been prevented from entering state-run child institutions during a past period of the current year. The Minister said that the financial support to foster families is one of the main problems that should be solved within the process of deinstitutionalization.

Misir Mardanov talked about systematic preventive measures taken among children and families at risk in order to prevent the increase in the number of children living in state-run institutions noting that the Ministry has a close cooperation with the relevant state authorities in this direction. According to him, in 2012 the number of children living in 42 state-run child institutions has reached 8336 and of the 3671 children are staying overnight. The Minister underlined the reduction in the number of children living in the state-owned institutions in recent years. According to him, in 2006 their number was 21,000, in 2007 - 18,400, in 2008 - 14,389, in 2009 - 10,055, in 2010 - 9827, and in 2011 - 9776 children.

The Minister expressed his views regarding the future of children living in state-owned child institutions and talked about projects jointly implemented with UNICEF to provide quality education (inclusive education) for disabled children. Noting that reforms implemented in the country on the fields of deinstitutionalization and child protection are highly praised by authoritative international organizations, Misir Mardanov expressed his gratitude to UNICEF and other relevant organizations for their support.

Speaking at the conference UNICEF's representative in Azerbaijan Mark Hereward, MP's Ganira Paslyayeva, Hadi Rajabli, Jeyhun Osmanli, the deputy head of Baku Executive Power, Fiduma Huseynov, representatives of the ministries of Labor and Social Protection of Population, Health, State Committee for Family, Women and Children Affairs, Grand National Assembly of Turkey and others shared their views on the organization of deinstitutionalization process, social services for children, and highly praised the measures implemented in the country in this direction.

A documentary film about children living in state-run institutions was demonstrated at the conference.

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At the end of the conference, Education Minister Misir Mardanov thanked everyone who contributed to the implementation of the State program.