1. **Human Rights challenges experienced in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, including in relation to the measures taken as part of the health response:**

The Commissioner for Human Rights (Ombudsman) of the Republic of Azerbaijan (HRCA) appealed to the people to fight against the new type of coronavirus pandemic COVID-19 and to pay more attention to ensuring human rights in the current situation. HRCA addressed an appeal to state and local self-government bodies, officials, other departments, enterprises and organizations, as well as business entities in order to pay more attention to the protection of the rights of persons with disabilities in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The appeal also focuses on the calls made by the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities regarding the protection of the rights of persons with disabilities during the global outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Information on the above-mentioned appeals of the Ombudsman of Azerbaijan, as well as the work done in the field of protection of the rights of migrants and children in the framework of its activities to prevent the spread of COVID-19 was posted on the Ombudsman's official website and covered in the media. Taking into account the situation with COVID-19 infection, the Ombudsman proposed the parole of prisoners with disabilities and addressed an appeal to the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Azerbaijan in this regard. Regular provision of anti-infectives (medical alcohol, masks and gloves) to people from low-income families, as well as people with disabilities who are unable to take care of themselves and live alone, as well as involving people with disabilities suffering from various diseases in mobile examination, treatment and rehabilitation services raised by HRCA before the relevant authorities were taken into account. Persons with disabilities registered at the dispensary, as well as those suffering from various diseases, were provided with the necessary medicines at the place of residence. The Ombudsman's proposal to apply appropriate discounts on utility costs to persons with disabilities, as well as to extend the expiration of disability pensions, benefits, pension cards of persons with disabilities by the relevant banks within the corporate social responsibility strategy was taken into account.

HRCA suggested placing people with disabilities who don’t have a place of residence in the Shelter and Social Rehabilitation Institution for Persons from Vulnerable Groups without delay. Moreover, HRCA suggested that employers increase attention and support for employees with disabilities given the current situation.

A number of visits were paid by National Preventive Mechanism of HRCA to Detention Centres for Illegal Migrants. Detention conditions of migrants, their access to medical and other services were investigated and relevant recommendations were made in this regard.
it should be noted that taking into account the special quarantine regime, the State Migration Service has removed the necessity to apply for extension of period of temporary stay in the territory of the Republic of Azerbaijan for the foreigners, who are in the territory of our country and cannot leave the country due to the above-noted reasons.

Addressing the media and social network users, HRCA said that the effectiveness of the fight against the pandemic in the current situation depends on the behaviour and responsible approach of citizens. HRCA stressed the importance of public support to the state's activities in the fight against pandemic through the proper organization of awareness-raising and propaganda work by the media in this regard.

Unfortunately, circulation of unscientific information based on conspiracy theories about the coronavirus pandemic without verification and analysis by the media has a negative impact on public opinion, forming misconceptions and reducing people's sense of responsibility. As a result, some people avoid using simple methods such as wearing masks, keeping social distance, and following personal hygiene rules.

 In order to raise the awareness about COVID-19, to promote obeying the rules of the quarantine regime, videos were made with the slogans "Stay at home - Be healthy" and "We are strong together" under the hashtags #StayHome, #WeAreTogether, and posted on official website, Facebook, Twitter.

A number of employees of the Azerbaijan Ombudsman's Office donated blood on their own initiative to children suffering from inherited blood diseases. Thus, they called everyone who has no health problems to participate in this campaign to support these children during pandemic.

1. **Any technical support needed to address the challenges identified, including the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 and response measures**:

During the COVID-19 pandemic, a single 7/24 Call Center 916 was established in order to ensure the effectiveness of the appeals of individuals by combining existing hotlines of HRCA and using modern information technologies. This innovation facilitated people's access to HRCA and increased the efficiency of handling appeals. You can watch a short video about the new Call Center (https://bit.ly/2XO5Ylv) on HRCA’s Facebook page.

At the same time, awareness raising work is being carried out among the population and a social video has been prepared in this regard.

HRCA has joined the preventive measures taken in our country to combat the COVID-19 pandemic and transferred funds to the Coronavirus Response Fund, established by the Decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan dated March 19, 2020.

 In connection with the COVID-19 pandemic, HRCA joined the charity campaign “We are strong together!” and supported low-income families, single people over 65, people living alone and persons with disabilities in the capital and regions.

Recently the next Presidential Decree has been issued by President Ilham Aliyev pardoning 625 prisoners, 72 (28 are women) out of which are from the list suggested by HRCA.

In March, 2020 176 prisoners aged over 65 in need of special care were pardoned upon the Presidential Decree in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic due to their age and state of health.

This measures are very important in terms of protection of human rights and health of people detained in prisons during the sanitary crisis.

In 2020, HRCA published 870 copies of 59 posters, bulletins, booklets and leaflets on various aspects of human rights, including the COVID-19 pandemic, in cooperation with the UNICEF Azerbaijan and distributed them to secondary schools, penitentiaries and rehabilitation institutions.

1. **Any good or promising practices in these areas, including examples of international cooperation**

The topics included in the agenda of the online conference on “COVID-19 and the protection and promotion of human rights during martial law” dedicated to the December 10 - Human Rights Day, organized by the HRCA covered the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and the work done to address them.

The return of our citizens wishing to come back to their homeland from other countries, including Turkey, Russia, Iran, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Ukraine, Belarus, and the United States has been ensured.

The Ombudsman and members of the National Preventive Group conducted unscheduled visits to the facilities of Penitentiary Service of the Ministry of Justice and other institutions to study the preventive measures and sanitary conditions against COVID-19 infection.

During the pandemic HRCA and members of the National Preventive Group conducted unscheduled visits to the institutions under the Penitentiary Service of the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The aim of visits was to check the preventive measures and sanitary conditions against COVID-19 infection, as well as detention conditions, treatment issues, nutrition, access to medical services on this eve, and to investigate received appeals on spot.

Moreover, unscheduled visits were made to institutions under the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection. The persons living and receiving treatment in these institutions were met in a confidential manner. The state of ensuring their rights were investigated, a number of requests for medical assistance were provided on the spot.

Taking into account the Ombudsman's proposals, the overhaul of Ganja Psychoneurological Social Service Institution No. 4, construction of new buildings for Ganja city and Sheki district psychiatric hospitals is important in terms of ensuring the rights and improving the living conditions of people living and receiving treatment here.

The representative of HRCA participated in a webinar on "On-site monitoring of the rights of persons with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic" organized at the initiative of the European Network of National Human Rights Institutions' Working Group on Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The activity of HRCA in this regard was widely covered as a good experience in bulletins of this Network.