**President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev’s remarks at the event commemorating the victims of political repressions and famine**

**Dear compatriots,**

**Dear participants of the event,**

Every year on May 31, we honor the memory of the victims of political repression and famine, bowing our heads in remembrance of all those who perished during those dark years.

In the 20th century, many nations within the Soviet Union endured severe trials. Our people were no exception. During the campaign of forced collectivization, people lost their livestock and property and died in large numbers from starvation. Many were forced to seek refuge in foreign lands.

Stalin’s repressions also targeted the national intelligentsia—the most educated and progressive segment of our society. Thousands were declared “enemies of the people,” subjected to brutal torture, and executed without trial or investigation. In a short period, our nation lost some of its brightest minds, including Alikhan Bokeikhanov, Akhmet Baitursynov, Saken Seifullin, Ilyas Zhansugurov, and many others.

Kazakhstan was home to 11 camps within the GULAG system. ALZHIR was one such tragic place. Around 8,000 women who were unjustly convicted were imprisoned there. Among them were the wives of prominent figures such as Turar Ryskulov, Sultanbek Kozhanov, Temirbek Zhurgenov, Beimbet Mailin, and Sanzhar Asfendiyarov. Today, the descendants of those who endured the horrors of ALZHIR are present with us.

Political repression was not limited to the Kazakh people alone. ALZHIR held representatives of over 60 ethnic groups. That is why all the nations that suffered during that grim era must draw lessons from this tragedy—a tragedy that must never be repeated. This is our shared responsibility. The true significance of remembering these tragic chapters of our past lies in this commitment.

Eliminating the "white spots" in our history is our sacred duty to both past and future generations. In recent years, comprehensive work has been carried out in this direction.

Five years ago, a State Commission for the Full Rehabilitation of Victims of Political Repression was established. Over a three-year period, a large team of experts and scholars meticulously studied documents from state and departmental archives. As a result, more than 300,000 individuals persecuted for political reasons have been rehabilitated. Classification has been lifted from over 2.5 million archival materials.

Based on the Commission’s research, a 72-volume collection has been published. In addition, a twelve-volume series has been issued, dedicated to the cases brought against members of the Alash Orda movement during the years of repression. The preparation of this work introduced previously unpublished documents into academic circulation.

A special center has been opened under the Archive of the President of the Republic, dedicated to the study of materials related to 20th-century political repressions. It has received 700,000 previously classified case files. This is a truly large-scale effort—unprecedented in Kazakhstan’s history.

It is worth noting that such extensive research has not yet been undertaken even in many other countries. This is the result of determined and tireless work. I extend my sincere gratitude to all citizens, including members of the Commission, who actively contributed to this research. Their efforts will undoubtedly be recognized and honored. Currently, scholars are systematizing and organizing the vast body of collected information. This work is vitally important for the future of our nation.

It is essential to study and understand the history of our people. This is a fundamental truth. Without a deep knowledge of national history—and more importantly, without a proper understanding of it—it is impossible to make objective judgments about current political trends. The memory of the millions of innocent victims of totalitarianism is sacred. There can be no historical reinterpretations, and certainly no justification for the inhumane and inherently flawed state policies of that era. At the same time, we must avoid subjectively politicizing history or using it as a tool for destructive agendas or for spreading populist ideas. Our society must uphold a strong sense of civic responsibility.

Repression and famine were tragedies not only for the Kazakh people—though we suffered immensely, perhaps more than any other—but also for the majority of the peoples of the former Soviet Union. That is why it is of utmost importance to draw painful lessons from the past so that such tragedies may never happen again.

Our people are the custodians of the unique cultural code of the Great Steppe civilization. This heritage has helped us endure and preserve our human dignity during times of historic hardship. Guided by the ideals of solidarity, humanism, and brotherhood, our ancestors extended a helping hand to all who suffered during those cruel and tumultuous years. This is why today, our national identity is rooted in values such as mutual assistance, responsibility, and tolerance.

The reading of history must not be influenced by current political agendas. Yet, unfortunately, this occurs all too often. Figures once lavishly praised are now, with the stroke of a so-called scholar’s pen, cast as villains. Conversely, individuals who were once publicly condemned have been rebranded by propagandists as popular figures, and the architects and enforcers of repression are sometimes portrayed as national heroes.

We must remember the names of those unjustly persecuted—statesmen, public figures, scientists, doctors, and their families, including their wives. But no matter how tragic our past may be, it must not become a barrier to the development and progress of our people.

We cannot live solely in the past or view the present through the lens of bygone eras. We need a broad, panoramic view of history. We must free ourselves from the victim mentality—for constantly looking back is a sign of weakness.

On the path to independence and sovereignty, our people have overcome many hardships and challenges. That is why the principle *“Independence above all”* must become sacred and unshakable in our national consciousness. It is essential to safeguard our national unity as we would the apple of our eye and to continue strengthening our statehood. I repeat: remembering and honoring the past is right—but we must move forward and strive for a better future.

Today, we are confidently advancing by implementing a national strategy and undertaking sweeping reforms to build a Just Kazakhstan. Three years ago, a nationwide referendum led to a new Constitution, laying a strong foundation for our country’s steady progress. We have fundamentally reshaped our political system, strengthening the powers of Parliament and increasing the accountability of the Government. A Constitutional Court has been established, and opportunities for citizen participation in decision-making have significantly expanded. One particularly important step that boosted public trust was the introduction of direct elections for rural and district akims (mayors).

Systemic reforms have also been enacted to uphold the rule of law and order, protect women’s rights, and ensure the safety of children. Parliament has passed relevant legislation on these matters. This is just one part of a broader modernization effort — and much work still lies ahead. Most importantly, these reforms have transformed the political mindset of our nation.

We are witnessing a renewal of public consciousness. A vivid example is the nationwide “Taza Kazakhstan” (Clean Kazakhstan) initiative, which has received widespread public support and has been embraced as a long-term strategy. Today, we are collectively building a just state and a harmonious society — and every citizen is contributing to this effort. People have come to believe in the reality of change and have become the driving force behind meaningful transformation.

A new political and electoral culture is taking shape in Kazakhstan, where pluralism of opinion is harmoniously combined with unity of purpose and aspiration. The attitudes of dependency and habitual criticism are gradually fading. Today, values such as diligence, the pursuit of knowledge, and progress are held in high esteem. The principle of “Law and Order” has come to the forefront. In other words, thanks to the reforms, a new national character is visibly emerging — and together, we will continue on this path, strengthening our national identity and reinforcing our unity.

**Dear friends,**

Today’s gathering also includes many young people. I want to say this to you: it is important to know our history well — but that does not mean we should live in the past. Our youth must look to the future with confidence and move forward with steady steps.

We are living in a complex and uncertain era. New and unprecedented trends and phenomena are emerging. The impact of artificial intelligence on social development is still not fully understood. Humanity is yet to face many challenges. That is why our youth must be fully prepared to meet this uncertain future. To do so, the younger generation must be progressive, goal-oriented, diligent, and responsible. As Abai taught us, young people should pursue knowledge and dedicate themselves to learning. It is essential to recognize the value of sovereignty and always be ready to defend the country’s Independence. Only then will our nation be strong, and its future bright.

I believe in the creative power of our patriotic youth.

I wish you success on your life’s journey, and peace and prosperity to our Motherland!