



United States Mission to the OSCE

Ongoing Human Rights Violations in Azerbaijan

As delivered by Political Counselor Christopher Robinson
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
June 5, 2014

On behalf of the United States, I would like to congratulate all Azerbaijanis on May 28, 1918: the date that marks the birth of an independent Azerbaijan, the first secular, democratic Muslim-majority country in the world. Sadly, the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic was reconquered by Soviet Russia's Red Army and incorporated into the nascent Soviet Union less than two years later. Azerbaijan remained a captive nation for more than seven decades, until it re-emerged as a sovereign state in 1991, when it assumed its place at this table, as a participating State in the OSCE.

Today, we call on our friends in Azerbaijan to reclaim their country's leadership role on human rights and fundamental freedoms. Azerbaijan and the United States share a commitment to diversifying energy supplies and promoting regional security. We appreciate, in particular, Azerbaijan's contribution to the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan. We want to support Azerbaijan in the development of its open market economy and in finding a peaceful resolution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

As Azerbaijan assumes greater responsibility in the international community, such as through its current chairmanship of the Council of Europe, the United States remains committed to working with Azerbaijan to advance democratic development and to protect human rights and fundamental freedoms. Regretfully, however, the space within which civil society can operate in Azerbaijan continues to be constricted by the Government of Azerbaijan. And the trend, unfortunately, is getting worse. This is a threat to comprehensive security across the region.

We urge the Government of Azerbaijan to live up to its international commitments to respect freedom of association and assembly, freedom of expression and freedom of conscience. The United States is deeply disturbed by the May 26 sentencing of Mr. Anar Mammadli, the widely respected Chairman of the Election Monitoring and Democracy Studies Center, to five-and-a-half years in prison on questionable charges ranging from tax evasion and illegal entrepreneurship to abuse of office. The authorities also convicted the organization's executive director and the head of a partner NGO on equally questionable charges. These convictions, like other recent convictions, lead friends of Azerbaijan to wonder about the sincerity of the government of Azerbaijan's stated commitment to democratic development.

We are also disturbed by the authorities' seizure of the passports of Institute for Peace and Democracy Director Leyla Yunus and her husband, which would prevent her from participating in the joint Chairmanship/ODIHR Human Rights Defenders Conference in Bern

on June 10 and 11, and by the authorities' continued pressure on the couple. Leyla Yunus has been a strong proponent of Track II diplomatic efforts in the region. The investigation launched against her and another advocate of people to people efforts, journalist Rauf Mirkadirov, also has a chilling effect on civil society in Azerbaijan, especially those seeking to promote a peaceful resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

Azerbaijan will best be able to ensure its future stability and prosperity by allowing a more open society, which is crucial for democratic development, which in turn provides the long term foundation for stability and shared prosperity for Azerbaijan's citizens. We urge the Government of Azerbaijan to begin working to strengthen the environment for political pluralism and to expand the space for independent media and civil society to operate. The United States remains committed to working with the Government of Azerbaijan and the Azerbaijani people to advance democratic development and to protect human rights and fundamental freedoms in Azerbaijan.

Thank you, Madam Chair.