



United States Mission to the OSCE

Conviction of Human Rights Activist Rasul Jafarov in Azerbaijan

As delivered by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
April 23, 2015

The United States is deeply troubled by the April 16 decision of an Azerbaijani court to sentence prominent human rights activist Rasul Jafarov to six and a half years in prison on charges widely considered to be politically motivated.

As founder and chairman of the Human Rights Club, Mr. Jafarov was arrested last August as part of a broad crackdown on human rights activists. His conviction is a further setback to Azerbaijan's democratic development.

The United States urges the Government of Azerbaijan to abide by its OSCE and other international commitments.

Azerbaijan must respect the rights of its citizens and engage with the OSCE to address challenges in its implementation of OSCE commitments. As a first step, we urge the authorities to release Mr. Jafarov and others incarcerated in connection with exercising their fundamental freedoms. Doing so would strengthen the country's long-term stability and our bilateral relationship.

Mr. Chair, regretfully, the conviction of Rasul Jafarov is not an isolated case. Just yesterday, human rights defender Intigam Aliyev was sentenced to seven and a half years in prison on politically-motivated charges.

The space for civil society activities in Azerbaijan continues to tighten, making it increasingly difficult for a range of organizations to function.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.