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United States Mission to the OSCE



**Statement on Freedom of
Media in Azerbaijan**

As delivered by Political Counselor Casey Christensen
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
November 13, 2008

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The United States has noted with concern reports that Azerbaijan's National Television and Radio Council may discontinue local radio broadcasts of international media, including Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, the Voice of America and the BBC.

The United States believes that these international broadcasters have enriched public debate in Azerbaijan and could contribute to Azerbaijan's democratic development. Discontinuing such broadcasts would send a disturbing message. The broadcasters reach a large audience through FM radio frequencies. The chairman of Azerbaijan's National Council on Television and Radio, Mr. Nushiravan Maharramli, is reported to have announced the Council's intention to ban these broadcasters' use of such FM frequencies in Azerbaijan.

Mr. Chairman, although Mr. Maharramli is quoted in press reports as encouraging the broadcasters to use other means, the reality is that neither use of Internet, satellite, nor shortwave broadcasting could reach as wide a public audience in Azerbaijan as current FM methods. It is hard to see how a decision to remove foreign broadcasters from FM radio serves the Copenhagen commitment to free, independent and pluralistic media, elements that we all agreed are essential to a free and open society and accountable systems of government. In Vienna nearly a generation ago we agreed that individuals should be able to freely choose their sources of information and that we would ensure that radio services can be directly and normally received in our States.

We urge the Government of Azerbaijan to review this situation and to find a solution that permits these broadcasters to continue to serve the people of Azerbaijan through FM broadcasts.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.