



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to the Presentation by the Head of Office in Baku, Ambassador José-Luis Herrero-Ansola

As prepared for delivery by Chargé d' Affaires Kyle Scott
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
June 28, 2007

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The United States warmly welcomes Ambassador Herrero-Ansola to this meeting of the Permanent Council and thanks him for his comprehensive comments.

The United States is grateful for his leadership and pleased with his efforts to consult with participating States and renew relations with the Government of Azerbaijan.

We expect the Office will continue to play an active role in helping Azerbaijan redress serious deficiencies in media freedom in the country. Improving relations between government officials and journalists will do much to enhance freedom of the media in Azerbaijan.

Looking ahead, we support the work of the Office in helping Azerbaijan prepare for free and fair presidential elections next year that meet international standards, using ODIHR's report on the last election as a guide. Recent reforms in the composition of election commissions and guarantees on the right to campaign are good steps in that direction.

The Police Assistance Program is an excellent example of how OSCE offices and participating States share best practices. We look forward to the new community policing teams that will be modeled after the successful programs offered through the office at Mingechevir (min-GEH-cheh-veer). These innovative centers directly contribute to the safety and security of the Azerbaijani people and help create and maintain conditions for democratic development from the street up.

Along with police reform, the Office has made significant advances in working with Azerbaijan on legal reform, especially through the Trial Monitoring Program. Other initiatives in legal reform, such as training journalists in court and crime reporting, help also to solidify the rule of law and protect the basic rights of all citizens. We are particularly encouraged by the monitoring of examinations for judges and Office seminars offered to selected judge candidates.

Office programs to diversify the economy, both in exploring new commodities and in developing new locations, are investments in the future of Azerbaijan. We note that small enterprise and entrepreneurship have struggled in the past, and we commend the Office in

promoting regional development by training local officials and business men and women in international best practices.

To support regional economic development, we note the Office's plans to establish new regional presences. We look forward to coordinating with Ambassador Herrero-Ansola to make sure the new initiatives complement existing bilateral programs in Azerbaijan.

Mr. Chairman,

The United States repeats its grave concern that seven journalists remain in Azerbaijani prisons, convicted of crimes that should not be crimes in a society that professes its dedication to international standards of democratic development. We fully support Ambassador Herrero-Ansola's determined efforts to engage the Government of Azerbaijan to advance media freedom, which should begin with the liberation of imprisoned journalists.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.