



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on Media Freedom in Azerbaijan

As delivered by Chargé d' Affaires Kyle Scott
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
April 26, 2007

Mr. Chairman,

The United States has also noted with concern what appears to be a steady deterioration of the climate for media freedom in Azerbaijan. According to a statement released this week by the OSCE's Representative on Freedom of the Media, the editor of the newspaper "Realniy Azerbaijan" was sentenced to two and a half years' imprisonment for libeling and damaging the reputations of certain individuals in a web forum comment two years ago. As in other cases in the past, libel laws were used as the grounds for criminal prosecution in this case.

Mr. Chairman, the OSCE has recommended that criminal prosecution of journalists for alleged libel should be stopped. The Representative on Freedom of the Media and his staff have worked tirelessly to convince governments of participating states to decriminalize libel and to protect freedom of expression for members of the media as a vital component of democratic governance. We applaud those efforts and urge the Government of Azerbaijan to take to heart the need to reform laws and practice to expand, rather than shrink, the degree of freedom of expression that journalists enjoy in Azerbaijan, as well as to take all necessary steps to protect media workers from intimidation or physical harm in the exercise of their profession.

The United States will continue to monitor this case and the overall situation in the hopes of seeing improvement.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.