

Thank you.....

I'd like to dedicate my remarks to Khadija Ismayilova:

- in prison on flagrantly political charges, brought against her in retaliation for her reporting.

- last time I saw Khadija was here, at this forum, last year, when she stood up for several political prisoners jailed for exercising their rights of free speech and free assembly in Azerbaijan.

On behalf of RFE/RL, I want to reiterate that the charges against her have no basis in law: they are punishment for her reporting and we call for her immediate release.

I'd like to remind participants that RFE/RL's Baku bureau was raided last December, as a result of which we had to close it in May. In addition, several of our employees fled the country in fear – permanently – and those who stayed fear imprisonment at any time. I know that Azeri authorities are targeting Maydan TV reporters just as they targeted us. Azerbaijan is systematically destroying non-State media, flagrantly violating commitments it has made as an OSCE member states.

I'd also like to use my remarks to highlight RFE/RL's situation in Turkmenistan. Our journalists there have always been subject to egregious abuses by Turkmen authorities, and in fact Ogsapar Muradova died in a prison cell in 1996. Over the last year, however, authorities have systematically targeted the correspondents who form our local network, in what can only be understood as a campaign to silence us. Saparmarad Nepeskuliev is in prison, having been detained incommunicado in July. Six of our other nine correspondents have been subject to pressure tactics designed to make them stop reporting. In several cases, family members have been threatened with loss of livelihood because a son or daughter or brother is working for us. On behalf of RFE/RL, I call for Mr. Nepeskuliev's immediate release, and condemn Turkmenistan's attempts to silence RFE/RL, in violation of its OSCE commitments.