



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on Freedom of Expression in Azerbaijan

As delivered by Chargé d' Affaires, a. i. Carol Fuller
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
May 19, 2011

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The United States remains concerned about restrictions on the right of freedom of expression in Azerbaijan.

Today we note with concern the May 18 conviction of youth activist Bakhtiyar Hajiyev, who was sentenced to two years' imprisonment on charges of draft evasion. The timing of Mr. Hajiyev's arrest, which immediately followed his online efforts to organize pro-democracy protests in Azerbaijan, raised questions about authorities' use of the judicial system to punish dissent. The United States supports the strengthening of the rule of law and meaningful democratic reform in Azerbaijan and calls upon authorities to ensure Mr. Hajiyev's appeals are reviewed in accordance with Azerbaijani law and international commitments, including its OSCE commitments.

The United States has also closely monitored the case of youth activist Jabbar Savalanli, who was convicted on May 4 and sentenced to two and a half years in prison on drug possession charges. Mr. Savalanli was detained February 5, shortly after making online comments calling for pro-democracy protests. Procedural irregularities, combined with the timing and circumstances surrounding Mr. Savalanli's arrest, raise concerns that Mr. Savalanli was targeted on the basis of his political activities.

We urge the Government of Azerbaijan and judicial authorities to resolve Mr. Savalanli's case in accordance with Azerbaijan's laws and its international commitments.

Finally, we note the statement by OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media Dunja Mijatovic, who called on Azerbaijani authorities to "prevent violence against the media and to ensure that journalists and social media activists can perform their work in a free and safe environment." The United States renews its call on the Government of Azerbaijan to respect the right of all its citizens to freedom of expression, and to respect the independence of the judiciary. Both are enshrined under the Azerbaijani Constitution and in Azerbaijan's OSCE commitments.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.