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## **United States Mission to the OSCE**

### **Statement on Sentencing of Eynulla Fatullayev**

As delivered by Political Counselor, Samuel C. Laeuchli  
to the Permanent Council, Vienna  
November 8, 2007

Mr. Chairman.

It is with regret that we again express our extreme concern about the failure of the Government of Azerbaijan to ensure freedom of the media. The United States has on several occasions recently drawn attention to the persecution and arrest of journalists. We are concerned by the October 30 sentencing on terrorism charges of Eynulla Fatullayev, the editor-in-chief of the independent newspaper Realny Azerbaijan. Mr. Fatullayev's newspapers routinely criticized government officials and publicized accusations of corruption. This sentence to eight and a half years in prison on charges of terrorism appears to be an attempt to silence criticism and stifle free expression. According to the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, Mr. Fatullayev is now the seventh Azerbaijani journalist imprisoned for his professional activities, and many other outspoken journalists in Azerbaijan have faced threats and violence.

As noted recently by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, this hostility towards independent and opposition journalists in Azerbaijan is not in harmony with our common OSCE commitment to freedom of the media. The United States urges the Government of Azerbaijan to address this and other cases of imprisoned journalists, decriminalize libel and defamation, and empower an independent and alternative dispute resolution to resolve libel and defamation complaints. We call on the Government of Azerbaijan to promote open and free media in order to achieve its professed goal of developing democratic institutions and a vibrant and free society in Azerbaijan. We reconfirm the willingness of the United States to continue working closely with the Government and people of Azerbaijan to help support the development of a thriving and responsible journalistic environment. Freeing these seven journalists would be a good place to start.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.