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United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on Verdict in the Court Case of Imprisoned Youth Activists in Azerbaijan

As delivered by Deputy Political Counselor Andrew Hyde
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
November 19, 2009

The United States regrets the November 11 court decision in Azerbaijan to imprison Azerbaijani youth leaders Emin Milli and Adnan Hajizade. The decision is a step backwards for Azerbaijan's progress towards democratic reform. The non-transparent investigation, closed court hearings, disproportionate legal charges, and failure to detain and charge the assailants have raised concerns about the independence of the police and the judiciary as well as about restrictions on freedom of expression in Azerbaijan.

We hope the events of the past four months do not signal a further erosion of free speech in Azerbaijan. We urge the appeal process in these cases to be conducted in a fair, timely, and transparent manner.

We also hope that this ruling does not discourage Azerbaijan's civil society from continuing efforts to promote democratic reforms, which the people of Azerbaijan deserve.

The United States remains committed to working with the government and people of Azerbaijan to seek progress on democratic reforms in line with Azerbaijan's OSCE commitments, including on freedom of expression and association. An independent judiciary, free from political influence, and a vibrant civil society are cornerstones of a modern democratic state.

Thank you, Madam Chair.