



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement in Response to Remarks by the Foreign Minister of Azerbaijan to the Special Permanent Council

As delivered by Ambassador Julie Finley
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
September 6, 2005

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

We welcome Foreign Minister Mammadyarov to the Permanent Council, and express our appreciation for his remarks here today. We commend the economic progress to which he has referred.

The United States strongly supports efforts to resolve the conflict in Nagorno Karabakh as early as possible. As a Minsk Co-Chair, we have been actively involved in the ongoing negotiations. We hope that recent discussions in Kazan between the Presidents of Azerbaijan and Armenia bear fruit. Resolution of the conflict would benefit all citizens of the region.

We strongly support the efforts by Azerbaijan to hold free and fair elections in November. We are encouraged by the steps that President Aliyev has taken in this regard, and point particularly to the President's Election Decree of May 11th that sets the stage for the elections. We urge President Aliyev and his government to continue on a path that demonstrates their commitment to Azerbaijan's democratic future, and to take all necessary steps to ensure the success of these elections.

We hope all members of the Government of Azerbaijan will stand by the President and support his goal of elections that meet international standards. Such elections will depend on balanced media coverage, peaceful campaign rallies, and prevention of election fraud, including allowing domestic nonpartisan observers to monitor the elections. Every voter needs an ID card, and we support Government efforts to ensure that every eligible voter can participate.

The new television channel, "Public TV," went on air on August 28th. The United States hopes it will offer fair and balanced coverage. We urge the channel to focus on unbiased coverage of all political parties in the campaign.

Mr. Chairman, the United States has heard reports of cases where organizers of regional campaign rallies have had problems receiving timely permits. We call on local and regional authorities in Azerbaijan to allow peaceful political rallies. These are an integral part of any political campaign.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, the United States is hopeful that recent amendments to the election code will help ensure that the Government can effectively prosecute election fraud. Key to this effort will be the prompt response by the Prosecutor General and the Central Election Commission to complaints forwarded to them.

Thank you.