



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to the Head of Office in Baku Ambassador Bilge Cankorel

As delivered by Chargé d' Affaires, a.i. Casey Christensen
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
July 9, 2009

Thank you, Madam Chairwoman.

We welcome Ambassador Cankorel to the Permanent Council, and thank him for his comprehensive report. The United States highly values the work of the Office over the past year, particularly in providing election-related assistance to Azerbaijani authorities, seeking to strengthen media freedom and promoting good governance.

We applaud the expansion of the Office's community policing program. In our view, these innovative centers directly contribute to the safety and security of the Azerbaijani people. We also strongly support the Office's programs on counter-terrorism and combating corruption among law enforcement officials.

In the economic-environmental area, we believe the Office's efforts to promote good governance and reinforce the anti-corruption work of the Government are particularly important and should be continued.

We continue to support the work of the Office and the Representative on Freedom of the Media in their vital work to create a more pluralistic and open media environment in Azerbaijan, in line with OSCE commitments. We welcome President Aliyev's recent criticism of criminal libel, but note that serious challenges to media freedom remain.

The Office's activities regarding rule of law, including training to increase professionalization of judges, prosecutors and defense lawyers, reinforce the Azerbaijani authorities' commitment to undertake a comprehensive reform of the judiciary. We agree that significant shortcomings still need to be addressed in this area. We therefore fully support the Office's intention to continue its focus on administration of justice in the coming year.

We also support the Office's commitment to advancing democratic governance in Azerbaijan and promoting reforms to bring Azerbaijan's legislation in line with international standards. Implementation of legislation, in particular regarding elections and freedom of assembly, should continue to be a focus of the Office.

We appreciate the Ambassador's May statement regarding the importance of an amended NGO law that fully meets international standards. We encourage the Government of Azerbaijan to consult with the OSCE and others regarding the recently-amended laws on NGOs, religion, and the media. We encourage the Office, as well as the Government of Azerbaijan, to collaborate with civil society, and to develop constructive solutions for some of Azerbaijan's most pressing human rights problems.

Recent high-level visits by United States officials to Azerbaijan underscore the importance that we attach to strengthening our bilateral relationship, and improving regional security. We reaffirm the United States' commitment to continue working together with the Government of Azerbaijan and the OSCE Office in Baku to advance Azerbaijan's development as a prosperous, modern democratic country.

Ambassador Cankorel, we wish you all the best for your work in the coming year.

Thank you, Madam Chairwoman.