



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on Arrest and Detention of Two NGO Leaders in Azerbaijan

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires Kyle Scott
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
July 23, 2009

Thank you, Madam Chairwoman.

Freedom of expression is a fundamental OSCE freedom and integral to the democratic process in every democratic country. The United States is concerned about the recent arrest and detention of Azerbaijani NGO leaders Emin Milli and Adnan Hajizade. We note reports that they were beaten and then detained pending trial, while their assailants explicitly were released. We are also concerned by credible reports that the police initially denied Messrs. Milli and Hajizade access to their lawyers, and that they may be in need of further medical care.

We have raised our concerns with senior officials of the Government of Azerbaijan, including law enforcement officials, and will continue to do so. We urge the Government of Azerbaijan to release Messrs. Milli and Hajizade pending trial. We call on the Government of Azerbaijan to ensure that Messrs. Milli and Hajizade are granted proper access to legal assistance and medical care. We also ask that the Government of Azerbaijan exercise due process.

We welcome recent positive steps taken by the Government of Azerbaijan this year, such as the release of several journalists from prison, and criticism by President Aliyev of the use of criminal courts for libel cases.

The United States remains committed to working together with the government and people of Azerbaijan to address the many challenges that remain to accelerate democratic reforms, including on freedom of expression and association, and the full range of OSCE commitments, which are integral to the democratic process in every State.

Thank you, Madam Chairwoman.