



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

# **Statement on Right to Peaceful Assembly and Freedom of Expression in Azerbaijan**

As delivered by Ambassador Ian Kelly  
to the Permanent Council, Vienna  
March 17, 2011

The United States remains concerned about the restrictions on the right of peaceful assembly and freedom of expression in Azerbaijan.

We took careful note of the March 10 spot report of the OSCE Office in Baku, which reported the arrest or detention of six young people active in social network or opposition party activities. These activists were arrested or detained for various administrative and criminal charges, following the launch of a Facebook group calling for protest actions on March 11, and the call from the opposition Musavat Party for a protest rally on March 12.

The timing of the charges against these young activists raises concerns that they were detained due to their efforts to express their political views. Similarly, the subsequent detention of a large number of youth activists connected with the planned March 11 protest raises doubts about Azerbaijan's commitment to the freedoms of assembly, association and expression.

The spot report also details the unsuccessful efforts of the Musavat Party to hold a rally on March 12. The actions of the authorities in this case appear to be inconsistent with Azerbaijan's OSCE commitments. Attempts by the Musavat Party to hold a peaceful demonstration in downtown Baku on March 12 ended with the detention of at least 63 demonstrators. A number of these demonstrators were charged with disobeying police orders and prosecuted.

We urge the Government of Azerbaijan to uphold the rule of law, ensure due process for those detained or arrested, and fully respect Azerbaijan's OSCE commitments to the freedoms of assembly and expression.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.