



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to Ambassador Bilge Cankorel, Head of the OSCE Office in Baku

As delivered by Patrick Connell, Political Adviser,
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
July 8, 2010

We warmly welcome Ambassador Cankorel back to the Permanent Council and thank him for his comprehensive report. The United States highly values the Office's work, particularly in providing election-related assistance, seeking to strengthen media freedom, and promoting good governance.

We applaud the expansion of the Office's community policing program. In our view, this innovative project directly contributes to the safety and security of the Azerbaijani people. We also strongly support the Office's police training programs and efforts to assist Azerbaijani authorities in combating terrorism, organized crime, and trafficking in persons.

We believe the efforts by the Office to promote good governance and reinforce the anti-corruption work of the Azerbaijani government are particularly important and should be continued.

Activities by the Office regarding the rule of law, including training to increase the professionalization of judges, prosecutors, and defense lawyers, reinforce the Azerbaijani government's effort to strengthen its judiciary. Significant shortcomings in this area still need to be addressed. We therefore fully support the intention by the Office to continue its focus on the effective and impartial administration of justice in the coming year. We also welcome the Office's placing emphasis on respect for the rights of detained persons.

We 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 freedom of assembly and elections, should continue to be a focus of the Office. We are concerned about an overly restrictive application of the Law on Freedom of Assembly and call on Azerbaijani authorities to allow peaceful demonstrations.

We also encourage the Government of Azerbaijan to avail itself of the OSCE's elections expertise to address deficiencies observed in prior elections, including in the candidate registration process, the composition of election commissions, local authorities' interference in the election process, lack of respect for freedom of assembly, and unequal media coverage of candidates.

We continue to support the work of the Office and the OSCE 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 note that serious challenges to media freedom remain, including the imprisonment of journalists. We join the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media in expressing our concern at the July 6 sentencing of imprisoned

journalist Eynulla Fatullayev to an additional two and a half years in prison on drug possession charges. The OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media called the charges highly improbable, particularly under the circumstances of Mr. Fatullayev's incarceration. In addition, we note that this decision came just months after the European Court of Human Rights overturned Mr. Fatullayev's initial sentencing and demanded that he be released immediately. We urge the Government of Azerbaijan to resolve Mr. Fatullayev's case, and the cases of imprisoned youth activists and bloggers Emin Milli and Adnan Hajizade, in accordance with Azerbaijan's laws and Constitution, as well as its international commitments. Securing freedom of expression for all citizens, including members of the media, is essential for democracy. Without an open media environment, candidates in the upcoming parliamentary elections will not be able to effectively disseminate their messages to the public, undermining the credibility of the government's stated commitment to democratic development.

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.

High-level visits by United States officials to Azerbaijan underscore the importance we attach to strengthening our bilateral relationship and improving regional security. We reaffirm the United States' commitment to continue working with the government and people of Azerbaijan to advance Azerbaijan's development as a prosperous, modern, democratic country. The OSCE Office in Baku is a crucial partner in these objectives. Ambassador Cankorel, we wish you all the best for your work in the coming year.