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United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on Azerbaijan Election Results

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires Bruce Connuck
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
November 10, 2005

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

We watched with great anticipation as the citizens of Azerbaijan went to the polls to vote last Sunday in parliamentary elections. President Aliyev had stated in May, and again on October 25, that his intention was to hold free and fair elections that met international standards. The United States, along with all of Azerbaijan's friends and allies, welcomed his determination and supported his efforts to reach this goal.

Now the results are before us.

The United States appreciates the comprehensive and authoritative preliminary findings produced by the International Election Observation Mission. They build confidence by building an objective, factual assessment of the election that all parties can use to address problems and to move forward.

We were pleased that there were improvements in some areas from the experience of previous elections. The International Election Observation Mission noted advances related to freedom of expression and freedom of assembly, as well as improvements in the fair application of election laws and regulations. We respect the efforts of all those in Azerbaijan who worked for free and fair elections.

However, we note there is much still to do before Azerbaijan meets international standards on elections.

In this regard, Mr. Chairman, we are disappointed that the elections did not meet a number of OSCE and Council of Europe commitments, as documented by the OSCE-organized observation mission. The observation mission concluded that problems in the pre-election period led to the lack of a level playing field. While the observation mission assessed voting positively in 87 percent of the polling stations visited, there was widespread fraud in the counting and tabulation of votes.

Fraud seems to have been particularly widespread in Baku, though the picture was more mixed in the regions. Certain places in more remote areas of Azerbaijan appeared to have conducted a fair ballot from beginning to end, while others conducted a solid voting process, only to mar progress during the vote count.

We take note of the November 8 press release circulated by the Azerbaijan Delegation informing delegations about President Aliyev's interview with Azerbaijan television on November 7. According to the press release, President Aliyev expressed appreciation for the

work of international observers and his Government's good cooperation with the OSCE and other international institutions. We commend his acknowledgement of reports of election fraud, as well as his commitment to ensure that these cases will be thoroughly investigated by the Prosecutor General's office. We call upon the Prosecutor General and the government to follow through quickly with their findings.

We are encouraged that opposition demonstrations to date have been peaceful, as was the government's response.

Mr. Chairman,

The United States has urged candidates to marshal their facts and channel their complaints into proper legal processes in Azerbaijan, that is, in the courts and through the CEC grievance process.

We look to the government to take corrective action in those districts where impartial and transparent investigations show that irregularities and fraud affected the results. We urge President Aliyev to ensure that those who violated the law are brought before the courts, as he has promised to do. Moreover, we call on the Government of Azerbaijan to ensure that voters who were victims of fraud or abuse during the election have prompt access to a fair, impartial and transparent judicial process to resolve such complaints.

In line with normal procedure, the OSCE observation effort must continue through complaints and appeals processes. We urge the Government of Azerbaijan to invite the OSCE to observe re-runs of the elections in selected districts.

Mr. Chairman, the United States reserves the right to return, at a later date, to the issue of statements by some members of the IEOM that were critical of the report.

Thank you.