



United States Mission to the OSCE

Ongoing Detentions and Arrests of Peaceful Activists in Azerbaijan

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires Gary Robbins
to the Special Permanent Council, Vienna
August 14, 2014

We urge the Government of Azerbaijan to halt the continuing arrests of peaceful activists, to stop freezing organizations' and individuals' bank accounts, and to release those who have been incarcerated in connection with the exercise of their fundamental freedoms. Most immediately, we call on the authorities to release, on humanitarian grounds, prominent human rights defender Leyla Yunus and her husband Arif Yunus, who were involved in people-to-people Track II efforts to promote peaceful reconciliation of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Both suffer from serious health conditions. Additionally, over the past weeks, other NGO activists such as prominent defense lawyer Intigam Aliyev, Rasul Jafarov of the "Human Rights Club NGO," and Emin Huseynov of the "Institute for Reporters' Freedom and Safety" fear imminent arrest or have been detained, arrested or charged with crimes on grounds that raise serious concerns. These are just a few of the many cases that cause us deep disappointment. We call on the Government of Azerbaijan to uphold rule of law, to respect human rights, and to stop this crackdown on peaceful civil society.

The space for peaceful civil society activities in Azerbaijan continues to tighten, making it increasingly difficult for a range of organizations - including some partners of the United States - to function. We urge the Government of Azerbaijan to ensure that its citizens are afforded all the human rights and fundamental freedoms to which all citizens are entitled, including the right to express their views freely in accordance with international human rights commitments and obligations. Doing so will foster an environment in which Azerbaijanis can reach their full potential and the country's long-term stability will be strengthened.

The United States' closest allies are democratic countries in which the rule of law protects human rights and fosters justice. These are necessary foundations for any country seeking widely shared prosperity and stability.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.