**Universal Periodic Review 16 – Azerbaijan**

**Intervention by the Netherlands**

Mr. President,

The Netherlands would like to thank the government of Azerbaijan for its national report and the detailed explanation of the national human rights situation in Azerbaijan by Mr/Ms ……………… here today.

The Netherlands is concerned about recent reports indicating decreasing respect for human rights in Azerbaijan, especially freedom of speech and freedom of assembly. The Netherlands calls upon the authorities to observe their international commitments on human rights and fundamental freedoms and to allow a vibrant civil society to help Azerbaijan become a well-functioning democratic society.

The Netherlands recommends that the government of Azerbaijan lift administrative restrictions on NGOs and peaceful demonstrators, refrain from imposing charges on peaceful demonstrators, refrain from acts leading to the closure of NGOs or the suspension of their peaceful activities, and instead promote a meaningful political dialogue that allows and embraces diverging views including those of human rights defenders, NGOs, journalists, political activists and others.

The Netherlands specifically recommends that Azerbaijan refrain from imposing excessive fines on media outlets for defamation, while working to adopt the law on defamation, which abolishes criminal liability for defamation and insult.

I thank you, Mr. President.