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**UPR Intervention for Azerbaijan, 16<sup>th</sup> Session April 30, 2013**

H.E. Mr Khalaf Khalafov, Deputy Min of FA

The United States welcomes [head of delegation] and the delegation of Azerbaijan.

We commend Azerbaijan's positive steps, such as those to discourage violence against women and early marriage and the 2012 release of a number of individuals imprisoned for public expression of their opinions.

However, we are concerned by the continued incarceration of some journalists and democracy activists. These raise concerns about authorities' use of the judicial system to limit the rights of individuals to express themselves freely.

We also are concerned by undue government restrictions on freedom of peaceful assembly. Authorities only permit demonstrations at locations far from the center of Baku. Further, they deny applications for peaceful political protests without cause, detain peaceful demonstrators, and in one recent incident, forcefully dispersed an otherwise peaceful, if unsanctioned, protest. We are equally concerned by credible reports of harassment of lawyers seeking to represent clients who were detained following peaceful demonstrations.

We are further concerned by recently enacted legal restrictions on funding for civil society and continuing difficulties for NGOs seeking to register.

We recommend:

1. Release individuals incarcerated for publicly expressing their opinions and ensure due process for other detainees;
2. Permit peaceful protests to occur throughout the country, including in Baku city center, and fully investigate the allegations of harassment of legal professionals representing peaceful demonstrators; and
3. Work with the legislature, as well as domestic and international organizations, to amend legislation in order to promote a flourishing civil society.

Alexandra Neelham