



## United States Mission to the OSCE

# Statement on the October 15 Presidential Election in Azerbaijan

As delivered by Ambassador Stephan M. Minikes  
to the Permanent Council, Vienna  
October 23, 2003

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The United States is deeply disappointed that the October 15, 2003, presidential election in Azerbaijan failed to meet international standards. We noted the preliminary assessment of the International Election Observer Mission, which included ODIHR and the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, that "voting in the 15 October Azerbaijan presidential election was generally well administered in most polling stations, but the overall election process still fell short of international standards in several respects." We concur with the latter conclusion, but reports from other organizations, and from individual observers themselves, concerning the orderliness of voting have also caused us concern.

The United States considered these elections to have been of great importance, and we informed the Government of Azerbaijan of our concerns on numerous occasions, at the highest level. There were some positive developments, including the new Unified Election Code, a multi-party choice for voters, and technical improvements that made fraud more difficult to hide.

However, these elements were unfortunately overshadowed by serious deficiencies, including the lack of a level playing field, police violence in the pre-election period, and partisan election commissions. While we regret that Azerbaijani non-governmental organizations receiving foreign funding were barred from observing the election, individual domestic observers were allowed to participate. On election day, observers witnessed serious irregularities, including inaccurate voter lists leading to the denial to eligible voters of the right to vote, voter intimidation, and the presence of unauthorized persons in the polling stations, and ballot-box stuffing. Observers also reported serious irregularities in vote counting and tabulation. These problems cast doubt on the credibility of the election results.

The United States is prepared to work with President-elect Ilham Aliyev and his government, but we believe that Azerbaijan's leadership missed an important opportunity to advance democratization by holding a credible election. The United States calls for an immediate, independent, thorough and transparent investigation of all election violations.

We are also extremely concerned about post-election violence and by what appears to be a wave of politically motivated arrests. Those who commit crimes should be prosecuted, whether civilians or police, and we call for a credible, transparent investigation. We also call upon opposition parties to act peacefully and within the law. We urge Azerbaijan's government to fulfill its OSCE commitments and its duties to protect all of its citizens and their rights. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.