



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on Juma Mosque Community in Azerbaijan

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires Paul W. Jones
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
July 15, 2004

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

On numerous occasions in the Permanent Council and bilaterally, we have urged Azerbaijan to uphold international standards of religious liberty, including its OSCE commitments. At the Permanent Council on July 8th, the United States called on the government of Azerbaijan to cease its eviction action against the Juma Mosque community.

The next day, July 9th, officials from the U.S. embassy and the OSCE office in Baku observed a group of police forcibly remove worshippers from the steps of the now-closed mosque. Our diplomats witnessed a police officer punching the deputy imam in the face after the latter had peacefully agreed to get into a police vehicle. Our embassy also reported that another worshipper was punched in the face, while an elderly man was forcibly arrested in the midst of prayers. At least five worshippers were arrested in total.

We are deeply troubled by the use of violence by police in Azerbaijan against peaceful worshippers.

We are concerned that authorities have closed the mosque indefinitely, purportedly for renovations, and refuse to allow any worshippers inside.

And we again call on the government of Azerbaijan to allow the Juma congregation to worship freely in the mosque and to choose its own spiritual leaders.

We also reiterate our call on both the mosque community and the government to refrain from violence and to resolve this dispute in a manner that fully respects the religious freedom of the Juma congregation.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.