

**U.S. Embassy Chargé Dereck Hogan's Remarks at
Opening Ceremony of the Seminar on the
U.S. Criminal Justice System**

March 30, 2015

Distinguished members of Azerbaijan's Judiciary,
Good afternoon.

Welcome to the judicial seminar on the Criminal Justice System in the United States. I am so pleased that experienced judges, such as yourselves, are interested in learning more about the U.S. legal system. I congratulate you all for your continual pursuit of professional development. As you all know, the dynamic nature of the law requires continuing professional development, both for American and Azerbaijani practitioners. More than 200 years after the founding fathers wrote the U.S. Constitution, legal experts and citizens still consider it a "living, breathing document." In the United States and surely in every other rule of law-based jurisdiction, the constitution and lesser laws are constantly being reinterpreted based on new realities and unanticipated events. And legislatures are constantly enacting new laws. These facts alone mean that judges and lawyers have to keep abreast of developments in the legal profession if they are to deliver sure justice.

In addition, sharing experiences and ideas with practitioners from different legal systems and traditions enriches all judicial education. The level of exchange is even more valuable when participants bring thoughts and proposals that they have developed from actual time on the bench. So I encourage you to share your experience in this seminar. Opportunities to explore new ideas and problem-solving approaches do not just enhance local judicial capability, but they also underwrite effective international cooperation.

Allow me to underscore a point that I am sure is obvious to all of you: the professional exchange of ideas is based on the premise that a knowledgeable, well-trained judiciary is a prerequisite to an independent judiciary. This is true no matter where you practice, in the Anglo-American system that selects its judges from among the most experienced legal practitioners, or in the Continental system where judges are selected in a competitive process based on institutional knowledge. A well-trained, knowledgeable judge is much more likely to be a more independent judge.

An independent judiciary, in turn, is critical to upholding the rule of law and guaranteeing the rights of citizens. When an independent judiciary is an essential feature of a country's constitution, it is far more likely that a citizen will be judged in accordance with the law, rather than on the basis of personal interest or class or family or partisan status.

The United States hopes that this brief seminar will be the first of many continuing judicial development exchanges between our two countries. I wish you a productive seminar.

Thank you