

**U.S. Embassy to Azerbaijan**

**Chargé d'Affaires Dereck Hogan**

**Opening Remarks**

**Azerbaijan Human Rights Forum**

**Park Inn Hotel, Baku, Azerbaijan**

**December 11, 2013**

**Chargé Hogan:** Good morning everyone. It is an honor to be here with you today to celebrate International Human Rights Day. I would like to thank the Institute for Reporters' Freedom and Safety, International Media Support, the British Embassy, and others for organizing this important event.

Each year, we commemorate the UN General Assembly's adoption in 1948 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. At that time, the UN envisioned a better world for all of us, and the document remains the common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations.

The United States fully supports the basic principles outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, namely, that everyone is entitled to certain rights and freedoms without distinction of any kind, such as race, color, sex, language, religion, or political or other opinions. Respect for these rights has long been a pillar of U.S. foreign policy throughout the world, including here in Azerbaijan.

As former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said during her 2012 visit to Baku, our closest relationships are with democratic states that respect the full range of human rights of their citizens. We want and need strong partners to deal with the increasingly complex challenges of today's world, and strong democracies are our strongest partners.

In our view, democracy is better than any other system of government at providing opportunity and freedom for individuals.

## TRANSCRIPT

The United States believes that Azerbaijan's future prosperity and stability is best ensured by enhancing respect for human rights and progress on democratic reform.

Among other things, we continue to encourage the government of Azerbaijan to ensure freedom of expression, assembly, and association. We also stress the need for due process and the fair administration of justice, media pluralism, and free access to opinions and information. We urge that more be done because we think rights and freedoms like these are pillars of democracy, and as a friend of Azerbaijan, we want to see it fulfill its tremendous potential.

There is no question that, when we create an environment free of intimidation, where basic human rights are respected, and when we dedicate ourselves to engaging in meaningful, mature, and public discussions on critical issues, we make our societies stronger.

We believe that respect for human rights and government engagement with citizens – especially young people – to address their legitimate concerns are the best and most effective ways governments can secure their long-term stability.

I want to reaffirm the United States' commitment to human rights and democracy in Azerbaijan. We will continue to work in partnership with the government, civil society, and the media to promote respect for universally recognized human rights and to ensure men and women are not penalized for pursuing these rights.

We do so because we want to promote Azerbaijan's vision for its development into an independent and prosperous Azerbaijan.

Thank you.