

**Remarks – Ambassador Robert F. Cekuta  
Humanitarian Assistance Project  
Ground-Breaking Ceremony  
Yeni-Dashkend  
Thursday, November 5, 2015**

Good Afternoon. Thank you for your welcome. My wife Anne and I are very pleased to be here in Yeni Dashkend, together with Major Scheinbaum from my Embassy, to break ground on this project to improve water supplies for IDP communities.

The project we are inaugurating today is just one of three new water projects which the United States, working through the U.S. Department of Defense's Humanitarian Assistance Program, is undertaking. The other two projects, on which work is also beginning, are in Ardushlu and Alkasli. All together, these three projects will improve the distribution of water for 670 families, or in other words, for over 3,300 IDPs and Refugees. These projects are only the latest in a series of projects the United States has undertaken in Azerbaijan since 1992 to help Azerbaijanis build a strong, stable, prosperous, democratic Azerbaijan, and also to help meet the needs of those who have been – and still are – affected by the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

Since 1992, the United States has provided over \$1.5 billion in assistance and humanitarian supplies, directly benefiting Azerbaijanis throughout the country. \$115 million of that has directly targeted IDPs, in the form of projects implemented by USAID, our Office of Defense Cooperation, and other U.S. entities. The projects we are starting today will be implemented through the U.S. Embassy's Office of Defense Cooperation, for example, working with the U.S. European Command and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Since 2003, the U.S. Department of Defense has allocated over \$4 million to fund 17 humanitarian assistance projects, including school construction and water projects, focused on helping IDP communities in Azerbaijan. These projects demonstrate our readiness to help improve the conditions of IDP's even as the United States remains focused on efforts to find a peaceful resolution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict through

the OSCE Minsk Group. Addressing the needs of IDPs and refugees will be a critical part of that effort. As Ambassador Warlick clearly said during his recent visit to the region, “there will need to be the opportunity for refugees and IDPs to return to their homes wherever they may be.” These projects are also a great example of what we can achieve when the United States and Azerbaijani governments work together with the support of local community leaders. This underscores the importance of international cooperation, of the friendship between our two great countries, and of the determination of Americans to stand by and support Azerbaijanis as they continue to successfully build a stronger, more prosperous country.

Let me focus a bit more on the project we are inaugurating here today. Why water? People’s access to good, drinkable water has huge implications. These include reducing poverty, hunger, and child mortality as well as improving maternal health, combating infectious diseases, and protecting the environment. Here in Yeni-Dashkend, the improvements in the well and water supply should help the people of the area realize these benefits. However, I also want to note something else, it will improve the water supply for the local medical clinic and thus improve the patients’ access to clean water.

With that, let me close and again thank the Azerbaijani government, the leaders herein Yeni-Daskend, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the U.S. military members of my team at the Embassy and at the U.S. European Command for all of your hard work. And let me wish all of them – and the people of this community – every success with this new water project.

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