

**Remarks by
Robert F. Cekuta
U.S. Ambassador**

**Signing Ceremony for USAID-UNDP Collaboration
on “Economic Empowerment for Entrepreneurship
and Employment”**

December 7, 2015

Ambassador Broek, Deputy Chair of the State Committee for Family, Women and Children Issues, Sofiyeva, Deputy Minister of Labor and Social Protection of the Population Kerimli, excellencies, other distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, good afternoon.

I am very much pleased to be launching this new partnership of USAID, UNDP, and the Government of Azerbaijan to support developing new economic opportunities for the women and youth of Azerbaijan.

Today’s event coincides with the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence sponsored by the United Nations. From November 25, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, to

December 10, Human Rights Day, the 16 days campaign is a time to act to end violence against women and girls around the world. As Secretary Kerry said in his recent remarks, gender-based violence is a problem in every country around the globe, including the United States. One in three women around the world will unfortunately experience some manifestation of this brutality in her lifetime. For older women, women with disabilities, and women in marginalized communities, the reality is even worse. And all of this comes at a terrible cost, not only for women, but for families, communities, economies, and countries the world over. I know there are many in Azerbaijan who have been acting to address this problem and so I am very glad to be part of this gathering today to celebrate this new program, empowering women and raising gender awareness.

Simply put, advancing women’s participation in the economy and society contributes to a stronger economy and society, as well as to an improved quality of life for women, men,

families, and communities overall. As President Obama recently said, communities that give their daughters the same opportunities as their sons, are more peaceful, are more prosperous, develop faster, and are more likely to succeed.

Azerbaijan, the United States, the United Nations, and all those here share this commitment and in that spirit we are signing today a Declaration of Intent to finalize a new two-year \$342,000 award with UNDP to implement the Economic Empowerment for Entrepreneurship and Employment (E4) project. Under this project, we will boost economic opportunities for women and others in Azerbaijan, especially in Masalli and Ganja. We will help rural women develop their business skills and strengthen their role in making the decisions that affect them and the fellow citizens of their communities.

Moreover, by improving the ability of Employment Centers in Masalli and Ganja to provide work-related training, we will enhance the ability of the women and youth in those communities not just to work, but also to innovate, to develop and act on new ideas in business and the workplace. Moreover, this project will draw on the UNDP's successful expertise in the establishment of Women's Resource Centers and Employment Centers, and capitalize on the successful partnerships they have built over the years.

I want to draw everyone's attention for a moment to the long, deep, and I think effective engagement that the United States has had with Azerbaijan in helping Azerbaijanis realize their expectations for a stronger, more prosperous future. For example, the United States, working through USAID, Peace Corps, and other U.S. government agencies has a long history of supporting gender equality and working to improve the opportunities for women and girls in Azerbaijan around the world. USAID's global Gender Equality and Female Empowerment Policy is having a direct and beneficial impact, helping women, families, and communities by improving access to resources, reducing gender-based violence, and increasing their capability to influence their lives.

For the past few years, in Azerbaijan, USAID has promoted women's economic empowerment by providing training in business skills and financial management, as well as internships for female students. USAID also supported women's social and economic participation in their communities and helped women-focused civil society organizations boost their ability to address women's issues.

I want to note too that the Government of Azerbaijan has taken many important steps as well. For example, Azerbaijan ratified the UN Convention on the "Elimination of Any Type of Discrimination against Women" in 1995. Azerbaijan's government has also adopted a number of laws and incorporated gender equality provisions into its policies. The Presidential decree on the "Implementation of the State Women's Policy in the Republic of Azerbaijan" in 2000 anticipates equal participation of women and men in all structures of the government. At the executive level, the government affirmed its commitment to address women's issues by

establishing a separate State Committee for Family, Women, and Children in 2006. For youth, the President approved the State Program “Azerbaijani Youth in 2011-2015” which aims to help Azerbaijan’s young people to be able to compete in the country’s evolving labor market. The National Employment Strategy also includes measures to promote youth employment.

Working through USAID and other U.S. entities, we look forward to engaging further with Azerbaijan – with its government, with its citizens, with Azerbaijani civil society organizations – to advance this work further. In particular, I am confident our partnership with the State Committee for Family, Women and Children and with the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection under the Economic Empowerment for Entrepreneurship and Employment project we are celebrating today will make another significant contribution to addressing both women’s issues and youth employment in Azerbaijan.

Thank you all for participating today and I wish all those engaged in this important work every success.