



PERMANENT DELEGATION
OF NORWAY TO THE OSCE

STATEMENT BY NORWAY IN RESPONSE TO THE HEAD OF THE OSCE OFFICE IN
BAKU, AMBASSADOR JOSE-LUIS HERRERO

**As delivered by Ambassador Guttorm Vik
to the Permanent Council,
12 June 2008**

Mr. Chairman,

The Norwegian delegation warmly welcomes ambassador Herrero back to the Permanent Council and thanks him for his extensive report. Let me also stress at the outset that we strongly support the important work of the OSCE Office in Baku.

We are pleased to note the frank and open dialogue that exists between the Office and the Azerbaijani authorities, and hope this cooperation will bring the desired results in all three dimensions. We appreciate that issues related to the OSCE's human dimension are high on the agenda, and we would in particular commend the OSCE Office's efforts in establishing a close cooperation with the host nation on projects within the justice sector, not least with regard to capacity building. At the same time, we see this as a proof of the political willingness of the Government of Azerbaijan to move closer to OSCE standards in implementation of the rule of law. Norway strongly encourages the Government of Azerbaijan to build on this positive development and without delay undertake a much needed general reform of the judiciary, including the penitentiary system. We have had constructive discussions with the Azerbaijani authorities on how we can draw upon the experience of the Council of Europe in this field.

We have also taken positive note of the valuable work undertaken by the OSCE Office in close cooperation with relevant Azerbaijani partners on projects in the economic and environmental dimension. We will continue our support to some of these projects.

Mr. Chairman,

Freedom of expression is fundamental to democracy and a key factor in developing a pluralistic society free of fear and self-censorship. We urge the Azerbaijani authorities to cooperate closely with the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media to create a media environment where journalists do not have to fear being imprisoned solely for their critical expressions of opinion. We also urge the Azerbaijani authorities to step up efforts at solving the 2005 murder case of Editor Elmar Husseinov, ensuring a transparent and impartial investigation, so that the culprits are quickly brought to justice.

Freedom of speech and expression is highly dependent on competent and professional media. Improving journalistic professionalism is therefore very important, and this is the reason why Norway supports the OSCE training assistance program for the Public Radio and Television Company (ITV) and a Council of Europe programme to develop training of journalists in Azerbaijan.

Mr. Chairman,

Elections are the very litmus test of democracy in any country. So also in Azerbaijan. The way the recently adopted Law on Freedom of Assembly is applied will have crucial impact on how political activities are organised throughout the country. Impartial media coverage and non-interference from governmental structures are other important aspects of the election environment. In this context, we very much welcome the cooperation that exists between the OSCE Centre, the ODIHR/Venice Commission and the Azerbaijani authorities on bringing the electoral system and environment closer to international standards.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, we understand and appreciate that the Office still has many and important tasks to complete, and we wish ambassador Herrero and his very competent and dedicated team all possible success in the work ahead.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.