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THE PUBLIC AFFAIRS SECTION / EMBASSY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Press Statement
Under Secretary for Global Affairs Dr. Paula Dobriansky
Baku, Azerbaijan
July 27, 2005

I am pleased to be visiting Azerbaijan, particularly during this key election year. We value our bilateral relationship. Azerbaijan has stood by the United States in fighting the Global War on Terror; Azerbaijan has contributed troops to coalition efforts in Afghanistan and Iraq; and Azerbaijan and the United States have worked to make the East-West Energy Corridor a reality, bringing Caspian energy resources to world markets. We are also working together to combat international problems such as trafficking in persons.

Given our countries' partnership in these areas – as well as the emphasis that President Bush places on the advancement of democracy and freedom – the United States is deeply committed to helping Azerbaijan succeed in democratic and economic reforms. Democracy is the only path to a stable and prosperous future.

There has been much international focus on this year's Parliamentary elections as part of Azerbaijan's democratic development. It is only when people have the opportunity to choose freely their leaders, leaders that respond to the interests and needs of their constituents, that the people can claim an equal stake in the future of their country. The whole election process, not just Election Day, is a key signal of your country's commitment to democratic development. Freedom of assembly, equal access to the media for all candidates, and a transparent and accurate vote count observed by domestic as well as international monitors, including NDI and IRI, are all elements that are crucial for ensuring the elections meet international standards. All political parties carry a responsibility to participate fully in the election process through non-violent campaigns that explain issue-specific messages and platforms to voters. The people of Azerbaijan must have real choices. Authorities should also prosecute recent election fraud, including the more than 100 cases from the December 2004 municipal elections, in order to build the people's trust in the election commissions and processes, and to deter election fraud in the future. In addition, there must be mechanism to adjudicate complaints about election procedures and ensure substantive dialogue to make certain that the process meets international standards. All of these steps will help build the trust of the Azerbaijani people and the international community that the process is free, fair, and transparent.

These are all key aspects to a democratic election process, and I have underscored these points throughout my meetings today. Some of these points are also part of President Aliyev's May 11

election decree. It is the sincere desire of the United States Government that this decree be implemented fully at all levels of government in all regions of Azerbaijan. Our hope is also that the U.S.-funded exit poll, conducted by an independent, objective organization, will help to deter electoral fraud.

Azerbaijan faces many challenges to advancing democracy and must address a number of issues in addition to elections. The United States Government is fully committed to helping Azerbaijan move down this road of democratic reform in pursuit of a genuine partnership based on shared values as well as common interests. We want to work with all of you to help achieve the future the people of Azerbaijan so richly deserve and which is within your grasp.