



**PERMANENT DELEGATION
OF NORWAY TO THE OSCE**

STATEMENT ON AZERBAIJAN

As delivered by Ambassador Robert Kvile
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
2 February, 2012

Mr. Chairman,

Norway and Azerbaijan enjoy close bilateral relations. We meet frequently for discussions of issues of mutual interest. Norwegian industry has made considerable investments in Azerbaijan. Earlier this week Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Mr. Khalaf Khalafov, visited Oslo for discussions with his Norwegian counterpart.

These discussions cover a broad range of issues, including issues related to the situation in the Southern Caucasus and other topics on the OSCE's agenda.

Norway has from time to time raised issues on the Permanent Council related to human rights and democracy in Azerbaijan. We have also aligned ourselves with the European Union when they have raised similar issues.

Last week the delegation of the Republic of Azerbaijan informed the Permanent Council of the National Program for Action to Raise Effectiveness of the Protection of Human Rights and Freedoms in the Republic of Azerbaijan.

Mr. Chairman,

We have carefully studied this Action Plan, which is a follow-up of earlier plans of the same kind, and we commend Azerbaijan for putting forward this plan. We believe it is a testimony to high ambitions in the area of human rights, democracy and the rule of law. We note that the document contains several references to international treaties to which Azerbaijan is a party, as well as to international organisations, the OSCE included, and the benefits that can be

drawn by Azerbaijan in cooperating closely with them. We agree that this Action Plan could form a suitable platform for substantive contributions by the OSCE and its institutions, as well as by individual member states, towards Azerbaijan reaching the objectives of the Plan. It is obviously its practical implementation which is most important.

We also note that the document contains references to civil society and non-governmental institutions. We know from our own history that a vibrant democracy is unthinkable without an active and engaged civil society. Chapter 4.9 of the Action Plan, which refers to the establishment of human rights centres, including houses of human rights, is in our view important in this regard.

Such an institution, The Human Rights House Azerbaijan, which is linked to an international network of Human Rights Houses, was established in Baku in 2007 and registered by Azerbaijani authorities the same year.

In March 2011, the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Azerbaijan asked the Human Rights House in Baku to cease its activities, citing a need to conclude a new agreement with the authorities.

Work towards resumption of the activities of the Human Rights House has since been ongoing.

We hope that the newly presented Action Plan, and the ambitions the Plan reflects, will serve as an impetus for a timely and positive conclusion to this process, allowing the Human Rights House Azerbaijan to reopen.

Mr. Chairman,

We understand that the Azerbaijani Delegation in due course will present the Action Plan in the Human Dimension Committee. We look forward to this presentation as an opportunity to hear more about the plan itself and its implementation.

By way of conclusion, I would like to underline my country's readiness to support the authorities of the Republic of Azerbaijan in their endeavours to strengthen human rights, democracy and the rule of law in their country.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.