

Statement of Senator Saxby Chambliss
U.S. Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE)
July 29, 2007

Mr. Chairman and fellow Commissioners, I am pleased to participate in this important hearing today on the situation in Azerbaijan. As a Senate Commissioner, and as member of the Senate Committees on Intelligence and Armed Services, I know how important his part of the world is to our strategic interests and to the region. And we value Azerbaijan's participation in the war on terror and in energy security and transportation.

But I also know the world will be watching this October when Azerbaijan holds its Presidential elections. Because Azerbaijan is a signatory to all the major international human rights agreements, including the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and the Council of Europe, this election is an opportunity for the government to show the rest of the world that it can live up to these commitments.

The Helsinki Commission performs a valuable function in monitoring fundamental freedoms, such as democracy and the rule of law, free and fair elections and the protection of human rights. The documents declare that commitments undertaken in this human dimension are of direct and legitimate concern to all participating states.

I am concerned there appears to be a number of human rights issues identified by the U.S. government, the Council of Europe and NGOs. According to the State Department, this has involved repression of independent journalists, the arbitrary arrest and detention of political opponents, and lengthy pretrial detention.

One case, in particular, is that of former Minister of Economic Development, Farhad Aliyev, and his brother, Rafiq, the former President of Azpetrol Oil Company. They were arrested during the parliamentary election campaign in October 2005: Farhad --on charges of plotting a coup d'etat. After being held in pretrial detention for 18 months, they were tried and convicted of unrelated economic crimes. Observers noted that the 5 month trial was marked by irregularities and lack of due process. I understand the state owned oil company took control of Azpetrol the day after the brothers were arrested.

During the trial, Minister Aliyev told the Court on May 15, 2007, that the coup charges were just a pretext and that the government came up with certain "bizarre demands" including an admission that he "intended to carry out the 'orange revolution' incited by the US, British and German governments. He also stated that they requested \$100 million dollars for him to be released. I ask UC that the text of his 2 court statements be included in the hearing record (Briefing book TAB 9).

The State Department Human Rights Report for 2007 had this to say: "Some considered the 2005 arrests of individuals on charges of plotting a coup and subsequently corruption to be politically motivated." I understand that the Aliyevs were held in isolation without meeting or talking to his family for 2 years, although this just recently changed. Mr. Chairman, I strongly urge Azerbaijan resolve this and other cases as soon as possible.