

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

June 15, 2009

The Honorable Nita Lowey
Chairwoman
Subcommittee on State,
Foreign Operations
HB-26, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kay Granger
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on State,
Foreign Operations
1016 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairwoman Lowey and Ranking Member Granger:

As you prepare the Fiscal Year (FY) 2010 State-Foreign Operations and Related Programs Appropriations bill, we write in strong support of U.S. assistance to Azerbaijan, other aid related provisions that contribute to the development of Azerbaijan, and to the further strengthening of U.S.–Azerbaijan relations. We respectfully request you to consider the following matters:

Repeal Section 907 of the Freedom Support Act.

Although the FY 2002 Foreign Operations Appropriations Act provided the President the authority to waive Section 907 annually, now is the time to repeal Section 907. Repealing Section 907 would remove significant impediments that prevent further strengthening of U.S.–Azerbaijan bilateral relations.

As you know, one of the priorities of President Obama’s foreign policy agenda is to strengthen our relations with Muslim world. As a staunch ally of United States, including in key areas such as energy security and war against international terrorism, Azerbaijan should be one of the first Muslim nations that we seek to reach out to and strengthen relations with.

Azerbaijan’s strategic location is increasingly important with our recent commitment to increased operations in Afghanistan. Most recently, on March 17, 2009, General Duncan McNabb, U.S. Transportation Commander testified before the Senate Armed Services Committee that “this year, establishing the Northern Distribution Network (NDN), alternative routes to Afghanistan through the Caucasus and Central Asia, has become a high priority. And we have made significant progress in partnership with the Department of State (DOS), DOD, USCENTCOM, U.S. European Command (USEUCOM), and U.S. Pacific Command (USPACOM) to establish these new routes.”

Russia’s incursion in Georgia changed all dynamics and balances in the region. To ensure our influence in the region we must support our allies like Azerbaijan.

Increase Military Aid to Azerbaijan.

We encourage the Subcommittee to allocate addition military aid to Azerbaijan. Due to its strategic location, Azerbaijan plays a significant role in our national interests and in the coming years could become increasingly significant.

Azerbaijan's important to the U.S. was mentioned most recently by General Bantz Craddock, United States European Command. In testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee on March 24, 2009, General Craddock noted: "Azerbaijan has taken deliberate steps towards Euro-Atlantic integration, to include realigning its staff structures to NATO standards, training a company to NATO standards under the Operational Capabilities Concept, and it recently began a Strategic Defense Review which the U.S. is leading with support from Latvia, Lithuania, and possibly Turkey. Its close proximity to Iran, Russia, and Caspian Sea energy resources makes it important to U.S. strategic interests. Azerbaijan provides an alternative energy source for our European Allies. An example of the region's growing importance to the global market is the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline, bringing oil from the Caspian Sea to the Mediterranean. Furthermore, Azerbaijan's support to the U.S. in global security has been substantial, including being a troop contributor to KFOR, ISAF and OIF."

Straddled between Russia and Iran, Azerbaijan is located in dangerous neighborhood with significant threats. In addition, Azerbaijan may be faced with additional threats as potentially plays an increased role in providing transportation and logistical support to American troops in Afghanistan. We must support our allies like Azerbaijan. Both Foreign Military Finance and International Military Education and Training programs are important tools.

U.S. Humanitarian Assistance to Nagorno-Karabakh Should Cover Azerbaijani IDPs

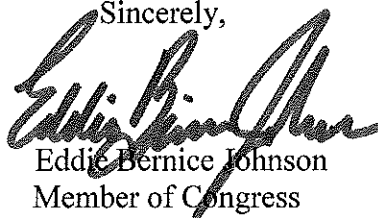
The United States has led humanitarian assistance efforts throughout the world, and that assistance has often covered both sides impacted by conflicts. We believe our humanitarian assistance to Nagorno-Karabakh should cover the victims of both sides of that conflict as well. As you know, Azerbaijan has been suffered significantly as a result of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Our humanitarian assistance must reach to Azerbaijani refugees and Internally Displaced Persons as well.

We should also recognize that some groups may use the goodwill of the Congress on behalf of their political purposes. They may present U.S. humanitarian aid as a U.S. direct assistance to "Nagorno-Karabakh Republic" which is recognized neither by U.S. nor by any country as independent state. The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is an extremely sensitive issue for both Azerbaijanis and Armenians. As a Co-Chair of the OSCE Minsk Group, United States has taken a neutral position on this conflict. We request Subcommittee to avoid from any actions that may damage our position of neutrality.

Sincerely,



Bill Shuster
Member of Congress



Eddie Bernice Johnson
Member of Congress



Solomon Ortiz
Member of Congress