

THE AZERBAIJANI PERSPECTIVE:

News from the Heart of the Silk Road

August 17, 2008 – Los Angeles, California

Parliamentarians Visit California

On August 12-15, members of the Azerbaijani Parliament, the Milli Mejlis, visited California at the invitation of the State Senate. The parliamentary delegation included MPs Gular Ahmadova, Asim Mollazade, Fuad Muradov and Ganira Pashayeva.

The program began in San Francisco, where the parliamentarians were welcomed at the City Council. Also in San Francisco, MP Asim Mollazade spoke at the World Affairs Council of Northern California on Azerbaijan's experience since independence and on the current state of affairs in the South Caucasus.

On August 13, in Sacramento, the delegation met with the incoming State Senate President Pro-Tempore Darrel Steinberg and was introduced on the Senate floor by Senator Sheila Kuehl. At the session, Mr. Mollazade spoke on behalf of the delegation and emphasized the importance of strategic partnership between the United States and Azerbaijan.

Other meetings in the State Capital included discussions with Mr. Garrett Ashley, Undersecretary for International Trade, and a group of California legislators.

In Los Angeles, members of the delegation were welcomed at the Los Angeles City Council by Councilmembers Eric Garcetti, Wendy Greuel and Dennis Zine. They also spoke at a luncheon with members of AIPAC and visited the Azerbaijani-American Council's office in Irvine, where they met with members of the Azerbaijani and Turkish communities.

In other news:

*President Ilham Aliyev led the Azerbaijani delegation at the Beijing Olympics. As of August 17, Azerbaijan's athletes won 5 medals. They include Elnur Mammadli's gold and Movlud Miraliev's bronze in judo, Rovshan Bayramov's and Vitaly Rahimov's silver in Greco-Roman wrestling as well as Mariya Stadnik's bronze in women's freestyle wrestling.

*A delegation of the American Jewish Committee led by Executive Director David Harris visited Baku and met with President Ilham Aliyev as well as with other officials.

In Baku, Mr. Harris described Azerbaijan as "a strong ally in a challenging and critical region" and "an example of religious tolerance and a proven friend of the United States and Israel."

*In response to the ongoing crisis in neighboring Georgia, President Aliyev ordered delivery of humanitarian aid to the conflict's victims. Earlier, the Foreign Ministry reiterated its support for territorial integrity of the Republic of Georgia and called for the cessation of hostilities.

In related news, Azerbaijan Airlines said it plans to resume regular flights to Tbilisi. Georgia's Olympians traveled to Beijing from Baku together with the Azerbaijani Olympic team.

*On August 15, MP Asim Mollazade joined Rabbi Abraham Cooper at the Los Angeles Museum of Tolerance for a media event focusing both on Azerbaijan's tradition of religious diversity and on implications of the Georgia-Russia crisis for the region and for Europe's energy security.