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PARLIAMENTARY PROGRAM IN AZERBAIJAN

Quarterly Report (July 1 – September 30, 2008)

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(Sixth Quarterly Report for Task Order 5)

September 2008

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(Sixth Quarterly Report for Task Order 05)

This quarterly report is submitted to the Program CTO Parviz Musayev of the Office of Democracy and Governance of USAID-Caucasus-Azerbaijan Mission under the guidelines as stated in Clause A.6 of the contract.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	4
I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	5
II. SUMMARY OF PROJECT OBJECTIVES AND RESULTS	9
COMPONENT 1: DEVELOPING AND STRENGTHENING PARLIAMENTARY CAPACITY	9
<i>SIGNIFICANT ACTIVITIES/EVENTS</i>	
<i>SUMMARY OF THIS QUARTER'S MILESTONES AND OUTPUTS</i>	
<i>RESULTS THIS QUARTER</i>	
<i>SUMMARY OF PLANS FOR NEXT QUARTER</i>	
COMPONENT 2: PROMOTING GREATER PROCEDURAL AND LEGISLATIVE TRANSPARENCY	12
<i>SIGNIFICANT ACTIVITIES/EVENTS</i>	
<i>SUMMARY OF THIS QUARTER'S MILESTONES AND OUTPUTS</i>	
<i>RESULTS THIS QUARTER</i>	
<i>SUMMARY OF PLANS FOR NEXT QUARTER</i>	
COMPONENT 3: ENHANCEMENT OF OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS OF PARLIAMENT	17
<i>SIGNIFICANT ACTIVITIES/EVENTS</i>	
<i>SUMMARY OF THIS QUARTER'S MILESTONES AND OUTPUTS</i>	
<i>RESULTS THIS QUARTER</i>	
<i>SUMMARY OF PLANS FOR NEXT QUARTER</i>	
CROSS-CUTTING TASKS	25
<i>SIGNIFICANT ACTIVITIES/EVENTS</i>	
<i>RESULTS THIS QUARTER</i>	
<i>SUMMARY OF THIS QUARTER'S MILESTONES AND OUTPUTS</i>	
<i>RESULTS THIS QUARTER</i>	
<i>SUMMARY OF PLANS FOR NEXT QUARTER</i>	
III. PROJECT MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATION	26
IV. CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED AND REMEDIAL SOLUTIONS	27
V. UNRESOLVED ISSUES OR CONSTRAINTS ON THE PROJECT	28

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Sixth Quarterly Report

Introduction

The **Parliamentary Program in Azerbaijan** is a two-year technical assistance initiative of the United States Agency for International Development USAID. It is being implemented by Development Alternatives, Inc. (DAI), from April 2007 to April 2009. The Parliamentary Program's main partner is the Milli Mejlis (MM), the Parliament of Azerbaijan. Program subcontractors include the National Conference of State Legislatures, Indiana University and International Roll Call.

The Program's activities focus on three general technical components, with activities to be carried out as detailed in each of the two annual workplans:

- 1) **Developing and strengthening the capacity of permanent parliamentary staff**, including the establishment of central and regional constituency offices for each MP, enhanced committee capacity and sustainable training Programs.
- 2) **Promoting greater legislative and procedural transparency** through the provision of technical assistance and resources to make official and draft legislation accessible to Government and private citizens and the adoption of sunshine mechanisms, including the publication of voting records of Members of Parliament (MPs).
- 3) **Enhancing the effectiveness of Parliament** by providing technical assistance and training for newly elected and existing MPs on staff utilization, responding to constituency requests and issues, ethics Programming, legislative procedure and process development, and comparative study tours.

The emphasis of the first year of the Program was to evaluate the status of the institution's capacity in the three overall components mentioned above and to provide training for capacity building accordingly. The second year of the Program further continues training of the staff of the Parliament and develops the MPs' ability to become a part of the policy making process, as full fledged legislators. The Program is the first USAID funded technical assistance project concerning the Parliament in Azerbaijan and hence, the Program started at determining the fundamentals of the institutional and administrative capacity in the Parliament and rapidly moved into a capacity building mode with very comprehensive tailor-made training Programs for its staff, assistants to MPs and MPs.

In order to carry out the Program activities, the Program has set-up five specific project staff teams, which correspond to one of more of the major activities within – or crosscutting – the three components. This includes the following: Constituency Building Task Force; Communication and Public Relations Task Force; Human Resources Development Task Force; the Organizational/Institutional Task Force and the Legislative/Legal Coordination Task Force. Each of the Program's Task Forces is run by a long term specialist and the entire Program is supervised by the Chief of Party. The counterparts of the Program include the Parliament's Chief of Staff and an Aide to the Chairman of the Parliament. The Program also will interact regularly with heads of technical and administrative departments within the Parliament.

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

During this quarter the Program team finalized the detailed training sessions for MPAs that had begun during the prior quarter. In addition, the Program held a study tour in Poland related to public information disclosure, IT, research and information for selected heads of departments of the MM Office. It also arranged visit of the Assistant to the Chairman of the MM, Ruslan Ismayilov to a yearly conference/meeting of the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) in the US, accompanied by the Program's Chief of Party. Another study tour, sponsored by the US Department of State also sent a number of MPAs for a three-week tour in the US to visit constituency offices in four cities. This quarter's activities continued to maintain and consolidate the quality of the working relationship between the Program team and the leadership of the Parliament, a number of MM departments, and with individual MPs and their assistants.

This summer saw a number of changes taking place with several MM staff and leadership members which required the team to reestablish contacts with the new staff members. This quarter did not see much activities in the month of August, a vacation month, during which the MM was not active. In addition, upon returning from vacation in early September, many MPs and MM staff were involved in the Azeri presidential election campaign,

The presidential election campaign affected the Program insofar as many MPs were called to duty to canvass the regions and constituencies in support of the incumbent president's candidacy. These elections show the Parliament as an institution that clearly acts as a propaganda tool for the executive powers in Azerbaijan, rather than the institution of representative democracy and policy development it should be. (A comment is provided on the impact of the election upon the Parliamentary Program, in section V of this quarterly report).

Nevertheless, the team was able to still work with the MM leadership and develop new relationships with the new staff members. By mid-September, the Team had obtained a very positive reaction to its Year 2 Workplan from the MM leadership and the coordinating team at the MM's HR Department. This was possible by having the Program tread carefully on putting together a workplan that, while addressing all main issues required of the RFP, did not on its face appear to be threatening to the status quo, though challenged the established institutional setting.

Detailed Training for MPAs

During the quarter, the Program conducted the final session of the detailed training of MP Assistants (MPAs) it had started in the prior quarter. The final training session took place in Nakhchivan, a region considered very important for the MM leadership. This last session concluded the detailed training sessions for all 104 MPAs. The detailed training Program for MPAs made great use of the best available local experts in a number of subject matters, including presentation of manual on various aspects of the constituency work (prepared by the Program team), discussion on ways of efficient cooperation with Ombudsman's offices in the regions, municipalities and NGOs', as well as with local ExComs', law enforcement agencies and courts and using of information technologies.

Just as it did with the last quarter's sessions, the training sessions were based on a very interactive approach, encouraging dialogue and the use of real life case studies. In all, the training sessions comprised the following districts in the regions: Lankaran/the southern regions, Ganja/the western regions, Ismaili/the northern regions and the Nakhchivan region.

Assistance and Training for MM Staff and Leadership

The Program also carried out two round tables for the Milli Mejlis staff working in the Parliament apparatus and MPAs. The round tables included a major round table session on information and research. It also included a new guest speaker series event starting with a round table presentation and discussion about the French Assemblée Nationale. The guest speaker series will be offered on a bi-monthly basis and will provide a forum for an open discussion between the MM staff and experts on a given subject matter. Both events were deemed to be very positive and welcome events by the MM leadership.

Coordination with Other USAID Projects

The Program team continued to substantially develop the work of the Coordination Meeting Group with other USAID partners, particularly in the area of training for MPAs with the case studies initiative of the Constituency Building component.

The Program will utilize a number of local experts from USAID partner projects as specialists in the case studies, including economists, social economists, lawyers specialized in community based organizations and NGOs, and others for in-depth practical training in policy development at the constituency level

Relations with MM Deputies and Building Capacity

The Program continued to develop a very good working relationship with a number of MPs. During the month of September, the program coordinated the organization of a meeting with MPs and a visiting former US Congressman, Greg Laughlin. The meeting was organized spontaneously and brought Samad Seyidov, the Chairman of MM International Relations Standing Commission and several other MPs, along with the MM leadership and head of the HR Department for a fruitful discussion on a number of topics, including the role of MPs in international relations and the use of staff support for effective legislating.

The case study on policy development training of MPAs also provides a very important forum for the Program to include MPs and to push for MPs to work together on a given policy development issue. The Program has thus begun to reach out to MPs in a more targeted fashion through the case study project, by providing a concrete basis for collaboration and training.

Assistance to MM Office Departments

Several events, including study tours and round tables took place during the quarter, which enhanced the Program's capabilities for comprehensive assistance and set the stage for future progress in the capacity building assistance to the MM staff. The Program continued to work with the library, IT, Public information/web site and Information-analytical departments in providing additional information and expertise. In that respect, noticeable progress has been made on the MM web site, through the addition of newly created link and text that touch on increased disclosure and transparency in the work of standing committees.

A round table on Information and Research for the MM, was held on July 2, 2008. About 40 representatives of the MM and invited guests participated in the Round Table with most attendees having actively participated in the discussions. In addition, an IT study tour to the Polish parliament was held during the second week of July.

Continuing its efforts for providing a solid experience, the Program launched a new additional event, named Bi-Monthly Guest Speakers series, as referenced earlier. The first of such events, featured a seminar on the French National Assembly with Mr. Stanislas Brezet, Counselor to the support services department of the National Assembly, September 10, 2008. The seminar was attended by 23 Staff members and MPAs. The topics included a review of the French National Assembly's institutional system and the administrative structure of the French National Assembly, including: relationships with the executive branch of power, human resources, MPAs, research and MPAs

In close cooperation with Ruslan Ismayilov, technical coordinator of the Program from MM side and Mehman Namazov, head of MM Library, the Program established on July 2, 2008 a 'USAID Parliamentary Program Corner' in MM Library. M. Namazov assigned a separate shelf in the library with the Program logo standing above. The program staff delivered 35 items of printing materials in two copies each, including evaluation reports, materials on best foreign parliamentary practices, presentations made by STTAs during round tables and workshops, including materials on Effective Parliamentary Commission Operations, Separation of Powers and Checks and Balances System, Parliamentary Oversight of Government, Parliamentary Codes of Conduct in Europe and others. The Program will continue delivery of the selected project materials to MM library.

Study Tours

The Program held several study tours during the quarter. One study tour held in early July took heads of the IT, library and web site departments for a full week study tour to the Polish Parliament.

In late July, the Program COP took the assistant to the Chairman of the parliament to the yearly convention of the National Conference of State Legislatures to New Orleans for a week of conferences, round tables and events attended by over 6,000 US and foreign legislators, and administrators of legislatures.

The US Embassy, under its international visitors program, invited 8 MPAs and members of the HR Department of the MM to a three-week long US study tour, on the Role of Assistants to Legislators in Policy Development. The study tour took place in Mid-August, early September.

The feedback received by the participants of these study tours shows that not only these study tours are very important in building goodwill and further follow-up, but are of great value to help in the buy-in of reforms that technical assistance projects such as the Parliamentary Program are attempting to foster.

Joint Steering Committee

As indicated in the prior Quarterly Report, the Joint Steering Committee proposed by the Program to the MM, had been put on the back burner. This quarter, the Program again revisited the idea with the MM leadership. While the MM leadership again indicated that the timing was not yet appropriate, it indicated that it may be discussed by year-end. In any event, the Program is working on alternative approaches, as it is an important component of the process, if the Program is to move for a coherent approach to reforms in the Parliament. In that regard, the Program will begin creating several small working groups in different activities, which once moving forward will provide a basis for a larger coordination. Thus, not unlike the "grassroots-upward" strategy used by the Program earlier in the project, as regards to the Constituency

work, as an alternative to the non-viable traditional “Top-down” approach, it will seek to reach its objective without pushing head-on, by getting around the obstacle, as a more productive approach. The lack of motivation on the part of the MM’s apparatus leadership, though apparently backed by one of the Chairman’s deputies, is unclear. It appears that this is solely based on the desire to maintain monolithic control over the apparatus, rather than share authority with MPs.

II. SUMMARY OF PROJECT OBJECTIVES AND RESULTS

The activities indicated in the summary are references to the activities indicated in the second year's workplan submitted to the USAID/Azerbaijan mission.

COMPONENT 1: DEVELOPING AND STRENGTHENING PARLIAMENTARY CAPACITY

SIGNIFICANT ACTIVITIES/EVENTS

Activity 4. Last Detailed Training Sessions for MPAs' Constituency Building conducted (July 2008)

Activity 4. Case Studies for Policy Development in Constituencies Launched (August-September 2008)

Activity 4. US Study Tour for MPAs Held (August-September 2008)

SUMMARY OF THIS QUARTER'S MILESTONES AND OUTPUTS

Activity 4: Support establishment of effective constituent relations

Last Detailed Training Sessions for MPAs' Constituency Building Conducted (July 2008)

During this quarter, the project finalized its series of detailed training sessions for MPAs, which had began during the prior quarter. The final training session took place in Nakchivan in mid-July 2008. The training included together 20 MPAs and carried the same format as for the prior training sessions and also utilized the same experts. Details of the training sessions' content and experts were covered in the prior quarterly report. As in prior training sessions, feedback from the sessions shows a large level of appreciation for the training and a good response to the substance of the training. The training sessions were attended by the Milli Mejlis HR Department's leadership and local state representatives.

Activity 4: Support establishment of effective constituent relations

Case Studies for Policy Development in Constituencies Launched (August-September 2008)

For the remainder of Year 2 of the Program, training of MPAs will continue at different levels. One of the aspects of such training will consist in providing hands-on, practical oriented work in constituencies, by looking at specific issues existing in some of the communities. This takes the form of a case study in specific communities which may overlap over several constituencies, having similar issues. The case study work itself is expected to last several months with a resulting report in about March 2009. The work will be done incrementally and we will insure that it does not infringe much upon the

other work that you and your MPAs have to carry out during this period, but rather try to integrate it into it efficiently.

The case study was designed as a result of the work done during the detailed training of MPAs. The issues were chosen after open deliberations with the MPAs, who helped us determine those that are important for the constituencies. The study will have a deeply practical approach and seek to provide a solution to the issues. The focus will be on constituencies at the local level, not national level, and hence will have a chance of having a more realistic practical effect on the community and engage the community as well. While practical in its approach the case study is supported by a methodology designed by our Program and which is used as a framework to research and draft a full fledged policy issue report. The report will be drafted by having our Program work very closely with MPAs and experts from our Program, Azeri and foreign experts and specialists from other USAID based projects, as well as local NGOs.

The aim of the case study is to prepare MPAs and MPs, working in their respective communities, to create a full fledged analysis of an issue and design a potential successful policy model. If the final result of the study in the form of the report is deemed to be of good quality and value by experts and MPs, that study may then, with USAID's guidance develop further into discussion in the appropriate Standing Commission, for possible further consideration. This is akin to some of the processes that are used in many parliaments around the world and is proposed to contribute to the capacity building of the Parliament and an enhanced role of MPs and their assistants, as contributing to the legislative process on specific issues.

Activity 4: Support establishment of effective constituent relations

US Study Tour for MPAs Held (August-September 2008)

The US State Department, with coordinated help from the Program, sponsored an "International Visitor Project Azerbaijan" study tour for 7 MPAs and HR department staff members in August 2008. The study tour focused on the role of legislative aides in policymaking in the U.S. The program was administered by Angela Pellegrino-Grant and Rebecca Tollefson of the World Learning Visitor Exchange Program, working with Program Officer Naomi Feigenbaum of the Department of State's Office of International Visitors. The study tour program objectives included the following:

- Examine democratic electoral processes at federal, state, and local levels;
- Explore the use of research and policy specialists in the development of legislation;
- Observe how legislative staff members provide constituent services of all types;
- Speak to representatives of both major U.S. political parties about platform development, fundraising and campaign strategies in the 2008 election cycle;
- Examine the interaction between non-governmental organizations and congressional staff members on policy formulation; and
- Interact with legislative aides at federal, state, and local levels to observe and understand their roles and responsibilities.

A detailed agenda of the study tour is attached as Appendix "A", for details.

Upon their return to Baku, the study tour participants issued a report summarizing how the tour benefited them. The report indicated that the study tour was a very important exchange of experience with American leaders. Through this study tour the report stated, “we were able to discuss not only political, economic and ideological matters, but also to communicate directly with ordinary Americans. We are given great opportunities to benefit from the experience of government, non-government organizations embracing all spheres of the American society and the experience gained in building a civil society. Despite similarity and differences in legislative, executive and judicial powers both countries, with the same mission, work hard to further develop civil society. The tour was a success in terms of improvement of the activity of the MP assistants’ institution of the Milli Mejlis, and having an exchange of experience with American parliamentary assistants.” The report also stressed that there are similarities in the rights and responsibilities, as well as the requirements and limitations set upon legislative assistants.

RESULTS THIS QUARTER

There were several main events related to this component during this quarter. The study tours and training, which involved Assistants to MPs and MPs and experts, strengthened their capacity in that it established concrete and practical approaches to their work in constituencies and understanding of the dynamics of policy development and use of staff. Furthermore, these events provided fertile ground for intense exchanges and comments between trainers, Assistants to MPs, institutional leadership, MPs and experts supporting MPs. The Study Tours greatly added to the training carried in the prior quarter and also greatly increased the buy-in into the process. The progress made in the capacity building of Assistants to MPs resulted in:

- Substantially improved understanding of the MPAs’ role in constituencies and in relation to the institution in a practical sense.
- Increased networking capacity among MPAs and with NGOs.
- Practical aspects of developing Constituency offices and relationships with constituents improved.
- Continued development of the relationship between the Program and the MM allows for a more open approach to training and a stronger and more potent exchange of ideas and concepts.

SUMMARY OF PLANS FOR NEXT QUARTER

- Implement constituency case study work with a number of MPs and their MPAs.
- At least three townhall meetings held in several regions.

COMPONENT 2: PROMOTING GREATER PROCEDURAL AND LEGISLATIVE TRANSPARENCY

SIGNIFICANT ACTIVITIES/EVENTS

Activity 1. Review of new Milli Mejlis website (July-September 2008)

Activity 2. Poland IT Study Tour Held (July 2008) (See Component 3 for details)

SUMMARY OF THIS QUARTER'S MILESTONES AND OUTPUTS

Activity 1: Support Website Improvements

Review of new Milli Mejlis website (July-September 2008)

This quarter, the Program continued to work with the MM Office of Public Information (Website) Division in developing the division's vision for improvement of MM website as one of the most efficient ways for information sharing and interaction with constituencies, NGOs and business associations. The Program arranged a study tour to the Polish Parliament with participation of three key staff members of MM Office, responsible for website, IT and library issues, which resulted in very good perception of the experience of the Polish Sejm in public information sharing and efficient functioning of the Sejm's departments and their role in enhancing of MPs capabilities as law-makers and elected representatives of people.

A number of activities related to the web site and information took place as follows:

MM Legislative Database

MM IT Department was continuing to work on creation of a comprehensive legislative database, which will include all laws adopted by MM during 1991-2008 and will be available online through MM website for public use. Currently only laws adopted during 2003-2008 are available on MM website. According to previous feedback the Program got from the IT staff there is several technical challenges related to creation of a comprehensive database, such as different scripts (DOS, ISO, etc.) used in the past during typing of laws, collating and verification of laws, etc.

With the assistance of the Parliamentary Project, files of Azerbaijani laws from USAID's Legislative Database, which is currently located at a server in the Ministry of Justice of Azerbaijan, were downloaded in the previous quarter into the MM server for further incorporation into MM Legislative Database.

Poland Study Tour provided good vision for MM Office IT Department on improvement options for the existing legislative database. Electronic lawmaking process has been implemented for over two years in Poland and approved by the respective law. It stipulates automation of the process of making changes made to the laws in an electronic database. MM Office IT Department is also developing "Drafting Legislation and Their Circulation" proprietary software which will make a lawmaking process more transparent and consistent. The Parliamentary Program will follow up on evaluation of MM needs in creation of a comprehensive legislative database.

Round Table in Milli Mejlis related to MM web-site evaluation (August 2008)

On August 14, 2008 a discussion was held in MM by initiative of Rashad Azizov, Head of Public Information Sector of MM Office. Osman Gunduz from Multimedia Information Systems & Technologies Center (NGO), Javanshir Aliyev from IT Department of Academy of Public Administration and Ismayil Mammadov from USAID Parliamentary Program participated at the event.

In the opening remark, Rashad Azizov informed briefly about the purpose of the meeting and said that Public Information Sector of MM Office would conduct a series of discussions related to the MM website, because the MM would like to improve the website permanently.

In his opinion, the main problem with information exchange and release in the MM is attitude of staff members ("bureaucrats"). They still inadequately perceive information resources and consider information as supplement to the legislative process, not as its essential part. But the leadership of the MM (the Chairman and Chief of Staff) understand the problems existing with the current state of information exchange within the MM and are trying to resolve them both technically and administratively. The leadership of the MM understands that the tasks related to information release are wider than the framework and requirements of Law on Public Information. The leadership of the MM has ordered the IT and Public Information Departments: to create internal and external information resources and databases, which should be a part of the legislative process and serve as an effective communication tools in- and outside of the MM. The quality of information is also crucially important.

Currently the MM's external website is isolated from internal information resources (Intranet) and is considered by many staff members as a media outlet. For example, in Poland, both Internet and Intranet are managed as a single tool from a single platform (server).

The design of MM website doesn't meet standards and needs to be improved, but there are some issues related to web-design company Mega. In September 2008 the Public Information Sector should submit proposals related to significant improvement of information exchange in MM through Intranet and Internet.

The Public Information Sector has reviewed opinions on the MM website prepared earlier by the USAID Parliamentary Program in Azerbaijan and Multimedia Technologies Center and appreciates the analysis provided in the respective reports. In addition to these reports, the MM wants to organize face-to-face discussions. This is why representatives of both organizations were invited to MM.

Rashad also stressed that while the legislative process is the core function of MM, it is necessary to change law-making practices. In western countries, for example, in Poland the Parliament's Office involved only in technical aspects of the legislative process (proof-reading of the draft-laws, etc.) and Committees of the Parliament plays key role, while in Azerbaijan MM Office Departments participate in all stages of law preparation while Commissions role is weak.

There are also exists several technical problems related to electronic versions of the laws. Contrary to that, in Poland, for example, the Sejm's IT Department developed a special software program which, after downloading into legislative database makes changes in all previous versions of the law automatically, should a new amendment adopted by the Sejm. There is strong necessity to develop similar software in MM too.

Rashad stressed one more time, that in general, the main difference between legislatures in Poland and Azerbaijan arose from the fact that staff members in the Sejm only provide technical support for legislative process, while in the MM officers of the legislative departments are directly involved into the legislative process.

As regarding MM Legislative Database, the work was undergoing in order to make available for public all laws adopted by MM since 1991. Ismayil Mammadov made several comments at the meeting both on substance and technical aspects of the website. While he supported Rashad's vision of MM website as part of information resources and one of the tools for legislative process, he also emphasized that the website should be a tool not for ordinary, but for efficient legislative process. It means direct or indirect involvement of constituencies and public into legislative process in order to ensure that the legislation is adopted based on citizen interest and not on interests of bureaucrats or lobbying groups.

The MM still was not able to provide by any means a regular summary of statistical information about its activity – how many draft laws were prepared by MPs, how many laws in general were adopted during a session (including “a genuine laws” and ratification acts), how many opinions on draft laws were received from the citizen, civil society, business associations, etc.

It is crucially important to provide timely access to verbatim reports on session debates. Though we could see some improvements in that area – the latest available on the website report is dated as of March 2008, while previously the latest report was one year old, MM should ensure that the reports are published in a timely manner, like for example, in Poland or Ukraine parliaments, where such reports are published next day after the plenary session.

Standing Commissions Section of MM website (September 2008)

The MM placed in September 2008 on its website the Standing Commission module which contains several sections, such as: composition of the commissions, legislative workplan, agendas and resolutions. It means significant step in increasing of transparency of MM activity, since the Standing Commissions are in the heart of legislative, representative and oversight functions of the parliamentary activity. The recommendation to place the Commission module in the MM website was expressed previously several times by the Parliamentary Project team.

Further Potential Actions for MM Website Improvement (September 2008)

On September 16, 2008 Ismayil Mammadov, The Program's communication specialist met with Rashad Azizov, head of MM Office Public Information Division. Rashad provided brief information about ongoing issues related to MM website, including feedback from the users and plans for improvement of both content and design. He brought as an example creation of a separate module for MM commissions which is currently accessible by outside users and contains consistent (though basic) information about the commissions' activity, including functions description, composition, workplans, agendas and resolutions.

Rashad emphasized that development of the commissions section was strongly pushed by Bahar Muradova, Deputy Speaker, who insisted on creation of a fully functional and useful section which would really help MPs in their work.

Furthermore, Bahar had strongly advised Rashad share to public through MM website as much information as possible about MM activity, thus making MM website as a source of comprehensive information in the legislative area.

Rashad pointed out that currently he would like to make significant improvements in MM website, such as following:

- Creation of section for MM Departments and linking departments to commissions. The section should contain information about ongoing issues in the department's agenda, including support to the Commissions in consideration of draft laws and specific issues. Non-legislative departments, such as Press Service or Public Relations Department should provide information for their respective areas of responsibility (accreditation rules, summary of addressing of petitions received from the citizen, etc.)
- Enlarge Commissions section by adding of a few new elements (contact points, minutes, etc.)
- Enlarge Draft Law section and download there all respective information related to draft laws (stages of consideration, analytical support materials, etc.)
- Add section on MPAs and link it to MPs section. The section should contain all contact information about MPAs (office address and phone, e-mail).
- Add section about general information about MM, including overview of the Parliament's functions and activity, MPs election process, etc.

All these changes require significant technical work to be carried out by Mega outsourcing company, with whom MM has a contract. According to a preliminary estimate the cost for such work would be equal of 2000-2200 manat.

Rashad was going to discuss with Safa Mirzoyev, MM Chief of Staff the issue of funds allocation for MM website update.

In the event that the MM would not be able to cover the expenses, Rashad was curious whether the necessary funds would be available from the USAID Parliamentary Program. Rashad has plan to finalize all works by the end of October 2008.

Since the potential request to allocate funds for the MM website's significant content improvement, provides the project with exciting opportunity to improve the MM website in a transitional way to a comprehensive and interactive source of information, the Program has tentatively agreed to allocate 1,000 AZN for this work. This would also cause very positive cooperation in terms of placement of the Parliamentary Project's materials directly on MM web-site.

There are many other ideas being considered currently by Rashad for the future, such as downloading of information directly from Commissions and departments computers, timely publishing of MM plenary sessions' minutes and a few others.

Internet Blog Design Training Course for MPAs (September 2008)

In September 2008, the Program in cooperation with IATP/IREX has continued its efforts for continuation of Internet blog design courses for MPAs. By recommendation of IATP the Program has engaged a local professional in electronic blog design and management training. The Program has communicated with MM on schedule of trainings and participants, aiming to bring MPAs with high computer literacy in order to make the courses efficient. The Program will communicate in October 2008 to MM Office IT Department in order to discuss technical aspects of the training courses. The

training module will consist of eight lessons, 2 hours each and covered all essential aspects of personal web-design, including creating of the MP website design, embedding various tools and management of web-site (removing and downloading of materials). The basic template of MPs web-site consists of the following content elements:

Static – address, biodata, contact details, including constituency map

Dynamic – current activity in the constituency and the Parliament, including constituency campaigns, speeches at the Standing Commissions and Plenary Sessions meetings; voting records, media reports. Depend on success of the courses, the Program may consider enlargement of trainings to MM Standing Commissions secretaries, in order to create skills in downloading of information related to the Commissions activities into MM

RESULTS THIS QUARTER

- This quarter resulted in a better outlining of the needs of the IT and web site departments and helped develop a clearer vision for the heads of the departments. The Program provided an in-depth analysis of the state of development of the departments and provided suggestions for future capacity building. These were further developed during the IT Poland study tour.
- IT Study Tour to Poland had provided very good opportunity for MM staff to acquire best experience in the use of IT for public information sharing and triggered initiative to make significant amendments in the content of MM website aiming to increase number of information available for public.

SUMMARY OF PLANS FOR NEXT QUARTER

- Continue to work with MM Office IT Department, identify needs and discuss solutions for creating and launching of online MM Legislative Database with incorporation of files from the USAID Azerbaijan Legislative Database.
- Hold a media round table discussion with MM leadership and deputies.
- Provide funding on a co-sharing basis for a redesigning of the MM existing website and incorporating a significant number of new sub-menus, relating to Standing Commissions and Office activities and including modules with the Program materials.
- Continue electronic blog design training courses for MPAs with engagement of an professional IT specialist (blogger). Demonstrate practical results in ability of MPAs to design and manage the Internet based blogs for MPs as one of the efficient interactive tools for communication with constituencies.

COMPONENT 3: ENHANCEMENT OF OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS OF PARLIAMENT

SIGNIFICANT ACTIVITIES/EVENTS

Activity 2. Poland IT Study Tour Held (July 2008)

Activity 2: Held a comprehensive Round Table event on library, information and research services for Parliament (July 2008)

Activity 3: Study tour to NCSL yearly conference attended. (July - 2008)

Activity 3: attended a public hearing seminar on anticorruption legislation (July 2008)

SUMMARY OF THIS QUARTER'S MILESTONES AND OUTPUTS

Activity 2: Professionalize the MM Library and research Services

Poland IT Study Tour Held (July 2008)

The long planned Study Tour to Poland for MM key staff members responsible for website, IT and library issues taken place between July 6 and 16, 2008 with participation of Mr. Shahin Hasanov, head of MM Office IT Department, Mr. Rashad Azizov, head of Public Information Division and Mr. Mehman Namazov, head of MM Library. During the tour, the delegation had many meetings in both chambers of the Polish Parliament, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Poland and Warsaw State University.

The Sejm plays a vital role in the governmental system of Poland. The Constitution shapes a delicate system of balance between particular powers of the State, which is described as a parliamentary-cabinet system with a slight inclination towards the presidential system. The government is subject to the control of the Sejm. Members of the government and the Council of Ministers bear full political responsibility to the Sejm; the latter may also hold the members of the Council of Ministers constitutionally accountable to the Tribunal of State. The Sejm is composed of 460 Deputies, elected in universal, equal, direct and proportional elections, conducted by secret ballot.

In a debriefing meeting held after the Tour, the delegation evaluated the trip (with a sense of excitement) as very interesting and useful. Indeed, they were able to see Polish Sejm as an example of a successful transition story from soviet-style façade legislature to a strong component in the check and balance constitutional system. Its administration has been reconstructed to fulfill the needs of a democratic body in supporting democratic legislative process. New services were developed specifically in the area of transparency of the legislative process, information management, legislative data bases, efficient and effective use of modern IT, as well as research, documentation and information for the use of parliamentarians.

The IT Centre of the Polish Sejm Administration offers an example of a quite advanced and professional operation. It includes several departments supporting various systems of servicing legislative process, documenting legislation, programming and IT networking, technical servicing and network administration. The IT department successfully runs Oracle applications which is a world leading provider of software in

the public sector. Polish Sejm website is also well developed, giving complete information and access to many data bases. There is also internal TV, as well as the regular TV studio. The Sejm Library, which would also be part of the study tour, has elaborated its own website. It is one of major libraries in the country. The access to the data bases of the Office of Sejm Analyses is also provided through internet. The relation of intranet and internet networks and accesses were also studied within the study tour. All of these subjects were of interest to MM officials.

Two main observations were stressed candidly by the participants of the tour: first, mentality difference in perception of work environment and duties between staff members in the Sejm and MM, and second, little role of the Office in the legislative process. Unlike MM staff members, the Sejm Administration's employees are proud to work for the Parliament and are very motivated. The Administration is encouraging initiative and creativeness and orients them to serve MPs as efficient as possible. Since all legislative staff works in the Committees of the Sejm, they are directly serving MPs.

The staff of IT Department is consisted of 50 employees, the staff of the Library – 75 employees and the staff of Information and Research Center also consists of 75 employees. In 2008 Sejm allocated amount equal to 1.2 million USD only for purchasing of IT equipment and software licenses.

The delegation has submitted a study tour report to the Program (though a little bit late) with some conclusions and recommendations. It includes potential implementation in MM's activity successful examples of IT and Library solutions and practices, as well as request to provide funding for participation in the conference "21st International Conference on Legal Knowledge and Information System" to be held in Florence, Italy on 10-13 December 2008.

The program will continue to work with MM respective staff in a "working group" in order to assist in implementation of actions, which will make more efficient work of MM Office Public Information Division, IT Department and the Library.

Held a comprehensive Round Table event on library, information and research services for Parliament (July 2008)

The Program designed and held a comprehensive Round Table event on information, library and research facilities for Parliament. The Round Table was held on July 2, 2008. During the Round Table, the Program introduced its paper elaborated during the prior quarter, entitled *Library, Information and Research Services for Parliament: Options and Model Organizational Solutions*, including a specific plan for a parliamentary information, library and research center for the MM. The paper was the main base document as a tool for the round table.

What is the most efficient approach to developing the Information and Research Center (IRC) in the Milli Mejlis?

In the opening remarks to the round table Petro Morgos of the Parliamentary Program in Azerbaijan and the representatives of the Milli Mejlis –, Chairman of Economical legislation Standing Commission Ziyad Samedzade; heads of legislative departments Nizami Safarov and Latif Huseynov stressed the role of such information and research services for legislative drafting, oversight, and first of all for policy development in a parliament. They presented the arguments for establishing these services and suggested that there are different models of parliamentary information and research

services in different countries. MM can adjust one of these models to legal practices and traditions of Azerbaijan. One of the important requirements for the parliamentary IRC is that it must provide nonpartisan information. MP can pick up any side he wants, but IRC must provide information on unbiased base to benefit the country as a whole. Research should be open and objective. It should not depend on the political process or personal assumptions.

An intensive debate started after the introductory remarks on identifying the most efficient approach to creation of the IRC: Should this be done through enhancing the capacity of the existing Analytical Information Department of the MM Office, which is involved mainly in foreign policy studies? Or should the analytical capabilities of the legislative departments be increased instead? Discussion of the pros and cons of these options made the round table a worthy exercise. As a result of the debate, the round table participants suggested the creation of a working group that would rethink what is in place in the MM into a coherent new center.

The Knesset experience

Presentation by Yehudit Galilee Metzger, Second Secretary of the Embassy of Israel, former staff member of Knesset, about the Research and Information Center of Knesset, attracted everybody's attention and made a strong positive impact on the round table participants. MPs can not be experts in everything, she said. That's why they have helpers. The services this Center provides to the Knesset include background documents for committee debates, economic analyses, comparative surveys, long-term studies, information posters on specific issues, etc. The clients of the Center are consultants for, Knesset committees and committee chairpersons, members of Knesset, Knesset departments. The information provided to MPs before discussions allows them to raise right issues, ask the Government the right questions, and adopt legislative acts which serve people. Knesset RIC can ask any government institution any question and that institution has to provide the right answers. Yehudit's suggestion to the MM representatives was frank and simple: Do not repeat our mistakes – do not wait for 50 years to do the right thing, learn from others' experience. The Israeli Government is very strong and the Parliament used to be quite weak, - she said. Then RIC was created a few years ago. Today, the Government is still very strong, but the Knesset is now learning how to get information and answers to its questions from the Government. Ms. Metzger also invited the MM representatives to visit the Knesset to see how the RIC work is organized.

Global Legal Information Network (GLIN)

As a second example, the Global Legal Information Network (GLIN) operated by the Congressional research Service of the Library of Congress was presented by Aybeniz Mammadova, Constituency Relations Specialist of the Parliamentary Program. Ms. Mammadova had just returned from the study tour to the US, organized by the Parliamentary Program for a group of MPs and Commissions experts. During the trip, the delegation visited the US Congress and its Library, as well as the Congressional Research Services department. As part of the research capacity. GLIN is a non-commercial federation uniting government bodies and institutions of different countries which provide their national legal information to the GLIN data base. GLIN provides internet access to the full texts of over 150,000 of legal documents from 50 participating countries. These materials are grouped in 4 modules: charters and rules of procedure; court decrees; legislative materials; and legal literature. The system allows using centralized dictionary to search for specific topics and legal terms. This is a reliable official updated and comprehensive information service. Joining GLIN, would allow the Milli Mejlis to get access to the legislative documents and other materials of many different countries.

KITAB - Proposed model for the Milli Mejlis IRC

As a model solution for organizing Information and Research services in the Milli Mejlis, the KITAB (Kitabxana, İnformasiya, Təhlil və Araşdırma Bürosu) approach was suggested by the Parliamentary Program team. The main idea behind the proposal is to build a new IRC around the existing human and technical resources of the Analytical Information Department (as a core), four legislative departments, standing commissions' experts and the library of the MM. Integration of all these currently considerably disconnected resources into a coherent and associated department, would help to develop IRC within MM with strong capabilities.

As part of the KITAB, the MM Library under the new name of MM Library and Information Sector would develop and strengthen its document collection, staff, equipment and overall facilities. Its mission clearly set as serving the parliament, individual deputies and researchers,

- it would hold Azerbaijani and foreign specialized literature and professional journals,
- it would develop e-library (catalogue, bibliographies, full text data bases, web searching and selective dissemination of information services), and
- it would be providing public enquiry services.

Its existing staff should be trained and enlarged by newly hired professional information professionals and librarians with foreign language skills, especially English. No more than 6-7 staffers will probably be needed.

The Research and Analysis Section should be more developed (around 25 staffers) and divided into teams by subject matters, tailored to the needs and priorities of the Parliament. Foreign languages, particularly good command of English, would be a must. Besides hiring a few specialists, like creative young people with foreign language skills, this section could be created by bringing people from other departments: experts from the department on the work of standing commissions, specialists on specific subject matters from legislative departments, as well as specialists from the analytical department.

The section's tasks would concentrate on:

- specialized research related to specific legislation, mostly on demand from deputies, commissions and departments,
- producing or commissioning expert analyses and opinions,
- producing reports and studies on the subjects of interest to the parliament,
- organizing conferences, seminars, workshops,
- publishing the results on the web site and in paper form.

The workings of the Analytical Department could constitute the beginnings of the new Research and Analyses Section.

The subject specialists from the legislative departments could be transferred to the appropriate teams of the Research and Analysis Section. Legislative departments (around 25 staffers) would be left with just legislative drafters dealing with specific bills and working with assigned committees. They would be assisted by research staff of the Research and Analyses Section, whose task would also be working for particular deputies on request.

At present, the staff of the four legislative departments, the analytical department and the library amounts to about 55 staffers, plus a number of committees' experts. It is a great challenge to bring this potential to establish substantial support for Milli Mejlis activities that would enhance the overall effectiveness of parliament.

MPs Ziyad Samedzade, Nasib Nasibli, Ali Masimli, heads of the MM departments Latif Huseynov, Nizami Safarov, Adila Abbasova, Aydin Agayev and others actively participated in this discussion.

Conclusion

The Round Table was assessed as an extremely important and timely discussion by the participating MPs and the staff of the Milli Mejlis, as well as outside invited experts. Many participants raved about the unique openness of the debate and the quality of the presentations and discussions, which they also described as a first among many seminars and round tables held in technical assistance projects. While this was only the first attempt to review the current status of information and research services at the MM in an open and frank manner, participants expressed great interest in the subject and thanked the organizers for the very useful and important seminar. Everybody agreed that with combined effort of different stakeholders, including the leadership of the institution, this issue could be addressed and a new information and research service center, meeting the requirements of a modern parliament, could be established at the Milli Mejlis for the benefit of the people of Azerbaijan.

Activity 3: Build Deputy Capacity to Contribute to the Parliamentary Process

Study tour to NCSL yearly conference attended. (July - 2008)

The NCSL (National Conference of State Legislatures) held a national symposium on July 22-26, 2008 in New Orleans. The NCSL is one of DAI's sub-contractors for the Parliamentary Program and has organized the US study tour with DAI in Denver and Washington DC. The National Conference of State Legislatures (<http://www.ncsl.org>) is a bipartisan organization that serves the legislators and staffs of the nation's 50 states, its commonwealths and territories. NCSL provides research, technical assistance and opportunities for policymakers to exchange ideas on the most pressing state issues. The leadership of the NCSL is composed of legislators and staff from across the country.

The Program invited Ruslan Ismayilov, the Assistant to the Chairman of the MM to attend the yearly convention, along with the Program's Chief of Party.

Attendance at the conference provided unique opportunities for one of MM's future leaders and currently a rising professional within the institution and Azerbaijan to meet with leaders of US legislatures and other professionals and administrators of foreign parliaments. The opportunity to network and create both new contacts and future collaborations between the institutions is a key element of future institutional progress in the MM.

Furthermore, Mr. Ismayilov's communication with the Parliament leadership and his ability to have the ear of the Chairman and Chief of Staff of the Parliament, will likely provide the basis for improving cooperation between the Parliamentary Program during year 2 and beyond.

Finally, from the perspective of development and strategy to improve the legislative institution in Azerbaijan, such a hands-on visit to a conference of that magnitude in the US, may provide far more knowledge and understanding, for a relatively small investment on the part of USAID, than many lectures and seminars carried by short term experts. From a pedagogical and educational perspective, the potential buy-in is

high as amply demonstrated by many short exchange visits in many other areas of development.

Activity 3: Build Deputy Capacity to Contribute To the Parliamentary Process

Attended a Public Hearing Seminar on Anticorruption Legislation (July 2008)

AzPAC project's (Strategy for Support to Anti-Corruption Policy in Azerbaijan) seminar on the society's awareness on prevention of money laundering and sponsoring terrorism

On July 22, 2008, Ismayil Mammadov, the Program's communications specialist attended a **seminar on the society's awareness on prevention of money laundering and sponsoring terrorism**.

The seminar was organized by AzPAC team in Baku in order to arrange discussion around draft law on prevention of legalization of illegally obtained monetary means and other property and sponsoring of terrorism.

The seminar was designed to increase citizens' and government awareness of these issues and to promote the adoption of appropriate legislation by Milli Majlis. The draft law was prepared by working group under auspice of the National Bank of Azerbaijan and passed through first reading in MM during spring session. Representatives of the state institutions and NGOs', as well as media were attended the event.

A few MPs from MM State Building and Legal Policy and Economical Policy Commissions participated at event, including Rovshan Rzayev, deputy Chairman of State Building and Legal Policy Standing Commission, Gudrat Hasanguliyev, Fazil Gazanfaroglu – members of State Building commission, Vahid Ahmedov and Ali Masimli – members of Economical Policy Commission. Except for Rovshan Rzayev, who did not participate in the discussion, all other MPs made very good comments regarding the draft law, which created interesting discussion between MPs and the foreign experts.

Generally, MPs participated in the seminar were well prepared for discussion around the draft law, have taken active participation in the exchange of views and made very good comments. Contrary to that, high-ranked officials of the executive branch of political power, who represented finance, tax, customs and other agencies responsible for preventing of money laundering almost did not provide any input the discussion, thus demonstrating their reluctance and apathy regarding preparation and adoption of the crucial law.

The seminar clearly demonstrated that, public discussion with participation of all interested parties around any draft law provides an excellent opportunity for thoroughly preparation of laws with consideration and refining of all opinions. Such discussions should be made an essential part of the law-making process in Azerbaijan.

However, in its practice MM very rarely organizes public discussions / hearings regarding a proposed draft law. It is not surprising in a situation when more that 80 per cent of all draft laws are prepared by executive power and submitted to the Parliament by President of Azerbaijan.

It should be emphasized that main legal acts of Azerbaijan regulating law-preparation process envisages restrictive approach regarding public discussions for draft laws submitted to MM by Executive and Judicial branch of powers and do not stipulate organizing of public discussions by these branches of power. In accordance with part 2 of article 96 of the Constitution of Azerbaijan Republic "... a draft law provided for discussion, in legislative initiative manner, to the Milli Mejlis by the President, the Supreme Court, the Prosecutor's Office of Azerbaijan Republic and the Supreme Mejlis (Ali Mejlis) of Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic shall be presented for discussion and put to the vote in the form in which they are submitted. Changes to such draft laws or decisions may only be made by agreement of those bodies". Such a practice contradicts to the main provisions of MM activity, according to whom "... key principles of the Milli Mejlis' activity shall include transparency, political pluralism and multiparty system, free discussion and independent resolution of issues" (Article 1 of MM Rules of Procedures).

Such restrictive approach regarding public discussions for draft laws submitted to MM, allows Executive branch of power to introduce many laws / amendment to the laws, which significantly restricts citizens rights and freedoms without having any public discussion and avoiding potential public pressure. For example, during the last few months President submitted to MM draft laws, which imposed much tougher conditions for conducting public rallies and meetings, defense of private property rights and finally, in June 2008 for conducting of presidential elections. The latter stipulated very tough restrictions for candidates to the President, such as very short campaign period, very limited access to the state media, etc.

However, since the MM initiates very limited number of draft laws, thus raising serious concern about the misuse and abuse of authorities in the area of legislative initiative by Executive power, as well as doubt on the MM's ability as an efficient legislative body and the practice of an independent branch of power.

In light of this outlook and conclusions, the Program recommends the following:

1. There is a strong need for preparation of draft law on law-making process. This law should include such obligatory provisions of law-making for all subjects of this process (MPs, President and others) as preparation of policy paper, conducting of wide-range and intensive public debates and hearings with participation of all interested / potentially affected parties, preparation of a law memorandum.
2. The role of MPs and the Standing Commissions in the legislative process should be significantly empowered. MPs should take active role in initiating of laws / amendments to the existing laws. In order to make this process efficient, the role of Standing Commissions staff, invited experts, communication with the constituencies and civil society groups should be significantly increased.
3. MM leadership should create suitable conditions for MPs joint work in commissions by providing appropriate facilities.

RESULTS THIS QUARTER

It is expected that the IT Poland study tour as well as the MPAs' US study tour will carry much capacity into the future work of the Program, especially in bringing other MPs into "buying in" new approaches of Committees' work and interaction with MM staff, as well as an opening into the need for improvement of the research ability of the MM.

The MM held a public hearing and had indicated that it will further introduce the practice of public hearing into its activities.

SUMMARY OF PLANS FOR NEXT QUARTER

- At least one additional round table on the development of the information and research center
- Work with Standing Committees chair persons and MPs to improve capacity of the work of Committees.
- Produce first draft of full report on evaluation of Azerbaijan Parliament with recommendations

CROSS-CUTTING TASKS

SIGNIFICANT ACTIVITIES/EVENTS

C. Continued to carry out task planning and held training sessions for MPAs with the help of local experts in USAID projects. (July-September 2008)

SUMMARY OF THIS QUARTER'S MILESTONES AND OUTPUTS

C. Donor Coordination

The Program continued to meet with a number of USAID funded projects, specifically those addressing issues close to the work of the Program with the case studies on policy development issues to be carried in constituencies by using experts from some of the projects in the detailed training of MPAs, such as IREX. The USAID projects included IREX, CHF, Eurasia and the Trade and Investment program.

Continued meetings with other donors and other USAID projects have proved valuable and constructive. As a result, the Program has created relationships with a number of NGOs that have already contributed to the Initial Training and are now contributing to the Detailed Training Program.

The relationship with other USAID projects relevant to the work of the Parliamentary Program continues to show an extremely high level of synergies and support. This is due in great part to the individual leadership of each project and especially due to the culture of support and cooperation created by the D&G Office at the USAID/Baku Mission.

RESULTS THIS QUARTER

The program continues its emphasis for insuring a strong interaction with other USAID partners and coordinate as many topics as possible, so as to make use of USAID civil society and media based programs for the benefit of the Parliamentary Program and to insure coordination and efficient use of expertise.

SUMMARY OF PLANS FOR NEXT QUARTER

- Hold workshops and round tables in which NGOs and other donor's organizations that will participate with MPs and assistants to MPs.
- Carry out a number of constituency based meetings with other USAID partners and donors in the context of the case study work planned with constituencies.

III. PROJECT MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATION

During this quarter, the RCO provided approval to several requests for change in key personnel made by the Program. The changes include: Change of position for Aybeniz Mammadova, from long term constituency specialist of the Program to Deputy Chief of Party; change of the status of Ewa Nawrocka, from DCoP to STTA as a Parliamentary expert, and approval of Eldar Gojayev as new Constitutional and legal specialist, as replacement for Erkin Gadirli, who had previously submitted his resignation.

IV. CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED AND REMEDIAL SOLUTIONS

This quarter, no challenges of extraordinary scale were encountered, though the Parliament's leadership and MPs respective schedules made the implementation of a number of round tables and training sessions difficult.

The main impediment to a more steady pace of work was due to the summer vacation time and thereafter, the presidential campaign's use of MPs.

A number of staff changes within the MM and particularly within the HR Department provides the basis for a more coordinated and active work pace between the Program and the MM leadership. The current quarter will be a test of whether the expected approach is working.

V. UNRESOLVED ISSUES OR CONSTRAINTS ON THE PROJECT

Chronic Inertia

There is still a chronic relative inertia in working with the MM, affecting the planning and implementation of activities, whenever a national event takes place in the country. This is true particularly in light of the presidential election.

Communicating and planning

The Program made great efforts in communicating the need for interaction and planning in the late summer and this resulted in a number of meetings with the leadership of the MM that helped the project design a workplan for the fall in a more meaningful way.

Joint-Steering Committee Alternative

The Joint Steering Committee proposed by the Program last quarter has not yet been implemented. The Program has been asked to hold it for the future, though no commitment to include it in the Program's activities has been made by the MM leadership. This fall, a number of activities that will be carried by the Program will necessitate the creation of a number of working groups. These working groups will become together a sort of Ad Hoc steering Committee. The Program intends to strategically use the working groups as a means of circumventing the infirmity of not having a formal Steering Committee. While it may be premature to speak of success at this stage, the Program believes that short of a formal Joint-Steering Committee, each working group will be the parts, the sum of which will eventually lead to an effective holistic approach to drive the reforms needed in the MM.

Election – Impact on the Parliamentary Program

Unlike other USAID projects, the Parliamentary Program did not have activities related to the presidential elections. However, it has been nevertheless affected by the election in the last several months, and especially during the month of September. The Program has been impacted essentially because a number of MPs have been mobilized to work in support of the incumbent presidential candidate. The atmosphere created by the election process and the maintenance of the status quo, as well as the emphasis on "political correctness" has stifled any debates that may have existed. In addition, recent news media coverage of MPs visits to constituencies, shows that the impact on the Parliamentary program will have long lasting effects, as it relates to the capacity building of MPs, as well as an understanding of their role as legislators.

On June 2, 2008, the Milli Mejlis (MM) adopted changes in the Election Code, which imposed a number of serious restrictions on the presidential campaign and did not support many earlier proposals made from the opposition. Among the restrictions were: shortened elections and campaign period (from 125 to 75 days and from 75 to 60 days respectively), ban for foreign organizations to carry exit-polls, excluding of AzTV – main state TV broadcasting channel from the debates. Two days earlier, the MM had adopted changes to the Law on 'Freedom of assembly', which also imposed restrictions for right to carry meetings and demonstrations in public places.

These changes were initiated by the President of Azerbaijan by submission of draft laws on amendments to respective laws and were approved by the MM without considerable discussions, despite attempts to reject the amendments by a small group of MPs from the opposition Musavat Party.

Seven candidates for the President position were registered by Central Election Commission between mid-August and mid-September 2008, including three current MPs' among them: MP Igbal Agazade; MP Fazil Mustafayev, MP Gudret Hasanguliyev (all representing the so-called quasi-opposition).

Starting in mid-September 2008, the ITV - Public TV channel organized a few public debates with the participation of candidates to the Presidency, which provided good opportunities to obtain information about their views on the current political-economical situation in the country and their election platforms.

During the debates, all candidates (except for Ilham Aliyev's representatives) strongly criticized many aspects of the existing situation in the country. Among the topics covered by them were blatant corruption, restriction/violence of people's rights and freedoms (especially in the regions of Azerbaijan), and an outdated political system. All these issues are being raised by constituencies before all MPs in their respective constituencies. It was stated during the debates that in the face of a situation in which the executive branch of power has an overwhelming influence, it is not possible to solve these problems, without institutional reforms.

One of the MP presidential candidate, Gudret Hasanguliyev proposed changes, such as:

Carry out constitutional reform and transfer a number of powers from the president to the Parliament; compose the Parliament based on a proportional election system and provide the right for the parliamentary majority to form the Government; restrict presidential powers, especially by removing the president's right to appoint ExComs – (Local executive representatives) instead by holding elections of ExComs' by the population; enhance the role of municipalities; establish effective control over public expenditures by the Parliament, including control over the State Oil Fund budget.

During September 2008, 31 MPs were appointed as official representatives for Ilham Aliyev's candidacy for the President position from the ruling YAP party and have spent almost all their time in their respective constituencies organizing and participating in town-hall meetings.

Monitoring of the media by the Program has revealed great concern about some MPs' attitude towards citizen complaints, lack of ethical behaviour and reluctance to handle and address people's petitions. (The Program has taken the position not to attend such meetings in constituencies in order to avoid any possible tensions with or alienation from MPs, as in the longer run, it would be counter productive. Other international projects are undertaking this role in any event.

According to article published on September 28, 2008 in "Reyting" (independent) weekly newspaper, some MPs - ruling YAP party campaigners of I. Aliyev, have received people's criticism in their constituencies during townhall meetings. MPs: Arif Rehimzade, Hadi Recebli, Aydin Hasanov and Nizami Khudiyev also have seen serious accusations from their constituents. Constituents have blamed the MPs for indifference to their problems, while some constituents have reminded the campaign promises given by the MPs in 2005. They have accused the MPs who represent YAP for failing to fulfill their promises. According to a journalist, meetings held in Jelilabad, Lenkoran and Khachmaz left some interesting incidents. In Khachmaz, a woman complained about being unable to meet with MP Nizami Khudiyev in his office while people in Lenkoran said that Arif Rehimzade had not shown up after the parliamentary elections. The constituents in Lenkoran suggested Arif Rehimzade to find another constituency for [elections] in 2010.

While these reports, published in independent and opposition newspapers might be considered as subjective and biased due to the negative opinions held by these newspapers toward the electoral campaign, public discussions held on the ITV channel on among seven candidates to the Presidency and representatives of a candidate, had demonstrated disappointing trend on relationships between MPs and constituencies during debates.

The Parliamentary Program has communicated with MPAs who represent the MPs, mentioned in the articles above, asking for their feedback about the MPs meetings during the presidential campaign. The Parliamentary Program was unable to obtain valuable information since the MPAs were reluctant to talk about incidents, but they mentioned that all town-hall meetings were conducted with great interest from public and people were very active and asking many questions. However, it was clear during the Program;s conversations with MPAs' that they are trying to keep close communication with constituencies and handle their petitions and complaints appropriately.

Brief conclusions can be drawn from these reports.

- Monitoring of MPs meetings in the constituencies during the presidential campaign shows that some of them handle people's inquires inadequately, demonstrating arrogance and rudeness. Apart of ethical standards, MPs violates the law "On MP statute", which requires them to appropriately handle citizens' petitions.
- The Parliamentary Program will concentrate on the issues of appropriate communications between MPs and constituencies during meetings with MPs.
- The Program's workplan on case studies for policy development in the constituency is well targeted.
- The Program's work with MPs in Standing Commissions is well targeted and an important point to follow.