

Learning multi faith coexistence from Consul General of Azerbaijan.



Consul General of Azerbaijan, Mr. Nasimi Aghayev speaks at UVU

On October 08, 2018, Utah Valley University students and faculty hosted the Consul General of the Republic of Azerbaijan in Los Angeles, Mr. Nasimi Aghayev, when VIP guest lectured before them about the harmony among all faiths in his country. Mr. Aghayev explained that although Azerbaijan has an overwhelming majority of Muslim population (96 percent), any visitor to the country can easily witness Muslims' mosques, Jewish synagogues, and Christian churches in addition to other religious centers which freely functioning, and all worshippers are exercising their beliefs at liberty. As Mr. Aghayev emphasized, this tolerant and one of a kind acceptance relationship among Muslims, Christians, and Jews believers is indeed a long deeply-rooted relation in Azerbaijan history, where people naturally have learned to live together with respect and caring for each other. Rich and strong historical culture and norms have always united all Azeri communities to face any danger that might threaten their cherished spontaneous unity.

The Consul General explained how it was important for the Azerbaijani people to work hard together in order to build what's become their second ever modern and secular independent state after the USSR dismantlement in the early 1990s. At the same time, Mr. Aghayev emphasized that those multi-faith communities have been challenged and overcome so many obstacles during the 19th century, and how they provided a foundation for declaring the first independent and secular state among all neighboring Muslim countries back in 1918, which granted their women right to vote in 1919. "Education is the key in understanding and solving any issues that might concern the Azerbaijani people," stated Mr. Aghayev as he outlined the vital role of education as a significant way to accept and respect other faiths, and to live in one big society harmoniously.

In his reply to the question of Jesse Sandstrom, one of UVU students asking about Azerbaijani women's role in their democracy, Mr. Aghayev stated that women do hold a strong position in his government, and mentioned the Azerbaijani Judge, Tatyana Goldman Alexander, who is a Jewish lady serving as one of seven women, among a total of 39 Supreme Court judges, on the Supreme Court bench of his country with a Muslims representing a majority of its population. I think, that this was the best examples, indeed, of freedom of religion and women's equal opportunity to serve high positions in different government's entities of Azerbaijan.

On the other hand, the Consul General of Azerbaijan stated that Azerbaijan was able to build partnerships with its neighbors, like Russia, Israel, and Iran. In fact, as I did some research on that matter I found how, for example, the [Rubin Center. For Research in International Affairs](#) emphasized that "Azerbaijan has attempted to find a delicate balance between Israel and Iran. Still, Baku's foreign policy orientation is closer to Jerusalem. Azerbaijan, which cherishes and affirms its secular nature, has proved Israel's stance that Muslims and Israelis can have good relations, an idea rejected by Iran." This is such a big surprise for me, as a person being raised in Syria as a devoted Muslim and now a U.S. citizen.

Additionally, I was able to find also sources, like agency [Azernews](#), which describe how Azerbaijan was able to maintain friendly relationships with Russia. According to it, the spokeswoman for the Russian Foreign Ministry, Maria Zakharova, stated at a press conference on September 7, 2018, that "Azerbaijan is one of the main economic partners of Russia among the CIS countries. The trade turnover between two countries amounted to \$2.14 billion in 2017. This

kind of cooperation plays an important role in the development of Russian-Azerbaijani trade and economic relations and in the increase of the trade turnover.” Now, there are 17 such agreements, and a number of new ones are being prepared. The effectiveness of interregional relations with Azerbaijan is evident.

In fact, I did learn a lot from Consul General Mr. Aghayev about Azerbaijan and the way this country is attempting to spread peace and progress both with the countries that Azerbaijan shares borders with and on the international level. By inviting and hosting such important guests to our campus and providing the opportunity for us, students, to interact with them on a professional and personal level, indeed, encourages me to appreciate what my university office of Global Engagement does as it makes me more educated and aware of international affairs.

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