

Learning about policies of Azerbaijan in religious affairs from Consul General Aghayev



Consul General Nasimi Aghayev at Utah Valley University

On October 8, 2018, Utah Valley University hosted His Excellency Nasimi Aghayev, Consul General of Azerbaijan in Los Angeles to speak about the established model of multi faith harmony and peaceful coexistence. This subject is of particular importance for the Azerbaijan state due their population being 95% Muslim. It is a heavily Shi'ite Muslim nation near Iran. In his lecture Consul General Aghayev exemplified that Azerbaijan was the first parliamentary democracy in the Muslim world, and most importantly that it was secular. In 1919 women were even given the right to vote one-year before it was granted in the United States. The Azerbaijani government has government workers of Muslim, Jewish, and Christian faiths working together to solve regional and national issues. Consul General Aghayev presented this as an example of how

even in the highest parts of the government there are people who work together and solve issues regardless of their religion which further perpetuates the Azerbaijani model.

Consul General Aghayev also spoke about when Azerbaijan was part of the Soviet Union many houses of worship were destroyed. I was particularly surprised by his mention of having sheltered many Jews during the Nazi period. After Azerbaijan was independent in 1991 the newly established government set a course to prioritize religious freedom and harmony. Additionally, he also mentioned that financial aid is given to different religions in the country as a further demonstration of the multi faith harmony that exists in Azerbaijan. Another example he focused on was the Heydar mosque, which was opened about 3-4 years ago. What makes this mosque unique is Sunni and Shi'ite Muslims come to pray and worship together which is a very rare occurrence in other parts of the world. These two sects of Islam even intermarry and as a result reinforce the Azerbaijani faiths harmony.

The Consul General did a very good job of presenting their Azerbaijani model of multi faith harmony, and painted Azerbaijan in rosy colors. By the sound of his lecture you wouldn't think that Azerbaijan is a country that can have such multi faith harmony, but also have issue in regards to citizen and journalism censorship, along with human rights violations in the last several years, which were not discussed. It is very impressive what the Azerbaijan government has accomplished since the end of the Soviet Union but they have a long way to go in nation building practices to become a truly democratic republic. However, for being a vastly Muslim country specifically in the region Azerbaijan exists in, the Azerbaijan government is doing something unique in incorporating and beyond just tolerating, but also accepting different religions into the government and fabric of the country.

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