

APPEAL

of Azerbaijani civil society activists and representatives
to the UN Committee Against Torture and European Committee for the Prevention of Torture
and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment
on the cases of politically motivated torture in Azerbaijan

For the attention of:

The President of the Republic of Azerbaijan

The Commissioner for Human Rights of the Republic of Azerbaijan

The United Nations Human Rights Council

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

The Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights

European Parliament

We – Azerbaijani civil society representatives – are witnessing the increase of political persecution and pressure in the country in the last month by various authorities, including law enforcement bodies, against those who are peacefully expressing their political views. We are deeply concerned about public smearing campaigns against political activists, their groundless administrative detentions, and physical and psychological tortures. For instance, the peaceful rally planned by the National Council of Democratic Forces (NCDF) on the 19th of October in central Baku was accompanied by brutal interference of the police which resulted in scores of citizens getting bodily injured, detained and arrested.

Those who were detained by police, including Ali Karimli, the leader of the Popular Front Party, Tofiq Yagublu, a prominent member of the Musavat Party and a board member of NCDF, his and dozens of rally participants were brutally beaten and faced inhumane treatment. Moreover, in the run-up to and after the 19 October rally, politically-motivated criminal cases were filed against two opposition activists and another 17 people faced administrative detention. In total, 31 people have been detained during the rally.

In another rally a day later on 20 October, the police again used excessive force against peaceful rally-goers and journalists resulting in bodily injuries. The rally participants protested violence

against women. We have received information that the authorities harassed participants and their family members a day before the rally.

The protection of freedom of peaceful assembly, association and expression is crucial for ensuring the citizen-state dialogue and for creating a space for political parties and civil society organizations to function. We have repeatedly called Azerbaijani Government to guarantee the political freedoms stipulated in the national legislation and international documents. Unfortunately, the authorities continue to systematically restrict these freedoms through various forms of pressure including torture.

We declare that, currently, the situation of human rights and freedoms in Azerbaijan is in crisis. We believe this necessitates the intervention of international organizations in order to bring an end to the use of inhuman methods, including torture, against political activists and to ensure the enjoyment of freedom of assembly. Therefore, we are calling for the following actions:

1. The UN Committee Against Torture and European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment should launch fact-finding missions into Azerbaijan and investigate the above-mentioned cases by the end of this year.
2. The Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Ministry of Justice of Azerbaijan should ensure that local human rights defenders and international organizations can monitor the detention facilities and prisons in a transparent manner.
3. The statements of law-enforcement bodies of Azerbaijan should be closely examined to check the level of impunity for those officers who are mentioned in the complaints of victims of torture, including political activists.

We condemn the arrest, torture and other inhumane treatment that citizens face for enjoying their right to peaceful assembly. We express our regret that the relevant bodies of the UN, the OSCE and the Council of Europe remain silent on the violations of human rights mentioned above. We hope that the intervention of these organizations will result in the release of those who were arrested or detained because of their participation in peaceful rallies and police officers who have taken part in violent and inhumane treatment of political activists and journalists will be held responsible for their actions.

The list of signatories:

1. Arzu Abdullayeva, Azerbaijan National Committee of Helsinki Citizens Assembly
2. Anar Mammadli, Election Monitoring and Democracy Studies Center
3. Akif Gurbanli, Institute for Democratic Initiatives
4. Bashir Suleymanli, Institute for Citizens' Rights
5. Fuad Hasanov, Democracy Monitor
6. Intigam Aliyev, Legal Education Society
7. Khadija Ismaylova, Investigative Journalist
8. Khalid Aghaliyev, Media Rights Institute
9. Qubad Ibadoglu, Public Initiatives Center
10. Leyla Aliyeva, The Center for National and International Studies
11. Mehman Aliyev, Turan Information Agency
12. Mehman Huseynov, Institute for Reporters' Freedom and Safety
13. Rasul Jafarov, Human Rights Club
14. Rovshan Hajibayli, Democratic Journalism School
15. Samad Rahimli, Human Rights Lawyer
16. Samir Kazimli, Human Rights Defender
17. Shahla Ismayil, Women's Association for Rational Development
18. Shahvalad Chobanoglu, Column writer
19. Yalchin Imanov, Human Rights Lawyer
20. Ulvi Hasanli, Nida Civic Movement
21. Zohrab Ismayil, Public Association for Assistance to Free Economy

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