

Joint Letter: Urgent call to confirm the suspension of Azerbaijan's PACE credentials at Winter session 2025

To: Members of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE)

Subject: Urgent Call to confirm the suspension of Azerbaijan's PACE Credentials and to Set Clear Benchmarks for their Restoration

Dear Members of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe,

We, the undersigned organisations, once [again](#) urge the Parliamentary Assembly to confirm the suspension of Azerbaijan's credentials at the January 2025 session and develop clear and measurable benchmarks for their restoration. Azerbaijan's [escalating](#) repression of civil society, independent media, and political dissent continues to violate the principles and values of the Council of Europe (CoE).

Azerbaijan shows a persistent lack of cooperation with international mechanisms and fails to address systemic human rights abuses. As PACE recognized in autumn 2024, the human rights situation [is deteriorating](#) and repression [has intensified](#). In retaliation for their criticism of Azerbaijan's human rights record, the authorities [banned](#) a group of PACE members from entering the country. In July, the CoE's Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) took the "exceptional decision" to make a [public statement](#) concerning Azerbaijan, citing the government's "outright refusal" to cooperate with the Committee and severe and systemic issues related to the treatment of people in police custody. Azerbaijan has one of the [worst records](#) among CoE member states on implementation of European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) judgments: The [Mammadli group of cases](#) and [Ramazanova group of cases](#), representing a pattern of government assault on civic space and human rights defenders, remain essentially unimplemented to this day.

Since November 2023 and ahead of and after COP29 in November 2024, the Azerbaijani authorities have intensified their crackdown on dissent, targeting civil society, journalists, and activists with politically motivated arrests on fabricated charges. Many of those arrested complain about ill-treatment in custody.

Key cases include:

- **Afiaddin Mammadov**, head of the Workers' Table Trade Union, was [sentenced](#) to 8 years in prison in January 2025 on bogus hooliganism charges. He has been in [detention](#) since September 2023.
- **Bakhtiyar Hajiyev**, a prominent activist, was [sentenced](#) to 10 years' imprisonment in January 2025 on bogus charges of hooliganism, illegal entrepreneurship, and smuggling charges. PACE rapporteurs had [repeatedly called](#) on Azerbaijani authorities to release him immediately.

- **Rail Abbasov**, an activist, was [sentenced](#) to 6 years and 6 months in prison on bogus fraud charges in January 2025.
- **Ilhamiz Guliyev**, a police whistleblower, was [sentenced](#) to three years' imprisonment on fabricated drugs acquisition charges in December 2024.
- **Azar Gasimli**, a prominent [opposition figure](#) and director of the Institute of Political Management, was arrested in December 2024 and put on four months of pre-trial detention on bogus extortion charges.
- **Rufat Safarov**, a human rights defender, [was arrested in December 2024](#) on fabricated charges of fraud and hooliganism. PACE rapporteurs [were dismayed](#) by his arrest.
- **Over a dozen** journalists and media workers from independent media outlets, including **Toplum TV, RFERL/Azadlig radio and Abzas Media**, continue to face up to twelve years imprisonment on retaliatory charges of foreign currency smuggling. In addition, the authorities [arrested](#) six (6) **Meydan TV journalists** in December 2024 on similar charges. In total, [since November 2023](#), authorities have detained at least 20 independent [journalists](#) and [media workers](#) and remanded them to pretrial detention on various bogus criminal charges. Among those detained are editor **Aziz Orujov**, investigative journalist **Hafiz Babali** and media expert **Alasgar Mammadli**, who have serious health problems, as well as media director **Ulvi Hasanli**, who has received threats after he blew the whistle on the use of torture and ill-treatment in detention. Seven (7) of the detainees are [female journalists](#) with Abzas Media and Meydan TV. Lawyers face delays accessing detainees, highlighting systemic barriers to legal representation.
- **Nazim Baydamirli**, a public activist and former lawmaker, was [sentenced](#) to 8 years in prison in September 2024 on bogus charges of extortion. Police arrested him shortly after he publicly [supported](#) the protests of villagers against environmental pollution and denounced the [police violence](#) in July 2023.
- Academics [Iqbal Abilov and Bahruz Samadov](#) were arrested on false charges, including “high treason”, in July and August 2024. Their arrests were an apparent retaliation for their academic work and activism. If convicted, they could face prison sentences of up to 20 years.
- **Anar Mammadli**, Václav Havel Human Rights Prize laureate, remains in pretrial detention with [deteriorating health](#) and a lack of adequate medical care. [He was arrested](#) in April 2024 on bogus currency smuggling charges shortly after he spearheaded climate justice advocacy ahead of COP29. During COP29, Baku courts extended the pre-trial detentions of Mammadli, journalist [Imran Aliyev](#), former diplomat [Emin Ibrahimov](#), and young scholar [Iqbal Abilov](#). All are facing various bogus criminal charges in retaliation for their activism.
- **Gubad Ibadoghlu**, a renowned academic and anti-corruption activist, [endured nine months of pretrial detention](#), during which his health worsened due to inadequate care and ill-treatment. In April 2024, the authorities released Ibadoghlu under his own recognizance, but he is still facing up to 17 years' imprisonment if convicted.
- **Akif Gurbanov**, Václav Havel Human Rights Prize nominee and co-founder of the political movement III Republic Platform, was [arrested](#) in March 2024 on fabricated smuggling charges in connection with the criminal case against Toplum TV and Institute of Democratic Initiatives (IDI), which he chaired.

- **Tofiq Yagublu**, an opposition activist who is currently on trial for bogus [fraud and forgery charges](#), is experiencing severe health issues in detention with his family fearing for his life.

These cases are but a few examples of the scores of human rights defenders, lawyers, journalists, opposition politicians, and activists who have been unjustly arrested and need urgent attention. Others have faced [travel bans](#) and intimidation. The crackdown, together with the highly restrictive legal environment for the operations of independent civil society organisations and media, threatens to eradicate all forms of dissent and legitimate human rights work in the country, further underscoring the need for a decisive international response.

Recommendations for PACE

PACE needs to act decisively to uphold Council of Europe values and protect civil society in Azerbaijan. In light of ongoing human rights violations, we call upon PACE to:

1. Confirm the suspension of Azerbaijan's PACE credentials and develop and enforce clear criteria for their restoration, including:
 - Immediate and unconditional release of arbitrarily detained civic activists, journalists, and human rights defenders, including vacating any convictions against them and fully restoring their civil and political rights.
 - Full implementation of ECtHR judgments on politically motivated imprisonment.
 - Resumption of cooperation with PACE rapporteurs and the CPT, including access to detention facilities.
 - Amendments to restrictive NGO legislation, enabling independent civil society operations.
 - Addressing systemic restrictions on freedom of expression, association, and assembly and removing arbitrary travel bans and restrictions on freedom of movement.
2. Underline the need for a comprehensive response to the increased levels of repression in Azerbaijan by the Council of Europe as a whole, in a unified and coordinated manner with PACE's decision on the credentials as one component.
3. In view of Azerbaijan's persistent non-implementation of ECtHR judgements, call on the Secretary General of the CoE to launch an Article 52 inquiry into Azerbaijan's systemic violations of the European Convention on Human Rights.
4. Ensure PACE oversight of the renewal of the CoE's Action Plan with Azerbaijan, making cooperation, including funding, contingent on measurable human rights improvements in line with the criteria outlined above, and require that any cooperation includes independent civil society and human rights defenders.

Sincerely,

Campaign to End Repression in Azerbaijan
Committee to Protect Journalists
Freedom Now

Human Rights House Foundation

Human Rights Watch

International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), within the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders

International Partnership for Human Rights

Netherlands Helsinki Committee

Norwegian Helsinki Committee

World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), within the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders