

Deteriorating human rights situation in Azerbaijan

May 2012

FIDH and its member organisation, Human Rights Center of Azerbaijan (HRCA) publish a briefing paper on deteriorating human rights situation in Azerbaijan.

Azerbaijan was the scene of a wave of peaceful protests in 2011: March and April saw hundreds gathering in streets demanding democratic reform and respect for human rights. Protesters have used internet-based social media, including facebook and blogs to mobilise supporters. Azerbaijani authorities have tried to suppress these nascent signs of popular dissent with a new wave of repression and intimidation, dramatically increasing pressure on civil society.¹ Activists and government opponents were repressed and arrested in the wake of these protests, with 15 people still in detention.

In a bid by state authorities to circumvent an Azerbaijani “Arab Spring”, political oppression has increased in the country over the last year in response to the aforementioned popular protests. This period has been marked by violations of media freedom, as well as freedoms to associate and demonstrate, while the judiciary’s lack of independence and impartiality facilitates abuse of the justice system. As the regime tries to silence its critics, the space for freedom of expression is dramatically shrinking.

A year after the commencement of this wave of protests in Azerbaijan, tensions remain high with regular protests taking place.

On 1 March 2012, thousands of people gathered at an unauthorized rally in front of the Quba region government building, demanding the resignation of Quba's governor, Rauf Habibov. The demonstration turned into a riot, and several buildings were damaged and burned. Quba's governor was sacked the following day, and at least 8 protesters and journalists were arrested and prosecuted. Less than a week later, on 6 March 2012, a peaceful protest, organized in central Baku, was violently dispersed by police, with several demonstrators being arrested and beaten.

I. FAILURE OF THE ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE

1. Intimidation, arrest, prosecution and conviction of human rights defenders and political activists on trumped up criminal charges

Azerbaijani justice is subservient to executive power and thus trials are conducted unfairly, charges often fabricated and cases arbitrarily initiated. While FIDH and HRCA welcome the release under pardon of two political prisoners on 15 March 2012, they recall that the existence of political prisoners is a long-standing and critical problem in Azerbaijan. Data suggests that there were between 50 and 70 political prisoners in Azerbaijan in January 2012. Problems surrounding the prevalence and treatment of political prisoners in the country have increased over the last year.

Following the peaceful protests of spring 2011, 17 protesters and political opponents were convicted on fabricated criminal charges, including illegal possession of drugs and evading military service, receiving prison sentences of between one and a half to three years. Among the activists arrested were **Bakhtiyar Hajiyev** and **Jabbar Savalanli**.

Bakhtiyar Hajiyev, a young activist and 2010 parliamentary candidate, organised the Great

¹ For further see: <http://www.fidh.org/The-crackdown-on-peaceful> (last accessed 24 April 2012).

People's Day protest on 11 March 2011. Later that month he was arrested on charges of evading military service and on 18 May 2011, Nizami Regional Court in Ganja City sentenced him to two years imprisonment.

Jabbar Savalanli, a 20 year old activist and member of the opposition Popular Front Party, participated in mass rallies in Baku. He was arrested on 4 February 2011 during an unauthorized street demonstration. On 5 May 2011, Sumgayit City Court sentenced him to two and a half years imprisonment for illegal possession of drugs. However, blood testing showed that there was no trace of narcotics in Savalanli's body, and his conviction was largely based on a confession extracted under duress while he was denied access to a lawyer. On 26 December 2011, Savalanli was released with 92 other prisoners under a presidential pardon issued by Azerbaijan's President, Ilham Aliyev. On 30 April 2012, Savalanli was summoned to a commissariat, where he was directly recruited into the army, despite his health condition not being satisfactory. Savalanli's lawyer denounces this procedure as a "political punishment".

Failures to administer justice in Azerbaijan have been condemned on several occasions by the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), which has found violations of the rights of prisoners condemned to life imprisonment (or "lifers") in the cases of *Mammad Mammadov v. Azerbaijan*,² *Mirzayev Natig v. Azerbaijan*,³ and *Pashayev v. Azerbaijan*.⁴

2. Torture, ill-treatment and the excessive use of force by law enforcement officials

Torture and ill-treatment remain of current concern. Several activists detained during and after the 2011 protests complained of ill-treatment upon arrest and while in police custody. To date, no such allegations have been effectively investigated. Complaints have been made by **Bakhtiyar Hajiyev**, **Tural Abbasli** and **Tazakhan Miralamli**.

Bakhtiyar Hajiyev states that he was ill-treated and threatened with rape while in police custody in March 2011. His allegations were dismissed by authorities without effective investigation.

Tural Abbasli, the leader of the youth wing of opposition party, Musavat, maintains that he was beaten upon arrest on 2 April 2011, and again while in custody at the Yasamal District Police Station in Baku.

Tazakhan Miralamli, of the opposition Popular Party, was allegedly beaten with batons by police while being taken into custody at the Sabail District Police Department on 2 April 2011. He was subsequently diagnosed with a serious left eye injury, a broken finger, kidney problems and extensive soft tissue damage.

Ill-treatment is also prevalent in Azerbaijani prisons. This is attested to by the cases of **Mahammad Majidly** and **Babek Hasanov**, who were beaten by prison guards during their transfer from prison n°16 to prison n°14 on 4 March 2012. Moreover, the death in custody of **Turac Zeynalov** illustrates the dramatic consequences of such treatment.

Turac Zeynalov was a resident of Arazin village in the Julfa region. He was arrested and detained on 24 August 2011 in connection with a lawsuit filed by the Ministry of National Security (MNS) on

² Case no. 38073/06, 11 October 2011. Available at: <http://cmiskp.echr.coe.int/tkp197/view.asp?item=3&portal=hbkm&action=html&highlight=MAMMADOV%20%7C%20AZERBAIJAN&sessionId=93098572&skin=hudoc-en> (last accessed 24 April 2012).

³ Case no. 36122/06, 22 November 2011. Available at: <http://cmiskp.echr.coe.int/tkp197/view.asp?item=1&portal=hbkm&action=html&highlight=NATIG&sessionId=93113470&skin=hudoc-en> (last accessed 24 April 2012).

⁴ Case no. 36084/06, 28 February 2012. Available at: <http://cmiskp.echr.coe.int/tkp197/viewhbkm.asp?sessionId=88528516&skin=hudoc-en&action=html&table=F69A27FD8FB86142BF01C1166DEA398649&key=96730&highlight> (last accessed 24 April 2012).

9 August 2011; this alleged that a group of individuals was cooperating with foreign intelligence services in violation of Article 274 of Azerbaijan's Criminal Code. On 26 August 2011, Zeynalov was ordered by Nakhchivan Court to be placed in pre-trial detention for the duration of the investigation.

On 28 August 2011, Zeynalov died while being held by the MNS in Nakhchivan. Three days before his death, his father had met him and reported that he was limping and had a bag over his head. The MNS has recognised Zeynalov's death as having taken place on 28 August 2011, but claims that he died not from torture, as alleged by his family, but from cancer.

3. Conditions of detention

Despite reforms of the penitentiary system, conditions of detention in Azerbaijan, particularly for life prisoners, remain extremely worrying.

Pre-trial and post-trial prisons are overcrowded, and living conditions in the colonies are harsh. Qobustan Prison, which holds not only life prisoners but also the prisoners transferred from ordinary prisons as a punishment for violating of internal orders or frequently complaining, is a place of such intense psychological pressure that suicides are frequent. Since the introduction of life imprisonment in 1998, around 60 of 250 "lifers" have died in Qobustan Prison or the Central Prison Hospital. For example, on 24 February 2012, **Emin Qadirov**, a lifer, committed suicide after 20 years in detention, including 5 years on death row.

4. Restrictions on freedom of assembly

Freedom of assembly is severely restricted in Azerbaijan. The authorities formally prohibit gatherings in Baku city centre, as well as opposition party and anti-government gatherings. Peaceful anti-government protests have been criminalised by a ban on demonstrations, and organisers and participants of such protests face imprisonment. In addition, the police use excessive force to break up peaceful but officially unauthorised demonstrations.

As outlined above, activists **Jabbar Savalanli** and **Bakhtiyar Hajiyev**, who both called for protests using facebook, have been imprisoned following unfair trials. Indeed, trumped-up charges not directly related to participation in protests are often brought against human rights defenders and opponents. Thus, **Shahin Hasanli**, a protest organiser, was arrested and charged with illegal possession of handgun bullets on 31 March 2011; he was convicted and sentenced to two years imprisonment for this offence on 22 July 2011. The prosecutors at his trial failed to present any evidence that he was in possession of firearms at the time of his arrest. The Supreme Court upheld the sentence in appeal on 24 April 2012.

Moreover, **Agyi Gasimov**, a participant in a protest in Garabagly village in the Salyan region on 18 November 2011 was sentenced to six months imprisonment on 12 January 2012. Salyan District Court found him guilty of resisting police under Article 315.1 of Azerbaijan's Criminal Code.

Arif Hajili, a claimant before the ECHR, is serving a prison sentence of up to two and a half years for his participation in a rally and "violation of public order" on 2 April 2011. The Supreme Court upheld the sentence on appeal on 24 April 2012.

On 6 March 2012, **Jabbar Savalanli** and **Dayanat Babayev**, both youth activists, were beaten and detained in the wake of a peaceful protest in Baku. The protest was violently dispersed by the police and both were hospitalized, sustaining serious injuries. Babayev suffered a broken rib and Savalanli concussion. Both activists were released with other detainees (Sagif Gurbanov, Zia Zohrab and Bahruz Hasanov) after Yasamal District Court fined them 50 to 75 AZN.⁵

II. FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION AND THE SITUATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

⁵ Azerbaijani New Manat.

Azerbaijan's government imposes arbitrary restrictions upon the activities of civil society organizations, and NGO registration remains an issue of serious concern in Azerbaijan. Whilst Azerbaijan's constitution secures freedom of association, many civil society organizations, and religious groups in particular, are still confronted with gruelling, non-transparent registration procedures and unjustified judicial harassment.

Threats to and intimidation of human rights defenders have recently been used together with legislative and administrative measures, to shut down and deny the registration of civil society groups and NGOs working on democracy and human rights.

1. The situation of NGOs

Several NGOs working on democratic reform and human rights have been denied registration or closed on arbitrary grounds.

On 4 March 2011, three local NGOs in Ganja (the Election Monitoring and Democracy Studies Centre, Demos Public Association and the Ganja Regional Information Centre), were evicted from their premises by the authorities without any formal explanation or apparent legal grounds.

The Baku branches of the National Democratic Institute and the Human Rights House Network were also shut down for supposed failure to comply with registration requirements, on 7 and 10 March 2011, respectively.⁶ Soon after that, the local Open Society Institute – Assistance Foundation closed its office in Baku.

On 16 March 2011, the Azerbaijani executive promulgated new rules for the registration of foreign NGOs in the country. These rules state that organisations must respect national moral values (point 3.2.2 of decree) and must not be involved in political or religious propaganda (point 3.2.4 of decree) if they are to obtain agreement to registration from the Ministry of Justice. The new regulations do not define "national moral values", "political or religious propaganda", or what would constitute involvement in such propaganda. The all-encompassing nature of these restrictions means they contradict Azerbaijan's international human rights obligations, as well as its own domestic legislation.

2. The situation of human rights defenders

Human rights defenders face constant judicial harassment, as well as arbitrary arrest and flawed trials. This is illustrated by the recent cases of **Hekimeldostu Mehdiyev, Vidadi Isgandarov, Ogtay Gulaliyev and Taleh Khasmammadov**.

On 22 September 2011, Hekimeldostu Mehdiyev, a human rights defender and IRFS correspondent in Nakhchivan, was fined 1000 AZN by Sharur District Court, for an alleged violation of Article 189-1.1 of Azerbaijan's Criminal Code relating to diverting electricity supplies.

On 27 August 2011, Vidadi Isgandarov, a human rights defender and former parliamentary candidate, was sentenced to three years in prison for allegedly interfering with the 2010 parliamentary elections, despite the fact that these charges had been dropped for lack of evidence in 2010.

On 8 April 2012, Mr. Ogtay Gulaliyev, Coordinator of "Kura" Civil Society Headquarters and member of the Coalition for Improving Transparency in Extractive Industries, was arrested. The arrest took place as he participated in a public meeting with local residents of a village in the Sabirabad region, discussing protests that these residents had been staging to demand fairer distribution of financial State aid. After being ordered to serve 12 days in administrative detention for allegedly having "sworn in a public place", the Prosecutor for Sabirabad charged Gulaliyev with "active resistance to authorities' legal orders" and "incitement to mass riots and to violence against citizens" (Article 220.2 of the Criminal Code), punishable with up to three years' imprisonment. On

⁶ For further see: <http://www.fidh.org/Closure-of-the-Human-Rights-House> (last accessed 24 April 2012).

the same day, the regional judge approved a two-month period of detention in remand. Despite Mr Gulaliyev's complaints of ill treated in detention, no investigation has yet been carried out into these allegations.

Founder of the NGO 'Law and Order 2010', Taleh Khasmammadov actively defended the rights of residents where they were violated by police. The day before his arrest, two people under the guise of policemen asked him to provide materials on illegal police actions. He was subsequently invited to the Police Department for the Ujar region and arrested on 12 November 2011 under charges of disorderly conduct and resistance of the authorities. His office and home were searched; his computer and archives were confiscated, pointing out to the political motivation behind the arrest. Khasmammadov was not given access to a lawyer

3. The situation of lawyers representing political prisoners and human rights defenders

Not only are human rights defenders repressed but lawyers also face sanctions for seeking to represent political prisoners. Indeed, 2011 saw several lawyers defending political prisoners deprived of their practice licenses.

On 27 August 2011, Nasimi District Court dismissed lawyer, **Elchin Namazov**, from defending political prisoner, **Rufat Hajibeyli**, following a dispute between Mr. Namazov and Judge Abdullayev. Judge Abdullayev subsequently opened a criminal case against Mr. Namazov for contempt of court under Articles 289.1 and 289.2 of the Criminal Code and ordered the Azerbaijan Bar Association to sanction Mr. Namazov. As a result, Mr. Namazov was disbarred by the presidency of the Bar Association on 16 September 2011.

Khalid Bagirov, a lawyer defending political prisoners, including human rights defender **Vidadi Isgandarov**, had his license suspended for one year on 24 August 2011, following a complaint from Baku Police Chief Rafiq Abbasov. The latter accused Bagirov of defaming the police by publically stating on 13 January 2011 that the police had beaten a detainee to death in a police station.

III. FREEDOM OF THE MEDIA

The repeated infringement of human rights in Azerbaijan is also illustrated by the authorities' systematic and widespread attempts to curb freedom of expression in the country.⁷ Violations of freedom of speech and the press, and threats to the security of journalists are particularly alarming; the authorities regularly persecute media representatives who are openly critical of the Azerbaijani leadership. Such persons are subject to arbitrary arrest, prosecution and acts of violence. Over the last seven years two journalists have been killed and more than a hundred injured. Most of these instances remain uninvestigated to date. Moreover, foreign broadcasters have been banned from national airwaves.

Following last spring's peaceful demonstrations, bloggers and activists have been the targets of a harsh crackdown. Fewer critical voices are tolerated, self-censorship has increased, and criticism of the President and leading government figures is frequently punished. In addition, new mediums for exercising freedom of expression, such as the internet and social media, are under considerable pressure, with the government currently considering ways to control and monitor internet use. In consequence, journalists continue to be targeted with impunity.

Seymur Haziyev and **Ramin Deko** journalists for the opposition newspaper, *Azadliq*, were reportedly abducted, beaten and warned not to write articles critical of the President, on 26 March and 3 April 2011, respectively. More dramatically, in 2005 and 2011 respectively, prominent commentators, **Elmar Huseynov** and **Rafiq Tagi**, were murdered.

⁷ Azerbaijan is ranked 162nd out of 179 countries in the Reporters Without Borders Press Freedom Index, 2011-2012. Available at: <http://en.rsf.org/press-freedom-index-2011-2012,1043.html> (last accessed 24 April 2012).

In addition, pressure from the Ministry of Justice on the Institute for Reporters' Freedom and Safety (IRFS) and a three week media smear campaign against the IRFS, were reported in February 2012. Investigative reporter **Khadija Ismayilova**, a correspondent with Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty and the regional coordinator of the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project, was also the target of a defamation campaign in March 2012. She is investigating claims of links between President Ilham Aliyev's family and a lucrative construction project in Azerbaijan's capital, Baku. The campaign against her received considerable support from the pro-government press.

Editor in chief of Xayal TV **Zaur Quliyev**, was arrested during events in Quba and charged on 22 March 2012 with promoting the infringement of public order (Article 233) and abuse of authority (Article 309). It has been ordered that he remain in pre-trial detention for two months. Quliyev told an NGO representative visiting him on 24 April 2012 that he was subjected to physical and psychological pressure whilst held incommunicado in a temporary cell at the Interior Ministry's division for organised crime. He stated that this treatment was aimed at obtaining his confession to involvement in a Youtube video broadcast, which allegedly triggered the protests in Quba. Quliyev has been refused medical treatment for a stomach ulcer aggravated by harsh detention conditions.

Independent journalist **Idrak Abbasov**, collaborator of the *Zerkalo* newspaper and the Institute for Reporters' Freedom and Safety, has been harassed for several months. On 18 April 2012 Abbasov was violently beaten by the workers of the State Oil Company of Azerbaijan, SOCAR, along with residents protesting a controversial house demolition that he was filming. He was taken to hospital and transferred to intensive care for serious head injuries.

Furthermore, several journalists are in prison, among them, **Avaz Zeynalli** and **Anar Bayramli**.

Avaz Zeynalli, Khural newspaper's editor-in-chief, was arrested on 28 October 2011 by officers from the Anti-Corruption Department. He was sentenced to three months pre-trial detention by a court in the Baku district of Nisami. His arrest was based on a complaint filed with the Anti-Corruption Department by ruling New Azerbaijan Party (YAP) MP, Gular Ahmadova. A criminal case was launched against him by the General Prosecutor's Office under Articles 311.3.3 (taking a large bribe) and 311.3.4 (taking a bribe in conjunction with threats) of the Criminal Code. On 4 April 2012, he was charged under Article 213.1 (evasion of taxes or other obligatory payments in significant amount) of the Criminal Code. The journal's property was confiscated and sold without notification to its owners, and a tax investigation launched against the newspaper in February 2012. In March 2012, Avaz Zeynalli was still in pre-trial detention, which was upheld in appeal on 20 April 2012.

Anar Bayramli, Iran's Sahar TV correspondent in Azerbaijan, was arrested on 7 February 2012 and charged under Article 234.1 (illegal possession of drugs) of the Criminal Code. On the day of his arrest, five police officers visited Bayramli's home and took him to Binagadi District Police Station N°4, providing no explanation or warrant. He was only given access to a lawyer after three days of detention. Bayramli was sentenced to 2 months of pre-trial detention at Kurdakhani Investigation Prison. He was reportedly summoned to the police station several times in the three weeks prior to his arrest, and questioned about his political affiliations.

Possession of drugs is often used as a fabricated charge in the Azerbaijani justice system. This is evidenced in the case of journalist, **Eynulla Fatullayev**, released in May 2011 under a presidential pardon after spending four years in prison for such an offence; as well as **Ramin Bayramov**, editor of the news website *islam-azeri.az*, who was arrested on 11 July 2011 for possessing arms and drugs. Absheron District Court sentenced Bayramov to 18 months in prison on 9 March 2012, in accordance with Articles 228.1 (illegal purchase, possession and carrying of firearms and ammunition) and 234.1 (illegal acquisition and possession of narcotics) of the Criminal Code.

Lastly, in April 2012 the ECHR examined the case of journalist **Sarvan Rizvanov**⁸, who worked

⁸ See *Rizvanov v. Azerbaijan* (Application no. 31805/06, 17 April 2012), available at: [http://cmiskp.echr.coe.int/tkp197/viewhbk.asp?sessionId=92321277&skin=hudoc-en&action=html&table=F69A27FD8FB86142BF01C1166DEA398649&key=97905&highlight=\(last](http://cmiskp.echr.coe.int/tkp197/viewhbk.asp?sessionId=92321277&skin=hudoc-en&action=html&table=F69A27FD8FB86142BF01C1166DEA398649&key=97905&highlight=(last)

at the Turan Information Agency and had been beaten by the police as he was taking pictures of an authorised demonstration in Baku on 9 November 2005. Although he lodged a complaint, the Prosecutor's Office of the Yasamal District did not institute criminal proceedings and no investigation was launched. The ECHR found Azerbaijan to be in violation of Article 3 of the Convention.⁹

IV. FREEDOM OF RELIGION

Freedom of religion is limited in Azerbaijan because of a supposed threat from religious extremists. In addition, the State often violates the separation of State and religion, guaranteed under Article 18.1 of Azerbaijan's Constitution, and seeks control over religious entities.

Several alleged terrorists and Iranian spies were arrested in 2011 and early 2012. Currently, there are over 250 "Islamic extremists" in detention on the grounds of accusations of high treason, terrorism, creation of illegal armed groups, illegal possession of fire arms, and other offences.

On 2 January 2011, the leader of the Islamic Party of Azerbaijan (IPA), **Movsum Samadov**, called on the Azerbaijani people "to rise up and put an end to the despotic regime". Within five days, Samadov and several members of the IPA in Baku and rural regions were arrested. On 7 October 2011, the Baku Court on Grave Crimes found these party members guilty of terrorism, the use of firearms, illegal possession of firearms and ammunition, and preparation for seizure of power. The Court sentenced Samadov to twelve years in prison; his deputy and another party activists were sentenced to ten and eleven and a half years in prison. The IPA, which acts without registration, faced repression under similar accusations in 1996. These arrests and trials, occurring at a time of deteriorated relations between Azerbaijan and Iran, were further marred by a number of procedural violations.

At least 8 Muslims (Zaur Iskandarov, Araz Ismayilov and others) were arrested after demonstrating in front of the Ministry of Education on 6 May 2011 calling for the lifting of a ban on religious scarves (*hijab*) in schools. In December 2011, they were sentenced to one to three years imprisonment.

In addition, already severe legislative constraints on freedom of religion have become harsher since the amendment of Article 167.2 of the Criminal Code on 15 November 2011. Religious literature is now censored and no religious book can be printed or imported without the permission of a state committee, composed of experts working with religious institutions. Moreover, the law restricts the activities of religious communities. Registration itself is controlled, and requires permission from the Caucasian Muslims Office, local authorities and the state committee. These registration constraints mean that the activities of some religious communities are condemned to being clandestine.

On 25 April, Baku's Administrative Economic Court No. 1 liquidated the Greater Grace Protestant Church, which had been legally registered for 19 years.¹⁰

This is the first known enforced liquidation of a religious community since the adoption of Azerbaijan's harsh new Religion Law in 2009. Once the ruling comes into force, any religious activity that the Church or its members engage in will be illegal and subject to heavy punishment.

accessed 17 May 2012).

⁹ In 2011-2012, the ECHR also adopted several judgments concerning the election disputes of 2003 and 2005. See respectively, *Huseyn Panah and Others* (Application nos. 35485/05, 45553/05, 35680/05 and 36085/05, 26 July 2011) and *Hajili Arif* (application no. 6984/06, 10 January 2012), *Kerimli Ali and Alibeyli Gulamhuseyn* (nos. 18475/06 and 22444/06, 10 January 2012), *Mammadov Sardar (No. 2)* (application no. 4641/06, 10 January 2012), *Khanhuseyn Aliyev* (application no. 19554/06, 21 February 2012), and *Abil Baybala* (application no. 16511/06, 21 February 2012).

¹⁰ Corley, F, 'Court liquidates Church', 26 April 2012, *Forum 18 News*, available at: http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=1694 (last accessed 17 May 2012).

V. ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RIGHTS

Illegal house demolitions, evictions and the expropriation of hundreds of local residents forced from their homes.

For two years, Baku's mayor has expropriated and ordered the demolition of hundreds of private homes and businesses in the city centre. The two-year demolition campaign has cost hundreds – possibly thousands – of homeowners and residents their homes, resulting in the widespread violation of private property rights and housing right, in the name of a “beautification” project.

In numerous cases, residents have reported that the authorities have begun to tear down apartment buildings while property owners who refused to agree to the government's compensation or resettlement offers remained in their apartments. Evictions were often carried out with violence (people were forced out of their flats and sometimes beaten) and showed willful disregard for the dignity, health and safety of homeowners and residents. In some instances, court cases challenging the demolitions and expropriations were still pending.

Moreover, victims claim that the authorities failed to provide homeowners with fair compensation based on the market value of the properties.

VI. STATE ACTION REQUIRED

FIDH and HRCA express their deep concern with regard to the persistence of serious human rights violations in Azerbaijan and call upon the Azerbaijani Government to:

- release all political prisoners immediately;
- end torture, ill-treatment or other inhuman treatment immediately;
- ensure that the competent authorities undertake prompt and impartial investigations, wherever there are reasonable grounds to believe that an act of torture has been committed at any level of the police hierarchy or in penitentiary establishments, in conformity with Article 12 of the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhumane or Degrading Treatment or Punishment;
- combat the disproportionate use of violence by public authorities, including law enforcement bodies, in conformity with the UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials;
- stop all forms of harassment and intimidation of human rights defenders, journalists and other civil society representatives, protect and fully respect their rights, ensure that prompt and impartial investigations of alleged violations human rights are conducted in compliance with the 1998 UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders;
- guarantee the physical and psychological integrity of peaceful demonstrators and journalists in all circumstances, and, more generally, stop all persecution of political and civil society opponents;
- guarantee freedom of association, in conformity with Article 22 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights;
- take effective steps to ensure the freedom of independent media, both domestic and foreign, in conformity with Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights;
- stop the illegal evictions and demolitions in Baku city centre and offer appropriate compensation to those affected, in conformity with the Basic Principles and Guidelines on Development-based Evictions and Displacements presented by the UN Special Rapporteur

- on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living;
- develop effective anti-corruption programs for government administration and the police.