

## Press Release

### Azerbaijan/UN/Women's rights

#### United Nations calls on Azerbaijan to address widespread violence against women

**Baku, Geneva, 11 September 2009** - The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, a United Nations monitoring body composed of independent experts, has called on the Government of Azerbaijan to adopt measures to end serious discrimination and violence against women.

In July 2009, the Committee examined the situation of women in Azerbaijan and measures taken by the government in accordance with obligations under the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW Convention). The Human Rights Center of Azerbaijan (HRCA), with the support of the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), submitted a report to the Committee's experts, documenting numerous violations including: persistent violence against women, widespread trafficking of women and girls, severe under-representation of women in political and public life and obstacles to access to employment and health services. These concerns are largely reflected in the recommendations of the Committee.

**Violence against women:** The Committee expressed deep concern at the prevalence of violence perpetrated against women and girls in Azerbaijan and the persistent failure by the Government to enact a law sanctioning domestic violence. The Committee noted that "such violence appears to be at times socially legitimized by a culture of silence and impunity and is socially accepted". The Committee called on Azerbaijan to accelerate the adoption of the draft Law on domestic violence and to ensure that victims of violence have access to redress and protection. The Committee also expressed serious concern about the growth in trafficking in women and girls in Azerbaijan and urged the Government to systematically investigate, prosecute and punish traffickers and to ensure the rehabilitation and social integration of victims of trafficking, including through the establishment of additional shelters for victims.

**Early marriage :** The Committee expressed concern at the persistence of early and unregistered religious marriages in Azerbaijan and urged the Government to work with religious authorities in order to prevent early marriages and to ensure that all marriages are properly registered. The Committee called on Azerbaijan to enact an amendment to the Family Code which would increase the minimum legal age for marriage of women (currently 17 years) to 18 years in accordance with the minimum age for men.

The Azerbaijan Government delegation informed the Committee that the draft reform of the Family Code and the draft Law on domestic violence would be considered by Parliament before the end of the year.

"We urge the Government to keep to this deadline. We have waited long enough for these reforms which are essential to reduce violence against women and girls", stated Zaliha Tahirova, HRCA.

**Representation of women in decision-making :** The Committee expressed its concern at the "very low participation of women in political and public life", especially their "severe under-representation" in decision-making bodies, and called for the urgent adoption of temporary special measures such as quotas.

**Access to employment and health services:** The Committee expressed concern at the high unemployment rate of women, the concentration of women in lower-paying sectors and the persistence of the wage gap, "which remains very wide in certain industries". The Committee urged Azerbaijan to ensure de facto equal opportunities at all levels for women in the labour market and to adopt measures allowing for reconciliation of family and professional responsibilities, including provision of affordable

childcare.

Finally, the Committee expressed “grave concern” about the high and increasing rate of maternal mortality and the insufficient access to adequate general health-care services and reproductive health-care services for women. It called on the Government to prioritize decreasing maternal mortality rates by providing adequate delivery services and prenatal care to all women.

FIDH and HRCA call on the Azerbaijan government to disseminate these recommendations widely to all relevant ministries and to Parliament, and to the general public. “Full implementation of the measures identified by the Committee is essential to improve the situation of women in Azerbaijan. FIDH together with HRCA will follow up on implementation of all recommendations the Azerbaijan government”, concluded Souhayr Belhassen, FIDH President.

### [CEDAW recommendations on Azerbaijan](#)

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