

# THE HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL MUST ADDRESS THE CRACKDOWN ON CIVIL SOCIETY AND REPRESSION OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN AZERBAIJAN

Briefing note  
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# The Human Rights Council must address the crackdown on civil society and repression of human rights defenders in Azerbaijan

34<sup>th</sup> session of the Human Rights Council

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The authorities in Azerbaijan have rapidly put in place legislation allowing the State to fully control civil society activities in the country. The legislation attempts to legally justify the detention of human rights defenders, journalists and activists, who can face imprisonment at any given time, on purely arbitrary accusations. The release of leading civil society figures from prison is not a sign of systemic change, but a signal of the leverage that the international community has to ensure such releases. Releases in 2016 included human rights lawyer Intigam Aliyev, human rights defenders Rasul Jafarov, Anar Mammadli, Bashir Suleymanli, Leyla Yunus, and her husband Arif Yunus, and journalist Khadija Ismayil. This dire situation deserves the highest attention and action at the United Nations Human Rights Council.

Following an official visit to Azerbaijan in September 2016, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders assessed that civil society has been “paralysed” by the government and has faced “the worst situation” since the country’s independence in 1991. He called upon Azerbaijan to “rethink [its] punitive approach to civil society.”<sup>1</sup>

**Azerbaijan’s authorities led a continued crackdown on civil society beginning in 2011 with the closure of the Human Rights House Azerbaijan.**



<sup>1</sup> HRHF, “Azerbaijan: ‘Rethink punitive approach to civil society,’” 22 September 2016, available at <http://humanrightshouse.org/Articles/21894.html>.

An unprecedented wave of attacks and arrests against human rights defenders, journalists, lawyers, or anyone critical of the government took place in 2014.

Most recently, video blogger and chairperson of the Institute for Reporters' Freedom and Safety (IRFS), Mehman Huseynov, was forcibly dragged into an unmarked vehicle and taken to an unknown destination by unidentified assailants wearing civilian clothes. The next day, he appeared before court and was fined with 200 AZN (around 100 euros) for "disobeying the police."<sup>2</sup> On 3 March 2017, he was sentenced to two years' imprisonment after he complained of having been tortured by police.<sup>3</sup>

Mehman Huseynov's case is emblematic of the abusive and arbitrary methods used by authorities to punish and attempt to silence human rights defenders, journalists and activists in Azerbaijan.

**The government of Azerbaijan has repeatedly turned down recommendations and warnings issued**

**by the international community. Given the dire situation for human rights defenders and the continued crackdown on civil society in Azerbaijan, coupled with a lack of willingness by the authorities to take any step recommended by international and European human rights mechanisms, the United Nations Human Rights Council has a responsibility to act. It also has the occasion to do so as the Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders will present his report on Azerbaijan at its 34<sup>th</sup> session.**

## **Targeted and systematic repression of human rights defenders**

Following the adoption in 2009 and 2011 of restrictive legislation on civil society and human rights defenders, the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Azerbaijan ordered the Human Rights House Azerbaijan to cease all its activities in March 2011.<sup>4</sup>

Civil society has been paralysed as a result of legislative amendments since 2009. The human rights situation in Azerbaijan has continued to deteriorate and legislation affecting civil society and human rights defenders has continuously been adopted to further increase State control over civil society activities, especially with regard to freedom of association and assembly, freedom of expression, and the right to be a human rights defender.

### **Quick facts:**

- In December 2013 and then in July, August and December 2014, authorities arrested many leading civil society actors of the country, in an unprecedented wave of repression.
- In May 2014, Azerbaijan took over the Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers, the Council of Europe's decision-making body.
- In November 2014, President Aliyev approved amendments to the Law on Grants, NGOs and State registration of Legal Entities, which further restrict civil society space and access to foreign funding.
- In June 2015 the European Olympic Games started in Baku with a wave of human rights violations.
- President Ilham Aliyev is now serving his third five-year term after a constitutional referendum eliminated presidential term limits in 2009.
- Recent constitutional amendments further increased the powers of the presidency.

<sup>2</sup> HRHF, "Mehman Huseynov detained in Azerbaijan," 10 January 2017, available at <http://humanrightshouse.org/Articles/22150.html>.

<sup>3</sup> HRHF, "Azerbaijani photojournalist sentenced to two years' imprisonment," 3 March 2017, available at <http://humanrightshouse.org/Articles/22288.html>.

<sup>4</sup> HRHF, "Azerbaijan Human Rights House closed for 2 years," 19 March 2013, available at <http://humanrightshouse.org/Articles/19132.html>.

Human rights defenders have been accused by public officials to be a fifth column of the Western governments, or foreign agents, which has led to a misperception among the population of the truly valuable role played by civil society. Activists promoting fundamental freedoms and criticising violations have been accused of being political opponents, touting values that run counter to those of their society or culture. They have been denounced as politically or financially motivated actors, and attacked, threatened, or brought to court and sentenced under charges such as “hooliganism,” “money-laundering,” “provocation,” “drug-trafficking,” and incitement to overthrow the State. Human rights defenders have faced smear campaigns in an attempt to discredit their work, by relegating them to political opposition, or indeed as traitors. This vilification of defenders has been exacerbated, in part, by a lack of awareness within civil society of the mechanisms they can resort to and tools they can use to boost their legitimacy and protection.

Legislation has been widely used to prevent non-governmental organisations (NGOs) from carrying out their activities and receiving foreign grants. The authorities impose strict administrative rules to arbitrarily and indefinitely delay the registration of NGOs, while foreign donors need to go through an onerous multi-tier system that makes funding of local NGOs practically impossible.<sup>5</sup> In its 2014 opinion on amendments to Azerbaijan’s NGO law, the Venice Commission concluded that “globally, the cumulative effect of those stringent requirements, in addition to the wide discretion given to the executive authorities regarding the registration, operation and funding of NGOs, is likely to have a chilling effect on the civil society, especially on those associations that are devoted to key issues such as human rights, democracy and the rule of law.”<sup>6</sup>

### **Unprecedented arrests of human rights defenders**

As HRHF documented in its report with Freedom Now, during 2014, the Azerbaijani authorities “rounded up the country’s most well-known civil society leaders and audaciously even targeted those who monitored and documented the cases of political prisoners.”<sup>7</sup>

In May 2014, the authorities launched a criminal investigation in connection with the activities of several active NGOs on charges of abuse of power, tax evasion and forgery. These accusations come from new restrictions on NGO registration and access to foreign funding. In this context, NGO offices have been raided, equipment and document seized, bank accounts frozen and NGO representatives interrogated and subjected to travel bans. These investigations have affected the capacity of civil society to carry out their work and have contributed to a climate of fear.

Releases of prominent civil society leaders that were imprisoned during the summer of 2014:

- On 9 December 2015, human rights defender **Leyla Yunus** was released on probation. Her husband **Arif Yunus** was released a month earlier, on 12 November 2015. They

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<sup>5</sup> Further information available at <http://www.xural.com/2015-cso-sustainability-scores-for-azerbaijan>.

<sup>6</sup> Venice Commission Opinion, Law on non-governmental organisations (public associations and funds), 12-13 December 2014 (Opinion 787/2014), available at [http://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/?pdf=CDL-AD\(2014\)043-e](http://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/?pdf=CDL-AD(2014)043-e).

<sup>7</sup> Freedom Now and Human Rights House Network, *Breaking point in Azerbaijan*, Washington, DC and Geneva, May 2015, available at <http://humanrightshouse.org/Articles/20947.html>.

were not able to leave the country until 19 April 2016, when they were allowed to travel to the Netherlands to receive medical care for their deteriorating health;<sup>8</sup>

- On 17 March 2016, the Baku Court of Appeals converted the six-year prison sentence of journalist **Rauf Mirkadirov** to a five-year suspended sentence, thus effectively releasing him from custody;
- Those released as part of the presidential pardon of 17 March 2016 include **Rasul Jafarov**, Head of the Human Rights Club, an organisation established in 2010 to protect human rights and freedoms in Azerbaijan, and **Anar Mammadli**, Chairman of the Election Monitoring and Democracy Studies Centre (EMDS), an organisation that has been carrying out independent election monitoring in Azerbaijan since 2001;<sup>9</sup>
- On 28 March 2016, **Intigam Aliyev** was released following the Azerbaijan supreme court's decision to convert his seven-and-a-half-year prison sentence to a suspended term for the rest of the sentence. Intigam Aliyev is a prominent human rights lawyer and a mentor for other lawyers and activists. When detained, Intigam Aliyev represented many Azerbaijanis at the European Court of Human Rights. His release from prison is only conditional and he still faces restrictions, including on his right to travel. The charges against him and his detention have deprived many Azerbaijani citizens of their right to appeal and seek justice before the court, and it is only with full rehabilitation of his rights that he will be able to continue this essential work.

This repressive wave was made possible by the lack of consequences faced by the Azerbaijani authorities for detaining Ilgar Mammadov, head of the Republican Alternatives (REAL) political party, imprisoned since February 2013. He was charged with breach of public order and resisting arrest, later on charges of mass disorder and violence to public officials were added<sup>10</sup>. The trial was ongoing during the 2013 presidential election, which Ilgar Mammadov was unable to participate in, and the court sentenced him the seven year in prison on 17 March 2014<sup>11</sup>.

### Crackdown on independent media

Independent media also works under the threat of arbitrary measures by the authorities. Despite protection under national and international law that guarantees the right to freedom of expression, Azerbaijan has continued to face challenges in ensuring an enabling environment for the media and journalists. Independent media outlets have been frequently targeted.

Media outlets are targeted in the country, whenever reporting on human rights challenges, attacks on civil society or simply broadcasting critical opinions:

- On 25 May 2016, the Supreme Court of Azerbaijan upheld **Khadija Ismayil's** appeal and released her on probation. Khadija Ismayil is an award-winning investigative journalist<sup>12</sup>. She was arrested on 5 December 2014 and sentenced to 7.5 years in prison<sup>13</sup>. She still faces restrictions, including a ban on travelling abroad for five years;

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<sup>8</sup> HRHF, "Leyla Yunus released on probation in Azerbaijan," 9 December 2015, available at <http://humanrightshouse.org/Articles/21344.html>.

<sup>9</sup> HRHF, "Released: Anar Mammadli and Rasul Jafarov," 16 March 2016, available at <http://humanrightshouse.org/Articles/21541.html>.

<sup>10</sup> HRHD, Breaking Point Azerbaijan, May 2015, p. 56, available at <http://humanrightshouse.org/Articles/20947.html>

<sup>11</sup> Mammadov v. Azerbaijan, ECtHR, Application No. 15172/13 (Judgment) (22 May 2014) at paras. 27-55.

<sup>12</sup> HRHF, "Khadija Ismayil awarded on World Press Freedom Day," 2 May 2016, available at <http://humanrightshouse.org/Articles/21589.html>.

<sup>13</sup> HRHF, "We condemn the sentencing of journalist Khadija Ismayilova," 1 September 2016, available at <http://humanrightshouse.org/Articles/21130.html>.

- In December 2014, the Government suspended the activity of **Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty** (RFE/RL) in Azerbaijan, in the context of a broader criminal persecution against civil society;
- **Meydan TV** was forced to terminate its broadcast in the same month in 2014. Its editor and director both had to flee abroad, and many of its journalists are banned from travelling abroad and their bank accounts are still frozen;
- In July 2016, the offices of **ANS TV/Radio** were closed as part of an investigation related to its coverage of the attempted coup d'état in Turkey;
- The **Institute for Reporters' Freedom and Safety** (IRFS) is a continued target of the authorities. Emin Huseynov, IRFS' founder, was forced into hiding in August 2014 to ensure his protection amid a wave of repression in Azerbaijan.<sup>14</sup> He was later officially charged, and these politically motivated criminal charges forced him to leave the country in June 2015.<sup>15</sup> While Emin Huseynov was in hiding, journalist Rasim Aliyev was appointed chairman of IRFS – he was attacked by a group of unknown individuals and died from his injuries.<sup>16</sup> Mehman Huseynov, IRFS' current chairman, was sentenced on 3 March 2017 to two years' imprisonment after he complained of having been tortured by police<sup>17</sup>. Prior to this he was detained in Baku, Azerbaijan, on 9 January 2017. Huseynov, who was held incommunicado until the hearing, said the officers who detained him, “put a tape on his mouth, used electric shock on him and beat him in the car”<sup>18</sup>. His unlawful detention in an unknown place and the refusal to provide information on the detainee's whereabouts constitute an enforced disappearance and should be promptly investigated<sup>19</sup>. In November 2016, he was elected as IRFS's new chairman.

The cases of journalist Khadija Ismayil, RFE/RL, Meydan TV, and IRFS are emblematic of the way authorities, in a systematic way, aim at silencing independent media, just as they target human rights defenders and other dissenting voices.

### **Crackdown against dissenting voices in the electoral period**

The wave of arrests during the electoral period leading to the 26 September 2016 constitutional referendum further illustrates the continued crackdown against dissenting voices by the authorities in Azerbaijan.

A popular referendum on constitutional changes should be an opportunity for true public debate on the future of the State's institutions; even more so when the concerned referendum significantly expands the power of the presidency. Everyone should be allowed to freely and safely express his or her opinions during a campaign, as the right to participate in public life includes disagreeing with the government's proposals. However, instead of promoting a popular debate, the Azerbaijani authorities started a new wave of their crackdown on civil society and opposition.

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<sup>14</sup> HRHF, “Emin Huseynov forced into hiding in Azerbaijan,” 11 February 2015, available at <http://humanrightshouse.org/Articles/20730.html>.

<sup>15</sup> HRHF, “Emin Huseynov is free and safe,” 13 June 2015, available at <http://humanrightshouse.org/Articles/21025.html>.

<sup>16</sup> HRHF, “Journalist Rasim Aliyev murdered as human rights crackdown continues in aftermath of European Games,” 11 August 2015, available at <http://humanrightshouse.org/Articles/21105.html>.

<sup>17</sup> <http://humanrightshouse.org/Articles/22288.html>

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.rferl.org/a/azerbaijan-blogger-huseynov-missing-feared-abducted/28223353.html>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.irfs.org/news-feed/abduction-and-torture-of-leading-blogger-highlight-crackdown-on-dissent/>

The outcome of the referendum is completely overshadowed by the events that preceded and accompanied it, and it cannot be considered a legitimate reflection of the people's will. The authorities silenced independent voices who criticised the process and showed that they have not abandoned the "revolving door policy" of politically motivated arrests, in which the authorities release some people while arresting others.

During the weeks that preceded the referendum, intimidation and arrests of those raising their voice to criticise the process became routine. The authorities targeted journalists, bloggers, human rights defenders and political opponents in an attempt to stop the spreading of information about the referendum and their participation in protest rallies. The authorities tried to prevent protest actions from taking place and on some occasions attacked and detained demonstrators and journalists.

As reported by the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, arrested student activists Bayram Mammadov and Giyas Ibrahim both reported having being subjected to violent interrogation techniques at a police station before being sentenced to four-months pre-trial detention for drug-related charges. The Working Group observed what seemed to be "physical sequels" of the treatment they were subjected to.<sup>20</sup> The pair is accused of having tagged a statue of late President Heydar Aliyev with the phrase "Happy Slave Day."

**With its repeated waves of repression against civil society and media, Azerbaijan has managed to weaken what used to be in 2010 an active and professional although small community of people working independently to promote human rights in the country, as documented in the report submitted by the Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders to the Human Rights Council at its 34<sup>th</sup> session.<sup>21</sup>**

## **Need for greater international attention to change course repression in Azerbaijan**

Several European and international bodies have repeatedly warned the authorities about the growing number of human rights violations and recalled them their international obligations. Azerbaijan ratified the International Covenant for Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) in 1992 and the Convention against Torture four years later. These international commitments expressly indicate the State's consent to be bound to the treaties. Hence the State assumes a legal obligation to implement the rights recognised in the treaties.

When it was elected to the Human Rights Council in 2006, Azerbaijan assured its full commitment "to the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms."<sup>22</sup> For the 3-year term at the Council and since then, the human rights situation in Azerbaijan has not improved. The authorities have continuously harassed and intimidated human rights defenders and journalists, and detained political opponents. Assessments by independent international mechanisms of the Council of Europe or the United Nations have all found the same thing: a worsening situation for human rights defenders, civil society, and individual freedoms in Azerbaijan.

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<sup>20</sup> Statement of the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, 25 May 2016, available at <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=20021&LangID=E>.

<sup>21</sup> Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders Michel Forst to the Human Rights Council, Addendum – Mission to Azerbaijan (UN Doc: A/HRC/34/52/Add.3), available at <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session34/Pages/ListReports.aspx>.

<sup>22</sup> Voluntary pledges and commitments, 8 April 2006, available at: <http://www.un.org/ga/60/elect/hrc/azerbaijan.pdf>



## International attention not followed by action

Many international bodies have expressed worries about the continued crackdown in Azerbaijan:

- In June 2015, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) has condemned “the crackdown on human rights in Azerbaijan” and called for an end to the “systemic repression” of human rights defenders, the media and those critical of the government, including politically motivated prosecutions;<sup>23</sup>
- In January 2016, the United Nations Committee against Torture (CAT) recommended Azerbaijan to “release human rights defenders who have been deprived of their liberty in retaliation for their human rights work;”<sup>24</sup>
- The United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (WGAD) visited Azerbaijan from 16 to 25 May 2016.<sup>25</sup> In its preliminary findings, while taking into account the pardon decree of 17 March 2016 that resulted in the release of many political prisoners and prisoners of conscious, the WGAD did not observe any significant change in the country with respect to Azerbaijan depriving persons of their liberty. The WGAD held that Azerbaijan continues to detain human rights defenders, journalists, and political and religious leaders on criminal or administrative charges to silence them and to impair their basic human rights and fundamental freedoms. These practices are an abuse of authority and violate Azerbaijan’s obligations to uphold the rule of law;
- In September 2016, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders calls upon the government to “refrain from criminalizing defenders’ peaceful and legitimate activities, and instead support the work of independent civil society, despite possible disagreements;”<sup>26</sup>
- In November 2016, the Human Rights Committee expressed its concern “about consistent reports of torture and ill-treatment, including of journalists, human rights defenders and youth activists.”<sup>27</sup>

**By consciously disregarding these alerts, the government of Azerbaijan is violating its obligations under international and European human rights law. However, no international body has taken clear action to answer this systematic repression and the continued deterioration of the human rights situation in Azerbaijan.**

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<sup>23</sup> PACE Resolution 2062 (2015), 23 June 2015, document available at: <http://semantic-pace.net/tools/pdf.aspx?doc=aHR0cDovL2Fzc2VtYmx5LmNvZS5pbmQvbnceG1sL1hSZWYvWDJILURXLWV4dHluYXNwP2ZpbGVpZD0yMTk1MyZsYW5nPUVO&xsl=aHR0cDovL3NlbWFudGljcGFjZS5uZXQvWHNsdC9QZGYvWFJlZi1XRC1BVC1YTUwyUERGLnhzbA==&xslparams=ZmlsZWlkPTIxOTUz>

<sup>24</sup> UN CAT concluding observations on the fourth periodic report of Azerbaijan CAT/C/AZE/CO/4, 27 January 2016, available at :

[http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/treatybodyexternal/SessionDetails1.aspx?SessionID=1002&Lang=en](http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/SessionDetails1.aspx?SessionID=1002&Lang=en)

<sup>25</sup> Statement of the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, 25 May 2016, available at

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=20021&LangID=E>.

<sup>26</sup> UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, end of mission statement, 22 September 2016, available at:

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=20544&LangID=E>

<sup>27</sup> UN Human Rights Committee, concluding observations on the fourth periodic report of Azerbaijan CCPR/C/AZE/CO/4, 16 November 2016, available at:

[http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CCPR%2fC%2fAZE%2fCO%2f4&Lang=en](http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CCPR%2fC%2fAZE%2fCO%2f4&Lang=en)

## **Time for action at the Human Rights Council**

The methods used against Mehman Huseynov clearly aim at intimidating him due to his work and are emblematic of a continued pattern of repression of human rights defenders, lawyers and journalists. It comes following the visit of two key United Nations procedures to the country, the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention and the Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders. Just like most other international mechanisms, their recommendations were ignored, including judgements of the European Court of Human Rights.

In their joint statement at the Human Rights Council in June 2015, 25 States called upon Azerbaijan “to end its crackdown on civil society and respect fundamental freedoms, and to create and maintain, in law and in practice, a safe and enabling environment in which civil society can operate free from hindrance and insecurity.”<sup>28</sup> The 25 States further called upon Azerbaijan to “cooperate fully in the field of human rights with the international community.” None of these two calls were satisfied since.

The way in which Azerbaijan is rebuffing recommendations made by various international mechanisms, shows that it has no will to truly improve the human rights situation and ensure that its legislation affecting human rights defenders is in line with international obligations and standards, especially those set forth in the Human Rights Council resolutions on civil society space and on human rights defenders. Lack of willingness to implement any of the recommendations made by the international community, even the most compulsory ones such as the European Court of Human Rights judgements, is a clear sign of lack of cooperation – Azerbaijan cooperates with the international and European system on paper only.

**Given the dire situation for human rights defenders and the continued crackdown on civil society in Azerbaijan, coming with a lack of willingness by the authorities to take any step recommended by international and European human rights mechanisms, the United Nations Human Rights Council has the responsibility to act. It also has the occasion to do so as the Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders will present his report on Azerbaijan at its 34<sup>th</sup> session.**

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<sup>28</sup> Joint statement on the situation of human rights in Azerbaijan, Delivered by Ambassador Patricia O’Brien, Permanent Representative of Ireland, at the 29<sup>th</sup> session of the Human Rights Council, 24 June 2015, on behalf of Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Hungary, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America, available at <https://www.dfa.ie/media/dfa/alldfawebsitemedia/ourrolesandpolicies/int-priorities/humanrights/HRC29---JC-human-rights-in-Azerbaijan.pdf>.

# Human Rights Council action is needed in 2017 to address a worsening situation for human rights defenders, civil society and individual freedoms in Azerbaijan.

“My [civil society] partners in Azerbaijan are in jail”  
**Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe**  
24 November 2014

“Calls on the Azerbaijani authorities to put an end to systemic repression of human rights defenders, the media and those critical of the government”

**Resolution, Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe**  
23 June 2015

“Call on Azerbaijan to end its crackdown on civil society and respect fundamental freedoms”

**25 States led by Ireland at Human Rights Council**  
24 June 2015

“Azerbaijan must put an end immediately to all forms of persecution against human rights activists in the country”

**Joint statement, multiple UN Special Procedures**  
25 August 2015

“Undue pressure, harassment and intimidation against journalists, human rights defenders and activists by State authorities continue to be reported”

**UN High Commissioner for Human Rights**  
08 September 2015

“Should release human rights defenders who have been deprived of their liberty in retaliation for their human rights work”

**UN Committee Against Torture**  
27 January 2016

“Severe limitations placed on the work of human rights defenders, journalists, political opponents and religious leaders”

**UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention**  
May 2016

“Azerbaijan should rethink punitive approach to civil society”

**UN Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders**  
22 September 2016

“Consistent reports of torture and ill-treatment, including of journalists, human rights defenders and youth activists”

**UN Human Rights Committee**  
16 November 2016

**2014**

**2015**

**2016**



Continued crackdown on civil society escalated from 2011 with the closure of the Human Rights House Azerbaijan



Ongoing suppression of independent media



Disregard of recommendations made by European and international human rights mechanisms to improve the human rights situation



98 Political prisoners reported<sup>1</sup>



80 Political prisoners reported<sup>2</sup>



119 Political prisoners reported<sup>3</sup>



Many prominent civil society leaders arrested



Azerbaijan cancels visit from the European Commission



Conditional release of prominent civil society leaders



International human rights groups refused entry to country



September referendum: Presidential powers expanded



Questions over legitimacy of parliamentary elections



Constitutional changes further restricted human rights

1. Reported by working group led by Leyla Yunus and Rasul Jafarov  
2. Reported by Azerbaijani Civil society organisations  
3. Reported by 24 civil society members including Khadija Ismaylova, Iritgam Aliyev, Rasul Jafarov, Anar Mammadli.