



To the President of the Azerbaijan Republic Ilham Aliyev,
Baku, Az 1066, Istiqlaliyyat Street 19,
Presidential Palace
Azerbaijan
office@pa.gov.az

Copies to:

Baku City Executive Authority: apparat@bakucity.az

Ministry of Foreign Affairs: katiblik@mfa.gov.az

General Prokurator of the Republic of Azerbaijan: z.qaralov@prosecutor.gov.az

Oslo, 18 August 2011

Re: Human rights defender's office demolished in Baku: The Government must promptly investigate into who is responsible and compensate for losses.

Dear Mr President Ilham Aliyev,

On 11 August 2011 the office of the NGO Institute for Peace and Democracy (IPD) led by the prominent human rights defender Leyla Yunus was demolished totally. The office was situated at 38-1 and 2 Shamsi Bedalbeili Street in central Baku and owned by Leyla Yunus and her husband Arif Yunus.

At approximately 8:30 p.m. on 11 August heavy machinery arrived at the site accompanied by officials from both the State Property Committee and the Baku Mayor's office. Bulldozers arrived without warning and within little more than an hour nothing was left of the building that for years served as the premises for important human rights activity in Azerbaijan, including a crisis centre for women, the only one in Baku. Leyla Yunus is a well known human rights defender who has assisted individuals and documented human rights violations in Azerbaijan for almost two decades.

All inventory, equipment, documents were destroyed or taken away by officials. IPD staff present was not allowed to bring anything with them. The demolition was overseen by officials from both the State Property Committee and the Baku Mayor's office.

Although there has been a longstanding conflict over the possibility of an expropriation of this property, the manner in which this has happened gives reason to believe it is linked to Yunus' human rights activity. On 24 May this year a Baku Administrative Economic Court ruled that destruction of the building is inadmissible without a court decision. The ruling was made known to all relevant authorities; however, no decision has been presented to the owners of the building documenting a decision allowing for the demolition that found place on 11 August.

Leyla Yunus has over the years persistently exposed corruption and abuse carried out or protected by the authorities. The demolition of the property belonging to the Mr and Mrs Yunus may have been a punishment for her long-standing work, possibly triggered by a recent series of articles published in international media. Leyla Yunus has exposed and challenged in courts the arbitrary house evictions and demolition of homes and buildings taking place in Baku.

The Norwegian Helsinki Committee condemns the demolition of the building.

We ask the Government of Azerbaijan to make sure that the persons responsible for the demolition of the building in 38-1 and 2 Shamsi Bedalbeili Street in central Baku must be identified and brought to justice according to national legislation.

We also ask the Government of Azerbaijan to compensate the owners of the building for the losses the demolition has brought upon them, as well as provide compensation the material losses of organisations situated in the building.

The Government of Azerbaijan must immediately cease the violation of the property rights of the people of Baku though forced evictions and unwarranted demolition. Those who have already been displaced should receive relocation assistance and adequate compensation for their loss.

The Azerbaijan government should to fulfil its obligations under the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders and protect Ms Yunus' and her colleagues' right to act as human rights defenders.

Sincerely,



Bjørn Engesland
Secretary General
Norwegian Helsinki Committee