



H.E. Pascal Meunier
Ambassador of the Republic of France to Azerbaijan
The Embassy of the Republic of France to Azerbaijan
7 R.Rza Street
Baku – Azerbaijan

Brussels, 10 August 2014.

Your Excellency,

We are writing to you on behalf of the Civic Solidarity Platform (CSP), a civil society movement comprising 60 NGOs in the region covered by the OSCE, to urgently request enhanced action to support human rights defenders in Azerbaijan in compliance with the EU Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders. While many CSP members have already been in contact with individual EU member state embassies in Baku, we would like to approach you in a coordinated fashion to underscore our message on the importance of using the Guidelines in their fullest extent at this time given the alarming crack-down on our colleagues and their organizations.

As you are aware, in the past few days there has been an unprecedented wave of persecution of human rights activists in Azerbaijan. On 30 July, the Director of the Institute for Peace and Democracy, Leyla Yunus was detained and charged with the criminal offenses of treason, fraud, illegal enterprise, tax evasion and falsifying official documents. She was confined to three months pre-trial detention. Shortly after, her husband Arif Yunus was detained and charged with treason and fraud.

Moreover, on 2 August, Rasul Jafarov, a well-known human rights defender and one of the leaders of the Sing for Democracy and Art for Democracy campaigns, was arrested and charged with tax evasion, illegal entrepreneurship and abuse of office. These charges were used as the basis for a decision to hold him in pre-trial detention for three months. On Friday 8 August, the head of the Legal Enlightenment Society, Intigam Aliyev, was arrested and accused of tax evasion, abuse of power and illegal business.

The common trend behind these arrests is the persecution of activists for their legitimate human rights work. At the same time as the number of cases of detention and pre-trial custody of activists is increasing daily, NGO offices are also subject to unannounced checks by authorities, and other NGO leaders have been subjected to travel bans, extensive interrogations and the freezing of personal as well as organizational bank accounts. These steps are taken in the context of an ongoing investigation by the Serious Crimes Investigation Department of the Prosecutor General's Office, in which more than twenty local NGOs are being targeted. We fear that further arrests may unfortunately very well occur among the human rights defenders targeted by this investigation.



In light of the rapidly deteriorating situation, we appeal to the EU member state embassies to fully and without delay put into practice measures provided by the EU Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders to protect Azerbaijani activists in danger. We urge you to publicly denounce the recent arrests and the wave of growing persecution of human rights defenders in the country, and to call for the immediate release of those in custody. It is fundamental that EU member states representations in Azerbaijan play a leading role in publicly condemning such practices and demanding that the Azerbaijani government immediately terminates all actions violating its international obligations on freedom of expression, association and assembly.

In accordance with the EU Guidelines, and in light of the evident danger of further arrests, we also exhort you to use all available means to provide swift assistance and protection, including direct physical protection, to defenders to ensure their security. With respect to those currently detained, we urge you to closely monitor detention conditions and any further court hearings in their cases that may take place.

We further request you to coordinate your responses with other embassies and with relevant EEAS and Council structures, including the EU delegation in Azerbaijan to elaborate a comprehensive longer term strategy for countering this orchestrated wave of repression against Azerbaijani human rights defenders and organizations. Should the Azerbaijani authorities persist in their current approach, we believe that such a strategy should consider the imposition of targeted measures to hold accountable those individuals directly involved in this repression.

We believe it is crucial at this difficult moment that the EU member states visibly demonstrate their commitment to promoting human rights and supporting defenders where they are most at risk in their response to the developments in Azerbaijan.

We thank you for the steps undertaken by a number of EU member state embassies so far, and for your continued and increased attention to this matter. Please do not hesitate to contact us shall you require further information.

Sincerely,

International Partnership for Human Rights, Belgium
Norwegian Helsinki Committee, Norway
Human Rights Movement "Bir Duino-Kyrgyzstan", Kyrgyzstan
Center for National and International Studies, Azerbaijan
Centre for the Development of Democracy and Human Rights, Russia
Public Verdict, Russia
Freedom Files, Russia
Kharkiv Regional Foundation Public Alternative, Ukraine
Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law, Kazakhstan



Ukrainian Helsinki Union, Ukraine
Moscow Helsinki Group, Russia
Helsinki Citizens' Assembly – Vanadzor, Armenia
Human Rights Group “Citizen.Army.Law”, Russia
Helsinki Committee of Armenia, Armenia
Human Rights Monitoring Institute, Lithuania
Centre for Civil Liberties, Ukraine
Netherlands Helsinki Committee, Netherlands
Barys Zvozkau Belarusian Human Rights House, Lithuania
Crude Accountability, United States
Promo-Lex Association, Moldova