

**Follow-Up Submission to the UNCAT
based on Concluding Observations
on the fifth periodic report of Azerbaijan, adopted on 6 May 2024
Submitted by Independent Lawyers Network and OMCT**

30 October 2025

The submitting organizations of this follow-up report are the Independent Lawyers Network (ILN) and the World Organization Against Torture (OMCT).

Independent Lawyers Network (ILN) is a non-profit organization founded in 2020 in Azerbaijan to promote human rights, the rule of law, and the independence of the legal profession. It works to strengthen the country's lawyer and civil society community through legal aid, strategic litigation, research, and advocacy. Since 2021, it has faced politically motivated denials of registration, challenged domestically and now pending before the ECtHR (communicated in February 2025).

World Organisation against Torture (OMCT) works with 200 member organisations to end torture and ill-treatment, assist victims, and protect human rights defenders at risk. Together, we make up the largest global group actively standing up to torture in over 90 countries, including leading organizations in Central and Eastern Europe.

Executive summary

Since the adoption of the UN Committee against Torture's Concluding Observations in May 2024, the situation in Azerbaijan has seriously deteriorated across all areas identified for follow-up recommendations. The Government has failed to provide the requested information to the Committee and, instead, intensified restrictions on fundamental freedoms, targeting journalists, human rights defenders, lawyers, activists and civil society organizations.

Torture and ill-treatment remained systemic and unpunished, while the legal and institutional framework continues to enable impunity. Investigations into torture allegations are clearly non-existent, and law enforcement officials particularly within the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the State Security Service continue to operate without any oversight and accountability. Victims are denied effective remedies, and the national preventive mechanisms remain non-functioning.

Erosion of Lawyers' Independence and lack of proper access to independent legal aid: Access to legal safeguards has sharply declined since UNCAT last concluding observations adopted in May 2024. Lawyers defending political prisoners, journalists, and torture victims continued to face harassment, disciplinary sanctions, arbitrary detention, and suspension from practice. Draft amendments to the Law on Advocates and Advocate Activity, adopted in the third reading on 31 October 2025 and awaiting the President's signature within 56 days according to the Constitution, will enter into legal force after his approval. The amendments further undermine the independence of the legal profession by substantially altering its independent mandate, expanding state control over the Bar Association, restricting lawyer-client confidentiality, and allowing indefinite leadership within a government-aligned Bar structure. These changes contradict international standards, including the UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers and findings or recent ECtHR judgments (*Afgan Mammadov*, *Farhad Mehdiyev*, *Imanov*).

Multiple cases, including those of lawyers **Zabil Gahramanov**, **Fariz Namazli**, **Elchin Sadigov** and **Nemat Karimli**, show ongoing reprisals against independent defence lawyers. Detainees such as journalists **Ulviyya Guliyeva**, **Shamshad Aghayev** along with many others were denied access to counsel and subjected to torture during detention or lawyers were face obstacles to meet their clients in detention or prison facilities. Defence materials have been confiscated in politically motivated trials, demonstrating systemic obstruction of the right to fair trial and legal representation.

We therefore recommend that Azerbaijan's implementation of this recommendation (Art. 13 b) be graded as (C) – the implementation plan has not been provided.

Absence of a zero-tolerance approach against torture and ill-treatment: Despite mounting, well-documented evidence of torture and ill-treatment, Azerbaijani authorities continue to deny their existence, while credible reports confirm that such practices remain systemic, widespread, and politically driven. Throughout 2024–2025, journalists, human rights defenders, and political activists were subjected to beatings, threats, and psychological abuse in detention, with no independent investigations or accountability. Courts routinely ignored torture complaints, while the Prosecutor General's Office and Penitentiary Service failed to act. The Ombudsman, formally mandated under the OPCAT mechanism, has remained silent, issuing no findings on alleged

abuses. The absence of high-level condemnation and the continuing persecution of victims and lawyers reveal state complicity in protecting perpetrators. Azerbaijan's failure to prevent, investigate, or punish torture reflects a policy of deliberate impunity and a systematic breach of its obligations under the Convention against Torture.

We therefore recommend that Azerbaijan's implementation of this recommendation (Art. 17 (a)) be graded as (C) – the implementation plan has not been provided.

Civic Space and Media Freedom: From 2023–2025, the Azerbaijani authorities escalated repression against civil society and the media through arrests, prosecutions, travel bans, and restrictive legislation. Over 30 journalists, NGO leaders, and activists were charged with politically motivated criminal charges in 2025 alone, raising the number of political prisoners to 392. Independent media outlets such as Turan, Voice of America, and BBC Azerbaijani Service were forced to suspend operations, while foreign NGOs, including Transparency International and five UN agencies, closed due to government restrictions. Legislative amendments adopted in July and August 2025 granted the government broad powers to deregister organizations and dissolve foreign media outlets without judicial oversight.

We therefore recommend that Azerbaijan's implementation of this recommendation (Art. 21) be graded as (C) – the implementation plan has not been provided.

The reporting period shows a clear pattern of state-orchestrated repression, combining the use of torture, arbitrary detention, and restrictive laws to silence independent voices. Azerbaijan continues to defy its obligations under the UN Convention against Torture, the European Convention on Human Rights, and related international standards.

The Independent Lawyers Network and World Organisation against Torture urge the Committee against Torture to maintain enhanced follow-up procedures and call on Azerbaijan to adopt concrete measures ensuring accountability, the independence of the legal profession, and protection for civil society actors and journalists.

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Introduction

In its Concluding Observations (CAT/C/AZE/CO/5, adopted on 6 May 2024)¹, the United Nations Committee against Torture requested Azerbaijan to provide follow-up information by 10 May 2025 on issues related to access to and independence of lawyers, the adoption of a zero-tolerance approach to torture, the protection of human rights defenders and journalists, and the investigation and prosecution of violations of international humanitarian and human rights law in connection with hostilities in the region concerned (see paras. 13 (b), 17 (a), 21 and 23 (a) above).

Since the adoption of the Concluding Observations, the Government of Azerbaijan has not provided the Committee against Torture with the requested follow-up information. On the contrary, the situation in the areas identified by the UNCAT has further deteriorated, with new arrests of journalists, NGO leaders, human rights defenders, and activists, increasingly new restrictive NGO and media legislation, and the continued use of torture and ill-treatment in detention facilities. Effective investigations remained absent, while serious obstacles persisted regarding access to lawyers of one’s choosing and to effective legal aid.

I. Legal safeguards for detained persons: The right to access to and to consult with a lawyer of their own choosing and access to free, independent and effective legal aid (Article 13 (b))

¹ United Nations Committee against Torture, *Concluding Observations on the Fifth Periodic Report of Azerbaijan* (CAT/C/AZE/CO/5), adopted the present concluding observations at its 2101st meeting, held on 6 May 2024, para. 42, <https://docstore.ohchr.org/SelfServices/FilesHandler.ashx?enc=rD84Ceb7B25%2FyzkDiCdGqeBZ5cnbVREPSImMqkxVIWCEvBNGfQwKVHsB%2BRVguq8NgW4c6yC%2FTkPg61IG6u8Ehw%3D%3D>

Since the Committee's 2024 Concluding Observations (CAT/C/AZE/CO/5)², access to legal safeguards for detained persons in Azerbaijan has seriously deteriorated, with growing interference in access to independent lawyers, continued legal reprisals of lawyers defending victims of politically motivated arrests, torture, and ill-treatment, and a new set of legislative changes that further weaken the independence of the legal profession in breach of international standards.

a. Government's Draft Legislative Package Amending the Law "On Advocates and Advocate Activity" (Adopted in Second Reading on 10 October 2025)

On 31 October 2025, the Azerbaijani Parliament adopted in the third reading a broad legislative package amending several key legal acts, including the Law "On Advocates and Advocate Activity" (LoA).³ The proposed amendments represent a systemic attempt to bring the legal profession under executive control, undermining the self-governance of the Bar Association and contravening international standards such as the UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers (1990) and the European Convention on the Profession of Lawyer (2025).

The amendments alter the preamble and Articles 3 and 4 of the Law, removing the explicit reference to "natural and legal persons" as beneficiaries of legal assistance and extending the Bar's duties to include the "rights and interests of state bodies." The deletion of the phrase "natural and legal persons" from the preamble is not merely stylistic but conceptually problematic, as it removes the explicit reference to the very subjects whose rights the legal profession is meant to defend. The preamble sets the interpretative framework of the entire law, and its human-centered language affirms that advocacy exists to protect individuals seeking justice. Article 3 of the Law functions as a general normative clause that frames the interpretation of all subsequent provisions; it is a foundational statement defining the public mandate of the legal profession.

These amendments directly contradict the core principles of the legal profession as articulated in the UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers (1990)⁴, which establish that the primary function of lawyers is to protect the rights of individuals against potential abuse of power by the State. By placing state institutions among the beneficiaries of legal protection in the same normative category as individuals, the amendment distorts the adversarial nature of legal representation and risks transforming lawyers from rights defenders into auxiliary actors of state interests.

Further proposed amendment to Article 7(III) of the Law on Advocates weakens the protection of lawyers from being interrogated about their professional work. The current law prohibits questioning lawyers about anything learned "in connection with the performance of their professional duties," which fully protects lawyer–client confidentiality and overall activities as a lawyer. The new wording "in connection with the exercise of legal practice" narrows this

² United Nations Committee against Torture, *Concluding Observations on the Fifth Periodic Report of Azerbaijan* (CAT/C/AZE/CO/5), adopted the present concluding observations at its 2101st meeting, held on 6 May 2024, para.42, <https://docstore.ohchr.org/SelfServices/FilesHandler.ashx?enc=rD84Ceb7B25%2FyzkDiCdGqeBZ5cnbVREPSImMqkxVIWCEvBNGfQwKVHsB%2BRVguq8NgW4e6yC%2FTkPg61IG6u8Ehw%3D%3D>

³ Azerbaijani Parliamentary (*Milli Məclis – National Assembly*) website: <https://meclis.gov.az/news-layihe.php?id=2522&lang=az&par=0> ; <https://apa.az/sosial/hakimler-dovlet-qulluqculari-ve-huquq-elmleri-doktorlarinin-vekilliye-qebuluna-dair-yeni-prosedur-muevvenlesir-923854>

⁴ According to the UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers (1990), in particular Principles 12, 14, 16, and 24, the role of lawyers is defined as the protection of individuals' rights and interests in relation to state authority, ensuring accountability and acting as independent agents of justice. By placing state bodies as beneficiaries of legal protection on equal footing with individuals, the proposed amendment contradicts these principles and undermines the adversarial and rights-protection function that the international standards assign to the legal profession.

protection only to formal legal actions within the course of legal practice. This change undermines the confidentiality and independence of lawyers and falls short of international standards protecting their professional secrecy.

The proposed changes to Article 8 of the Law on Advocates, giving the Ministry of Justice's Justice Academy control over the mandatory training and final exam for Bar admission, do not introduce anything new but rather formalize the state's existing influence over the process. By officially placing this authority under the executive, the amendments further entrench government control over who can enter the legal profession.

Finally, the deletion of the two-term limit for the Bar Association Chairperson (Article 11(2)) removes the last internal check on leadership renewal. Given that delegate selection for the Bar's Conference is already tightly controlled by the Presidium, this amendment would institutionalize one-person rule within the Bar, exclude critical voices, and solidify a loyalty-based governance model.

Taken together, these amendments would transform the Azerbaijani Bar from a self-governing professional body into a state-controlled institution, undermining the independence of lawyers and the very foundations of access to justice in Azerbaijan.

b. Systematic interference into access to independent legal aid and lawyer–client confidentiality in politically motivated cases

Throughout 2024–2025, Azerbaijan has seen a worsening pattern of state interference in the right to independent legal aid, as lawyers defending individuals in politically sensitive or torture-related cases face intimidation, obstruction, and retaliation. Detainees are routinely denied confidential access to counsel of their own choosing.

In April 2025, the Independent Lawyers Network (ILN) submitted a Rule 9.2 communication to the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe in the *Namazov v. Azerbaijan* group of cases, detailing systemic deficiencies in the independence of the legal profession.⁵ In the past year, the European Court of Human Rights in its *Afgan Mammadov* (Nov 2024)⁶, *Farhad Mehdiyev* (Mar 2025)⁷, and *Imanov v. Azerbaijan* (Oct 2025)⁸ judgments found that lawyers' disbarments by the Azerbaijani Bar Association stemmed from abusive disciplinary proceedings targeting their critical views, breaching Articles 8 and 10 of the Convention.

This pattern of reprisals is further aggravated by recent cases of legal harassment against Azerbaijani human rights lawyer Zabil Gahramanov on 23 October 2025, where Gahramanov arrested by Ganja city police and being placed in three months of pre-trial detention on charges of

⁵ Rule 9(2) submission to the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe concerning the implementation of the *Namazov v. Azerbaijan* group of cases (Appl. No. 74354/13) to be examined at the 1531st CM DH meeting on 10-12 June 2025, submitted on 29 April 2025, [https://hudoc.exec.coe.int/eng?i=DH-DD\(2025\)575E](https://hudoc.exec.coe.int/eng?i=DH-DD(2025)575E)

⁶ Case of *Afgan Mammadov v. Azerbaijan* (Application no. 43327/14), Judgment, 14 November 2024, <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng?i=001-237962>

⁷ Case of *Farhad Mehdiyev v. Azerbaijan* (Application no. 36057/18), 18 March 2025, <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/?i=001-242368>

⁸ Case of *Imanov v. Azerbaijan* (Application no. 62/20), Judgment, 7 October 2025, <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/?i=001-245077>

hooliganism and fraud widely seen as fabricated.⁹ Earlier that month, on 8 October 2025, the Azerbaijani Bar Association's Presidium had suspended Gahramanov's license for six months, citing unspecified disciplinary violations.¹⁰ Gahramanov, known for defending politically sensitive cases and criticizing police abuse, is widely believed to have been targeted for his human rights work.

On 15 August 2025, a lawyer Nemat Karimli, representing opposition politician Tofiq Yagublu, was subjected to an illegal search during a prison visit, with penitentiary officers inspecting and censoring his legal documents (only the documents deemed "appropriate" by officials are allowed into the meeting room). Karimli publicly protested the violation of lawyer-client confidentiality and filed complaints with authorities, but the harassment continues.¹¹

Similarly, during a 14 July 2025 hearing in the "Toplum TV case", defendant journalists and activists reported that defence notes were confiscated by Penitentiary Service officers before the hearing. The presiding judge denied authorizing the action, advising lawyers to complain to prison authorities, a response reflecting the judiciary's unwillingness to safeguard defence rights.¹²

On 6 May 2025, prominent journalist Ulviyya Guliyeva was arrested as part of the "Meydan TV case" and denied access to her lawyer during the first hours of detention, despite repeated requests. Her home was searched in her absence, and she later reported being beaten and threatened with rape to force disclosure of her passwords. Both the Prosecutor General's Office and the Ministry of Justice ignored her complaints and blocked medical examinations requested by her lawyer. During the Khatai District Court hearing on 7 May, her torture allegations were dismissed, and the court issued a one-sentence ruling without considering procedural violations, illustrating the systemic denial of defence rights in politically motivated cases.¹³

On 5 February 2025, journalist and Argument.az editor Shamshad Aghayev (Ağa) was arrested in connection with the "Meydan TV case" and charged under Article 206.3.2 of the Criminal Code (smuggling by an organized group). In a letter from detention titled "How I Became a Political Prisoner," Aghayev described being subjected to police (Baku City Main Police Department) brutality, including being struck in the chin and having his finger bent painfully when he requested access to his lawyer. His detailed account illustrates both the denial of the right to legal counsel and the use of physical coercion during interrogation—part of the broader pattern of ill-treatment and obstruction of defence rights in politically motivated cases in Azerbaijan.¹⁴

⁹ Caucasian Knot: The court placed Zabil Gakhramanov under arrest, October 26, 2025, <https://www.eng.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/69216> ; OCMedia: Azerbaijani human rights lawyer detained on hooliganism charges, 27 October 2025 <https://oc-media.org/azerbaijani-human-rights-lawyer-detained-on-hooliganism-charges/>

¹⁰ Meydan Tv: Vəkillər Kollegiyasının Rəyasət Heyətinin qərarı ilə fəaliyyəti dayandırılan vəkillərin adları məlum olub (The names of the lawyers whose activities were suspended by the decision of the Presidium of the Bar Association have been revealed),

9 October 2025, <https://www.meydan.tv/az/article/v%C9%99kill%C9%99r-kollegiyasinin-r%C9%99yas%C9%99t-hey%C9%99tinin-q%C9%99rari-il%C9%99-f%C9%99aliyy%C9%99ti-dayandirilan-v%C9%99kill%C9%99rin-adlari-m%C9%99lum-olub/>

¹¹ Tribunal.info: Can an Attorney be inspected upon the enter-exit of Penitentiary Institutions?, 22 September 2025, <https://tribunal.info/en/analysis/can-an-attorney-be-inspected-upon-the-enter-exit-of-penitentiary-institutions>

¹² Toplum TV, 'Toplum TV case: State offered cooperation', (July 2025), <https://toplummedia.tv/mehkeme/pldquotoplum-tv-isirdquo-doumlvlet-bize-emekdasliq-teklif-etdip>

¹³ Ocmmedia: Azerbaijani journalist Ulviyya Ali 'threatened with rape' by police in detention, 19 May 2025, <https://oc-media.org/azerbaijani-journalist-ulviyya-ali-threatened-with-rape-by-police-in-detention/>

¹⁴ Meydan TV: Letter from journalist Shamshad Agha, 18 April 2025, <https://www.meydan.tv/az/article/s%C9%99msad-aga-hakim%C9%99-get-ovladlarinin-gozl%C9%99rin%C9%99-bax-v%C9%99-n%C9%99-q%C9%99d%C9%99r-%C9%99dal%C9%99tsiz-q%C9%99rar-verdiyini-dusun/?tztc=1>

On 7 December 2024 and 31 January 2025, human rights lawyer Elchin Sadigov reported two incidents of obstruction, as the Baku City Main Police Department and staff of Detention Facility No. 15 barred him from meeting his clients' journalists Aynur Elgunesh, Natig Javadli, Polad Aslanov, and blogger Rashad Ramazanov for long hours under various pretexts, effectively denying access to legal counsel.¹⁵

On 31 August 2024, Azerbaijani human rights lawyer Fariz Namazli was arbitrarily detained by the State Security Service (SSS) without a summons or explanation and released later the same day without charge. Lawyer spent long night intimidating interrogations at the SSS for related to the defence works in politically motivated cases and use of e-court system. The International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) condemned his detention as an act of persecution aimed at silencing an independent lawyer known for defending political prisoners and handling cases before the European Court of Human Rights.¹⁶

II. Absence of a zero-tolerance approach against torture and ill-treatment (Art. 17 (a))

Despite numerous well-documented and repeated allegations of torture and ill-treatment, the Azerbaijani authorities continue to deny their existence, even as credible evidence shows that these practices are systemic, widespread, and deeply entrenched. During 2024–2025, numerous reports from domestic lawyers, detainees, and media reveal widespread torture, physical abuse, and psychological pressure in detention facilities, particularly targeting political prisoners, journalists, human rights defenders and activists. The government has issued no public statements from senior officials condemning torture or reaffirming the absolute prohibition of ill-treatment. Instead, official rhetoric that once denied or dismissed such allegations has now been replaced by complete silence, with no response or action to address complaints or incidents of torture and ill-treatment.

Persistent allegations of torture and ill-treatment and the continuing lack of accountability: Cases documented throughout 2024 and 2025 demonstrated the continuation of torture and ill-treatment against civil society members, including human right defenders, journalists and activists. Peace activist and PhD student **Bahrüz Samadov**¹⁷, charged with treason, was beaten and coerced into revealing his phone data by the State Security Service. On February 21, 2025, B. Samadov's lawyer filed a motion with the Baku Grave Crimes Court regarding the termination of the criminal case against Samadov, the investigation of the torture complaint, and the violation of the right to defence. The court did not grant the motions. Only the court decided to send a request to the prosecutor's office regarding the complaint about the failure to investigate the beating issue at the State Security Service. However, no investigation was conducted.¹⁸ His arrest, which was followed

¹⁵ Rule 9.2 - Communication from NGOs (European Human Rights Advocacy Centre, Independent Lawyers Network and Free Voices Collective) (29/04/2025) in the Namazov group of cases v. Azerbaijan (Application No. 74354/13), paras 24-25, [https://hudoc.exec.coe.int/eng/?i=DH-DD\(2025\)575E](https://hudoc.exec.coe.int/eng/?i=DH-DD(2025)575E)

¹⁶ The International Commission of Jurists (ICJ): Azerbaijan: Security services ramp up attacks on independent lawyers and human rights defenders, 10 September 2024, <https://www.icj.org/azerbaijan-security-services-ramp-up-attacks-on-independent-lawyers-and-human-rights-defenders/>

¹⁷ VOA: 'Bahrüz Samadov started hunger strike in prison', (February 2025), <https://www.amerikaninsesi.org/a/7983349.html>

¹⁸ Radio Liberty: 'Bahrüz Samadov announced that he had started a hunger strike in prison: 'Once upon a time, Bagirov was destroying intellectuals, just like now...'', (February 2025), <https://www.azadliq.org/a/behruz-samedov-acliq/33323163.html>

by a smear campaign from pro-government media in August 2024, is widely recognized as politically motivated.¹⁹

In the Abzas Media and Toplum TV cases, journalists **Sevinj Vagifgizi**, **Nargiz Absalamova**, and **Elnara Gasimova** reported beatings, threats, and psychological abuse in Baku Detention Facility on 11 and 18 February 2025, allegedly in retaliation for exposing rights violations in detention facility. Journalists' complaints have not been investigated yet.²⁰

On 6 June 2025, Workers Table Unions Confederation leader **Afiaddin Mammadov** faced threats of being transferred to a high-security prison after publicizing inhumane detention conditions, while fellow activist **Elvin Mustafayev** was brutally tortured at Penitentiary Facility No.6, suffering a ruptured eardrum and lasting injuries.²¹⁻²² According to reports, upon his arrival, the facility head **Fariz Aliyev** and two regime officers slapped and inflicted severe physical torture, resulting in a ruptured eardrum and loss of consciousness from heavy blows to his head and body, with Mustafayev still suffering from an ear infection and severe pain over a month later. The Confederation demanded immediate action from the Ombudsman's office and the Penitentiary Service for the accountability of the named officials. None of these incidents have led to investigations or disciplinary action despite persisting complaints filed by lawyers.²³⁻²⁴

On 23 June 2025, Toplum TV journalist **Farid Ismayilov** informed the court about his deteriorating health, citing hunger, low blood sugar, and inadequate medical care during transfers, while his family reported negligent IV treatment.²⁵ Fellow journalist **Ali Zeynal** addressed an open letter to the Justice Minister exposing inhumane conditions and fabricated complaints against him at the Baku Detention Facility, where both remain detained in politically motivated proceedings.²⁶

On 30 June 2025, lawyer Agil Layij reported that veteran and activist **Haji Valiyev** was tortured in solitary confinement at Baku Detention Facility between 23–27 June, suffering head injuries after refusing to sign a fabricated disciplinary record.²⁷ Detained on 31 March 2025 on hooliganism charges, Valiyev has been on hunger strike since 21 June, protesting what he calls his politically motivated imprisonment for public activism.²⁸

¹⁹ Oxu.az, 'Why did Bahruz Samadov work for Armenians?', (August 2024), <https://oxu.az/siyaset/ermenistana-isleyen-sebeke-ifs-a-olundu-kimler-in-adi-var>; Amnesty International, 'Azerbaijan: Release Bahruz Samadov and other government critics targeted during election campaign', (September 2024), <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/09/azerbaijan-release-bahruz-samadov-and-other-government-critics-targeted-during-election-campaign/>; Amnesty International, 'Azerbaijan: Academics Arrested on Fabricated Charges: Iqbal Abilov and Bahruz Samadov', (September 2024), <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur55/8554/2024/en/>

²⁰ VOA: 'Detainees in Abzas Media case refuse to participate in the trial', (February 2025), <https://www.amerikaninsesi.org/a/7970449.html>

²¹ Radio Liberty: 'Afiaddin Mammadov is allegedly threatened in prison', (June 2025), <https://www.azadliq.org/a/afieddin-mammadov-tecridxanada-durum/33429744.html>

²² Ibid

²³ OC Media: 'Convicted union activist faces transfer to stricter prison for 'acting like opposition figure'', (June 2025), <https://oc-media.org/convicted-union-activist-faces-transfer-to-stricter-prison-for-acting-like-opposition-figure/>

²⁴ Toplum TV: 'Elvin Mustafayev allegedly faced torture with special cruelty', (June 2025), <https://toplummedia.tv/mehkeme/pelvin-mustafayevin-xuumsusi-amansizliqla-zorakiliga-meruz-qaldigi-devilibr>

²⁵ Toplum TV: 'Journalist Farid Ismayilov protests transfer to court due to deteriorating health', (June 2025), <https://toplummedia.tv/mehkeme/pferid-ismayilov-sehhetine-goumlre-mehkemeye-aparilmasina-etiraz-edirnbspp>, [available in Azerbaijani]

²⁶ Toplum TV: 'Ali Zeynal addresses an open letter to Justice Minister', (June 2025), <https://toplummedia.tv/olke/peli-zeynal-edliyye-nazirine-accediliq-mektub-yazibp>

²⁷ Toplum TV: 'Haji Valiyev faced torture in solitary confinement cell', (June 2025), <https://toplummedia.tv/mehkeme/pvekil-haci-veliyeve-karserde-igence-verilibp>

²⁸ Institute for Reporters' Freedom and Safety, 'Lawyer: "The court knows well what suffering Haji Valiyev has endured"', (May 2025), <https://www.irfs.org/az/news-feed/lawyer-the-court-knows-well-what-suffering-haji-valiyev-has-endured/>

Judicial Complicity and Institutional Failures: Domestic courts consistently ignored or dismissed complaints and appeals concerning torture, inhumane detention conditions, and denial of medical care. The Prosecutor General's Office and the Penitentiary Service also routinely failed to investigate such allegations or grant requests for adequate medical care.

The national human rights ombudsman formally the National Preventive Mechanism under OPCAT, has not confirmed or published any findings addressing torture, ill-treatment, harsh conditions or access to medical aid against civil society members, journalists, human rights defenders and activists for 2023-2025 years.

Azerbaijan's continued refusal to acknowledge or address torture amounts to state tolerance and normalization of abuse, in clear violation of Articles 1 and 16 of the Convention against Torture. The Committee's call for a high-level public declaration and a genuine zero-tolerance policy remains unfulfilled.

Instead, the authorities have deepened impunity by pressuring and abusing those who report or speak out about torture, criminalizing human rights defenders, and protecting perpetrators through inaction and state-controlled smear campaigns against victims. Urgent measures are needed to ensure political condemnation of torture, independent investigations, and accountability at all levels, in line with the Convention and the Committee's recommendations.

III. Civil society and media under pressure: ongoing arrests and closing civic space (Art. 21)

During 2023-2025, Azerbaijan's civil society and media came under unprecedented crackdown through mass arrests, wide criminal prosecutions, and new restrictive laws targeting journalists, human rights defenders, and independent NGOs. The authorities have continued to misuse criminal law not only to silence and punish critical voices but also to systematically dismantle the remaining space for independent civic activity. These developments continue with criminal investigations, new arrests and political trials to suppress public oversight and close the civic space, contrary to Article 21 of the Convention and the Committee's recommendations to ensure a safe and enabling environment for civil society and the media.

To illustrate the scale of repression, in the first eight months of 2025 alone, 32 members of Azerbaijan's civil society and media faced politically motivated criminal charges, with 20 placed in pre-trial detention. Overall, 27 people from civil society (19), media (8) with additional political opposition members (8) were charged in politically motivated criminal charges²⁹, with 23 arrested

²⁹ Civil society members, lawyers, HRDs; 1. Anar Abdullayev, 2. Elgiz Gahraman, 3. Mammad Mammadzada, 4. Bashir Suleymanli, 5. Asaf Ahmadov, 6. Zamin Zakiyev, 7. Ahmad Mammadzada, 8. Galib Bayramov, 9. Hafiz Hasanov, 10. Subhan Hasanli, 11. Aytaj Aghazada, 12. Nargiz Mukhtarova, 13. Mehriban Rahimli (Representative of the German Marshall Fund); 14. Tamilla Musayeva, 15. Asiman Gojayev, 16. Ulviyya Babasoy, 17. Anonymized because of fear of reprisals, 18. Fikrat Jafarli, 19. Zabil Gahramanov, Media: 20. Shahnaz Baylargizi, 21. Shamshad Aghayev, 22. Nurlan Gahramanli, 23. Fatima Movlamli; 24. Farid Ismayilov; 25. Ulviyya Guliyeva (Ali), 26. Ahmad Mammadli; 27. Ahmad Mukhtar
Opposition/ political (including public) activists: 28. Novruz Taghiyev; 29. Zaur Asgarov; 30. Rashad Aliyev; 31. Gunduz Mirzayev; 32. Kanan Zeynalov; 33. Zahiraddin Ibrahimov; 34. Rahil Guliyev; 35. Zaur Rzali;

for pre-trial period³⁰, while others put under police supervision and house arrest with 2 search warrants were issued in absentia³¹ between 1 January 2025 and 25 October 2025.

The number of political prisoners, according to independent civil society organization reports, has surged to 392 as of October 2025³² up from 254 in December 2023³³ an alarming increase of 138 that underscores a systemic assault on basic freedoms, not a series of isolated cases.

On 14 March 2025, Azerbaijani authorities resumed Criminal Case No. 142006023 remained open since April 2014, bringing new charges against several NGO leaders—including a country representative of the German Marshall Fund (GMF). The charges based on the interpretation of persecuting authorities' interpretation of service agreements funded by USAID and the U.S. and UK embassies as unregistered grant agreements. By equating contractual service-based funding with grants, the authorities continued the pattern of criminalization of foreign-funded civil society activity and exert sustained pressure on independent NGOs by misapplying criminal law.

There has been a report of dozens civil society members and media professionals were put under politically motivated travel bans between 2024-2025 years. Reportedly, more than dozens of civil-society and media professionals remain under politically motivated travel bans with very few of them publicizing about their cases for fear of risks of persecution. The government has continued a routine wave of arrests and interrogations accompanied by smear campaigns. Civic activism and democratic oversight have been effectively shut down, leaving virtually no safe space for independent voices in Azerbaijan.

Meanwhile, during February - March 2025, Azerbaijan saw mass closure of international organisations and media in Azerbaijan. Among the organisations ceasing operations were the Azerbaijani branch of Transparency International (Transparency Azerbaijan), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and Erasmus+ the EU's largest education exchange program. Several independent media outlets, including Turan Information Agency³⁴, Voice of America³⁵ and BBC Azerbaijani Service³⁶, Bloomberg³⁷ suspended operations amid smear campaigns and accreditation cancellations. On 14 July 2025, the Azerbaijani Parliament approved legislative amendments expanding the definition of "media subjects" to include foreign media branches and representations. The changes introduce mandatory registration with the Media Registry, requiring foreign outlets to apply for inclusion within seven days of state registration or face liquidation. The amendments also grant the Media Development Agency the authority to dissolve foreign

³⁰ Media: 1. Farid Ismayilov, 2. Shamshad Aghayev, 3. Nurlan Gahramanli, 4. Fatima Movlamli, 5. Shahnaz Baylargizi (was later placed under house arrest), 6. Ulviyya Guliyeva (Ali), 7. Ahmad Mammadli,

NGO: 8. Mammad Mammadzada, 9. Bashir Suleymanli, 10. Zamin Zakiyev, 11. Asaf Ahmadov, 12. Ahmad Mammadzada

³¹ 1. Subhan Hasanli (NGO), 2. Aytaj Aghazada (NGO)

³² Institute for Peace and Democracy, 'Political Prisoners, 7 October 2025, <https://www.ipd-az.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/7okt2025ENG.pdf>

³³ Institute for Peace and Democracy, 'Political Prisoners, 1 December 2023, <https://www.ipd-az.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/1pp1dec2023.pdf>

³⁴ Eurasia.net: "Financial pressures force Azerbaijan's last bastion of independent media to suspend operations" Feb 14, 2025, <https://eurasianet.org/financial-pressure-force-azerbaijans-last-bastion-of-independent-media-to-suspend-operations>

³⁵ Meydan TV: Correspondent accreditation of Voice of America has been revoked in Azerbaijan, 24 February 2025, <https://www.meydan.tv/en/article/correspondent-accreditation-of-voice-of-america-has-been-revoked-in-azerbaijan/>

³⁶ BBC: Azerbaijan orders suspension of BBC News Azerbaijani in Baku, 20 February 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c4g7ewd9ne0o>

³⁷ OCMedia: Azerbaijan revokes accreditation of Bloomberg, 28 February 2025, <https://oc-media.org/azerbaijan-revokes-accreditation-of-bloomberg/>

media offices without court procedures if they operate without registration or are accused of disseminating “false information.”³⁸

At least 8 international organization and programs, including 5 offices of the UN, notably UNFPA, UNHCR, UNDP, IOM and UNICEF were forced to suspend their operations in Azerbaijan in 2025.³⁹

On 8 July 2025, the Azerbaijani parliament adopted amendments into the Code of Administrative Offences introducing harsh fines for NGOs and related entities that fail to register foreign-funded service contracts, with penalties also applying to banks involved in such transactions. While the obligation dates back to a 2015 Cabinet decision, this marks the first adoption of concrete sanctions, though final approval by the President confirmed on 5 August 2025.⁴⁰ On 8 July 2025, Azerbaijan adopted amendments further tightening NGO rules: all transactions for services or work funded by unregistered foreign sources are banned, and public associations must now report detailed sources of all assets, not just grants or donations, under the revised anti-money laundering law.⁴¹

Annex: ILN Analyses of Draft Legislative Package Amending the Law “On Advocates and Advocate Activity”

³⁸ Azertag: “Media haqqında” Qanuna təklif edilən dəyişikliklər təsdiqlənib (Azertag: Proposed amendments to the Law "On Media" approved), 14 July 2025, https://azertag.az/xeber/media_haqqinda_qanuna_teklif_edilen_deyisiklikler_tesdiqlenib-3656239

³⁹ Jamnews: Azerbaijan: Opposition and media representatives respond to international organizations' shutdown, 6 March 2025, <https://jam-news.net/azerbaijan-opposition-and-media-representatives-respond-to-international-organizations-shutdown/>

⁴⁰ On 24 June 2025, the Milli Majlis read in the first reading amendments to the Administrative Offences Code introducing financial penalties for NGOs and affiliated entities that fail to comply with existing foreign-funded service contract registration requirements. The newly proposed Article 432-1 imposes fines ranging from 1,500 to 2,500 AZN for officials and 5,000 to 7,000 AZN for legal entities for non-compliance with the contract registration deadline, and significantly higher penalties for carrying out services or receiving funds without registered contracts. Banks and payment providers involved in such transactions may also be fined. While the obligation to register these contracts was first established under Cabinet Decision No. 337 in 2015, this is the first time concrete legal sanctions have been proposed, effectively formalizing enforcement mechanisms and further tightening the regulatory environment for foreign-funded civil society activities. It is worth noting that there is no information confirming the final adoption of the legislation by the parliament.

https://azertag.az/xeber/azerbaycan_respublikasinin_mulki_prosessual_mecellesinde_azerbaycan_respublikasinin_cinayet_prosessual_mecellesinde_ve_azerbaycan_respublikasinin_inzibati_xetalar_mecellesinde_deyisiklik_edilmesi_haqqinda_azerbaycan_respublikasinin_qanunu-3687487

⁴¹ Azertag, Law amending the “Law on Non-Governmental Organizations (Public Associations and Foundations)” and the “Law on Combating the Legalization of Criminally Obtained Property and the Financing of Terrorism”, 31 July 2025, https://azertag.az/xeber/qeyri_hokumet_teskilatları_ictimai_birlikler_ve_fondlar_haqqında_ve_cinayet_volu_ile_elde_edilmiş_emlakin_leqallasdırılmasına_ve_terrorchulugun_maliyyelesdirilmesine_qarsi_mubarize_haqqında_azerbaycan_respublikasinin_qanunlarında_deyisiklik_edilmesi_barede_azerbaycan_respublikasinin_qanunu-3681843