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Press release

Azerbaijan: The Government Presents Another Face than Reality

The third periodic review of Azerbaijan by the UN Human Rights Committee has been held on 20 July and is still being held on 21 July 2009. The freedoms of expression, association, and assembly are currently under serious threat in Azerbaijan. Human rights defenders and journalists are being attacked by unidentified people on a regular basis – for the most part, these acts are not investigated or persecuted by government and legal officials. Additionally, human rights defenders and journalists are being attacked by agents of the Government themselves. The human rights situation in Azerbaijan is getting worse by the minute, despite the efforts of the international community.

8 organisations and partners of the South Caucasus Network for Human Rights Defenders have published a report, reflecting the real situation in Azerbaijan:

- Violence against women is widespread. Insufficient measures are taken by the Government to reduce domestic violence. There is urgent need for the creation of shelters for victims of domestic violence and for the implementation of special programmes for rehabilitation of victims of domestic violence. At present, the Criminal Code does not specifically criminalize domestic violence, but this should be revised by the Government.
- There is an urgent need to change the definition of rape. By international standards, the definition of rape is that rape has occurred if the victim has not agreed to a sexual act. In Azerbaijan, the family of the victim must testify to the occurrence of rape and there has to have been an “existence of resistance”.
- The judiciary system in the country is neither fair nor independent from the Government. The NGOs show in their report that there are numerous cases where the Justice did not allow free trials for accused human rights defenders and journalists.
- The NGOs have also presented 10 cases in which the freedoms of expression and opinion for human rights defenders and journalists have been violated.

Most recently, Emin Milli, the “Alumni Network” Youth Organization Coordinator and the ANTV Online TV Leader, and Adnan Hajizade, one of the “OL” Youth Organization’s coordinators and a well-known video-blogger, have been severely beaten by unidentified persons. The police in the Sabail District denied medical assistance to Adnan Hajizade and Emin Milli and detained them under charges of hooliganism. Both were denied access to lawyers of their own accord until the following day. On July 10, 2009, the Sabail District Court sentenced the activists to two months in pre-trial detention. On July 20, 2009, the Baku Appellate Court rejected the appeal for Adnan Hajizade and Emin Milli to be released from pre-trial detention. As said by Florian Irminger, Head of the Geneva office of the Human Rights House Foundation, to the Human Rights Committee, “this very recent event demonstrates the poor reality in Azerbaijan and reflects the situation in the country for human rights defenders and journalists.”

Rasul Jafarov, representative of the Baku based Institute for Reporters’ Freedom and Security, was present at the third periodic report of Azerbaijan and commented, “the Government of Azerbaijan did not present the real situation to the UN Human Rights Committee. It presented another face than the one it uses to rule in Azerbaijan.”

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