

Human Rights Council – 29th session (15 June – 3 July 2015)

Joint statement on the situation of human rights in Azerbaijan

Delivered by Ambassador Patricia O'Brien, Permanent Representative of Ireland

24 June 2015

I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the following 25 States: 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.

We are concerned about the shrinking of space for civil society and freedom of expression in Azerbaijan. This has taken various forms: harassment and intimidation, arrest and imprisonment of lawyers, journalists, peaceful activists and human rights defenders on dubious charges, blocking of bank accounts and other restrictions on funding and functioning of NGOs, restrictions on travel and refusal of access to the country to representatives of respected international human rights organisations and foreign journalists. While the methods have varied, the incidents can be seen together as a systematic silencing of critical voices.

We welcome Emin Huseynov's safe departure from Azerbaijan on 13 June. We call for the immediate and unconditional release of journalists, human rights defenders, and activists wrongfully imprisoned on politically motivated charges, including human rights lawyer Intigam Aliyev, head of an election monitoring group Anar Mammadli, political activist Ilgar Mammadov, veteran activist Leyla Yunus, her husband Arif Yunus, founder of the "Sport for Rights" campaign Rasul Jafarov, and journalists Khadija Ismayilova and Rauf Mirgadirov. Several of these urgently need medical care.

It is unfortunate that, while Azerbaijan is investing significant efforts in promoting its image abroad, these efforts are being undermined by its actions at home. We call on 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.

We call on Azerbaijan to cooperate fully in the field of human rights with the international community, including the United Nations and relevant regional organisations, such as the Council of Europe and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). We note that Azerbaijan has issued a standing invitation to the special procedures mandate holders of this Council, and that several visits have been agreed to in principle. We urge Azerbaijan to facilitate such visits. We note with satisfaction that the Subcommittee on the Prevention of Torture was able to resume and complete in April the visit which it had suspended last year due to lack of official cooperation. As a member of the Council of Europe and a party to the European Convention on Human Rights, Azerbaijan is bound to abide by judgments of the European Court of Human Rights, and we urge it to do so in all cases. We regret that Azerbaijan has procured in 2014 a dramatic reduction in the size and mandate of the OSCE field presence in the country, and has recently decided to close it down completely. We consider this decision short-sighted, and request Azerbaijan to reconsider it.

We also call on Azerbaijan to extend a timely invitation to the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the OSCE to observe the November parliamentary election in accordance with its OSCE commitments.

We invite the High Commissioner and the special procedures mandate-holders of this Council to continue to pay attention to the human rights situation in Azerbaijan and to include it in their regular reporting. We for our part will also continue to follow the situation closely.