

Human Rights Watch

Torture, Former Combatants, Political Prisoners, Terror Suspects, & Terrorists

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2012/06/22/azerbaijan-open-letter-regarding-political-prisoners>

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To Members of the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights, Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

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Dear Members of the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights,

We understand that the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights is due to review the findings of the report by the Rapporteur, Christoph Strsser, on follow-up to the issue of political prisoners in Azerbaijan, on Tuesday, June 26. We are a group of organisations which are deeply concerned by the continued imprisonment of people in Azerbaijan for exercising their right to freedom of expression. We believe that Mr Strsser's report could not be more timely, and we urge the Committee to give it the full attention it deserves. Although the Azerbaijani Government denied Mr Strsser access to the country, his report addresses crucial issues of fundamental importance to the Committee's mandate.

We call on the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) and the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights to urge the immediate and unconditional release of those who have been imprisoned solely for peacefully exercising their freedom of expression and to ensure that those imprisoned on politically motivated charges are released or given a fair trial.

We are concerned that Azerbaijan, despite its obligations as a member state of the Council of Europe and a state party to the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (ECHR), has consistently failed to comply with its obligations to respect the rights to liberty, fair trial, freedom of expression and assembly.

We are particularly concerned about the continued harassment and imprisonment of those who voice opinions which criticise the authorities, including:

We call on you as a member of this Committee to:

On 26 June, the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights should ensure a substantive discussion and continuation of the Assembly's work to secure the release and fair trial of all those who are illegally detained in Azerbaijan. Too many excuses and dilatory measures have hindered the Assembly's work on this issue to date. Hanging in the balance are those who are being denied their rights to liberty, fair trial and freedom of expression.

As a member of an Assembly which represents the people of Europe and has proved principled in addressing serious human rights violations, you have every reason to be part of the much needed solution for Azerbaijan's political prisoners.

Yours faithfully,

Nicolas Beger, Director, European Institutions Office, Amnesty International

Courtney C. Radsch, Senior Manager, Freedom House

Maran Turner, Executive Director, Freedom Now

Maria Dahle, Executive Director, Human Rights House Foundation

Hugh Williamson, Europe and Central Asia Director, Human Rights Watch

Kirsty Hughes, CEO of Index on Censorship

Cc:

President of the Parliamentary Assembly

Secretary General of the Council of Europe

Commissioner for Human Rights

Chair of the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights

Rapporteur on Political Prisoners in Azerbaijan

Co-rapporteurs of the Monitoring Committee on Azerbaijan

Permanent Representations to the Council of Europe

Possession of Extremist Material in Kyrgyzstan

Censorship and Freedom of the Media in Uzbekistan

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