

# **Organization for Defending Victims of Violence (ODVV)**

## **UPR Submission**

**30th session of UPR Working Group (May 2018)**

**Azerbaijan**



**[www.odvv.org](http://www.odvv.org)**

## **About ODVV**

1. The Organization for Defending Victims of Violence (ODVV) is a non-governmental, non-profit, non-partisan organization in Special Consultative Status to ECOSOC. ODVV was established in 1988 in Tehran and has been active in the field of human rights and humanitarian activities.
  2. ODVV is also associated to the United Nations Department of Public Information (UNDP), a participatory of the NGOs Coalition for an International Court (based in New York), and national coordinator of the Global March Against Child Labor (based in New Delhi). ODVV has cooperated with international organizations in a variety of issues and has working relations with many NGOs in Iran and around the globe.
  3. ODVV is also a member of the International Organization against Small and Light Weapons, the UN Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations (CONGO), the International Movement for a Just World (JUST), AMAN Network of Rehabilitation Centers in the Middle East and North Africa and International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims (IRCT).
  4. During the last 2 decades, we have done so many activities, mainly informative with regard to human rights and support of the victims of violence. Various human rights education courses, workshops, seminars, conferences have been held or co-held by ODVV for various sectors of society: civil society institutions and governmental organizations.
5. Other Activities:
- Participation in UN Commission on Human Rights annual sessions, and the new Human Rights Council sessions in Geneva. Written and oral statements on various items of the agenda are issued by ODVV.
  - Internship for foreign students
  - Publication of different books and booklets on human rights such as Rights of the Child, Racism, Racial Discrimination and Xenophobia. Publication of Defenders Newsletter (English), human rights news and developments bulletin (Farsi), Rights of the Child bulletin (Farsi)
  - Daily electronic human rights newsletter in English and Farsi.
6. As a NGO active in human rights, ODVV has collected documents and data, through published information in news websites, and is providing the following report on the human rights situation of Azerbaijan, with the aim of the improvement of the human rights situation.

### **1) Freedom of Expression**

1. Twenty-three recommendations were given to the Republic of Azerbaijan in the two previous UPR cycles, but the country continues to violate freedom of expression and the press. All the media are under government control and independent journalists are threatened with physical violence and intimidation. On 20 April, government officials started a criminal

investigation against the Azeri language broadcaster Meydan TV on charges of illegal activities, tax dodging and abuse of position and 15 journalists who were mostly reporting from outside Azerbaijan were investigated and barred from leaving the country until the end of the investigations.<sup>1</sup> Also 2 Afghan journalists who were reporting on social issues were attacked by unknown assailants and were arrested after a while.<sup>2</sup>

## **2) Freedom of Association and Assembly**

2. The freedom of association and assembly is cracked down by the police and government forces. In the demonstrations that took place in January 2017, the police took steps to disturb the crowd and arrested political activists.<sup>3</sup> Also, there are heavy restrictions on NGOs that in practice there are no space for social participation of independent groups, and the bank accounts of NGOs that are active in human rights have been blocked. Even the new amendments to the Constitution, gives the government more power to restrict these rights.<sup>4</sup> In the two previous UPR cycles 26 recommendations were given to Azerbaijan on Freedom of Association and Assembly.

## **3) Torture and Ill Treatment**

3. Officials and authorities commit acts of torture and ill treatment without being investigated or prosecuted. Some human rights activists have been abused and ill-treated. For example in August, police arrested Elgiz Gahraman, member of an opposition youth movement, and held him incommunicado for six days. Gahraman told his lawyer that police beat and threatened him with sexual humiliation to force him to confess to false drug possession charges.<sup>5</sup>

4. Also, members of the Islamic Unity Movement have been subjected to abuse and inhuman mistreatment or behavior. They had been arrested during clashes with government security forces in the village of Nardaran in 2015.<sup>6</sup> This is while, Azerbaijan received 16 recommendations on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment in the two previous UPR cycles. The country also received 7 recommendations on Freedom of religion and belief.

## **Recommendations**

5. Azerbaijan should stop criminalization of human rights defenders and journalists for peaceful and legitimate activities and release all detained defenders.
6. Ensure that Azerbaijani media regulations uphold diversity among media outlets.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2017/country-chapters/azerbaijan>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/europe-and-central-asia/azerbaijan/report-azerbaijan/>

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2017/country-chapters/azerbaijan>

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/europe-and-central-asia/azerbaijan/report-azerbaijan/>

7. To fulfill its international obligations, Azerbaijan must end the crackdown on public associations, ensuring that they can operate freely and without fear of retribution for their legitimate activities.
8. Revise the Law on non-governmental organizations to comply fully with international human rights law.
9. Azerbaijan should take all possible measures to eliminate torture and inhuman treatment with its citizens, specifically human rights defenders and members of religious groups.