

To Permanent Representatives of all member states
to the Council of Europe

Brussels, 6 May 2014

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



EUROPEAN INSTITUTIONS OFFICE

Ref: B1577

Dear Ambassadors,

HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN AZERBAIJAN AHEAD OF ITS CHAIRMANSHIP OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE'S COMMITTEE OF MINISTERS

As Azerbaijan assumes the Chairmanship of the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers on 14 May 2014, Amnesty International would like to draw your attention to our report "[Behind bars: Silencing dissent in Azerbaijan](#)", published today (enclosed). It records an increased clampdown on freedom of expression, assembly, and association following the 9 October 2013 elections.

It is particularly alarming that Azerbaijan's human rights record has significantly deteriorated during this short period of time. The report documents how harassment, beatings, and unfair trials, detention and imprisonment are routinely used in Azerbaijan to control and curb on voices of opposition parties, independent media outlets, and any other individuals critical of the government.

There are at least 19 prisoners of conscience currently behind bars in Azerbaijan for no other reason than peacefully expressing their views. This figure includes eight representatives from the "NIDA" youth movement who have been sentenced today to between six and eight years in prison. It also includes politicians, journalists, civil society activists and bloggers known for expressing critical views in social media. Please find more details on the criminal prosecution of these individuals and other recent cases of persecution of civil society activists in the report.

The Azerbaijani authorities must begin to respect the rights to freedom of association, assembly and expression, including by immediately and unconditionally releasing the individuals they have incarcerated for the peaceful exercise of these rights. We took note of the 2014-2016 Action Plan for Azerbaijan which is, in itself, welcome. It has however not been announced or made public and no provision has been made for any public reporting on its implementation or its impact on the respect for human rights in Azerbaijan, none of which inspires confidence that Azerbaijan's worsening human rights record is being tackled with the necessary firmness.

The important role that Azerbaijan is about to assume comes with significant responsibilities to lead the Council of Europe's work for the defence and promotion of human rights across the continent. It is a role which must, inevitably, expose its bearer to greater scrutiny of its human rights record. We therefore urge the Committee of Ministers to give this matter its critical attention and:

- Urge the Azerbaijani authorities to immediately and unconditionally release all 19 prisoners of conscience in Azerbaijan
- Urge the Azerbaijani authorities to fully respect and protect the right to freedom of expression, association and assembly, as guaranteed under Article 10 and 11 of the European Convention on Human Rights and ensure that everyone can peacefully enjoy these rights
- Make the 2014-2016 Action Plan for Azerbaijan public
- Ensure that the implementation of the Action Plan is effectively monitored and publicly reported on

We thank you for your attention and remain at your disposal for any further information.

Yours sincerely,

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