



24th session of the
Human Rights Council
Item 6

Consideration of UPR reports: Azerbaijan
Delivered by Renate Bloem

Thank you. Mr President,

This is a joint statement by CIVICUS and the Center for National and International Studies, a human rights group based in Baku.

We welcome Azerbaijan's examination under the UPR as an essential opportunity to address pressing human rights concerns in the country, but regret having received the addendum only today. We are pleased to learn about the intention to invite several Special Rapporteurs to the country.

However, despite the Government's denial, CSOs in Azerbaijan are facing a number of unwarranted restrictions greatly imperilling freedoms of association in the country. At least nine States called on Azerbaijan to remove legislative and practical obstacles for the registration, funding and work of NGOs in Azerbaijan. However, in stark contrast to these recommendations, on 15 February 2013, the Azeri Parliament approved far-reaching amendments to *the Law on Non-Governmental Organisations, the Law on Grants, and the Code on Administrative Offences. Of principal concern are provisions found within the amendments which unduly curtail the independence of international and national CSOs by requiring them to reveal the identities of their benefactors.*

We also remain gravely concerned about reports of continued intimidation and harassment of independent media outlets, journalists and netizens in the country following Azerbaijan's examination during the 16th Session of the UPR. Amendments to the defamation law approved in May 2013, which extend criminal defamation to include Internet speech, run contrary to a number of recommendations made by the governments of Austria, Canada, Norway and the Netherlands. Most recently, in August 2013, Mikail Talybov was sentenced to 1 year of "corrective labour" for posting comments on Facebook critical of Access Bank. In line with a number recommendations made to Azerbaijan during its examination, we call on the government to reform its defamation legislation in conformity with article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Right and put an immediate end to the practice of detaining individuals engaging in the exercise of their legal civil and political rights to freedom of expression.

Thank you for your attention.