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HRW – Human Rights Watch

(Author)

Brutal Police Raid on LGBT-friendly Venue in Azerbaijan

Detainees Report Abuse, Humiliation, Extortion

Last month, Azerbaijani police raided a venue in the capital Baku, known as a safe space for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people, and detained over 100 people. According to witnesses and independent media, those detained were abused by police who made it seem like the operation was to target sexual and gender minorities rather than routine law-enforcement.

According to a witness Human Rights Watch spoke with, police arrived shortly after midnight, confiscated patrons' mobile phones, demanded passwords and searched through private photos and videos without warrants. Officers took [at least](#) 106 people to the Nasimi District Police Department, then forced them to stand outdoors in a freezing courtyard for up to five hours without adequate clothing, food, or water. The witness told us police provided only a single bottle of water for the entire group.

There were other reports of physical and psychological abuse. One person sustained a broken tooth allegedly due to use of force by police, while others said they were denied access to toilets for hours. Officers also reportedly verbally abused a woman experiencing an epileptic seizure rather than promptly assist her.

At the station, police reportedly took biometric data, including fingerprints—typically reserved for criminal suspects—without offering any legal grounds, and subjected detainees to forced drug testing and humiliating questioning about their sexual orientation and private lives.

Authorities only released the detainees after forcing them to pay on the spot “fines” for “petty hooliganism” ranging from 30 to 150 Azerbaijani manats (approximately US\$17-88).

The raid echoes the mass arrests, [documented](#) by Human Rights Watch, which took place in Baku in 2017 that involved arbitrary detention, torture, and extortion. In 2024, the European Court of Human Rights [found](#) Azerbaijan had violated the prohibition on torture and discrimination in executing the arrests, but while the authorities paid victims compensation, no one was held to account.

Weeks later the Interior Ministry has yet to comment on the raid. A police-affiliated social media account [posted](#) a video that appeared to include images taken from confiscated phones, stating that the operation followed residents’ complaints about “unethical” behavior and neighborhood disruption.

Azerbaijani authorities should promptly and impartially investigate allegations of abuse and extortion, return confiscated property, and ensure protection from discrimination and abuse for everyone, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity.

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