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AZERBAIJAN

BIAS-MOTIVATED SPEECH

Hate speech remained a serious issue, in the media, and by political and religious figures. QueerRadar's 2021 hate speech monitoring report found that of the 501 media pieces analysed, almost two-thirds were hateful or biased against LGBTIQ+ people. One cleric called trans people "cursed by God" and said killing those in same-sex relations is justified. MP Javid Osmanov said in an interview that "LGBT people and feminists should be isolated" as they only bring "bad habits" to society. Osmanov also stated that the goal of feminists was to disrupt Azerbaijani society and that LGBT activists were backed by "Western circles". MP Eldar Guliyev from the ruling party stated that LGBT people should be expelled from the country. He added "a man is a man, a woman is a woman, that is it - if they [LGBTI+s] are sick, let them get treatment."

In May, MP Tahir Karimli, who had previously called LGBTI+s "waste", stated his opposition to the Istanbul Convention arguing that "our traditions deny faggots" and that they should be "persecuted and isolated".

On 28 October, MP Tahir Karimli said to local media that 'LGBT propaganda' should also be banned in Azerbaijan.

BIAS-MOTIVATED VIOLENCE

Hate crimes against the LGBTIQ+ community continued to be a serious issue. One of the most prominent LGBTIQ+ activists in the country, Avaz Hafizli, was brutally mutilated and murdered by his cousin in February. The police, who previously ignored Hafizli's requests for protection, wrapped the body in a rug and transported him in a garbage truck.

"LGBTQ people are of no importance to Azerbaijani law. They are not considered human beings, and neither the prosecutor's office, nor the State Security Service, nor any other body wants to move a finger to prevent mass killings". - Activist Gulnara Mehdiyeva quoted on the Advocate

Avaz's murder came in the wake of Instagram posts last year by Azerbaijani social media influencer, Sevinj Huseynova, who called for the physical "removal" of sexual minorities and trans people in a video that was watched by thousands.

In August, the court sentenced the perpetrator to nine and a half years in prison but ignored the homophobic motif and the brutality of the murder. LGBTIQ+ activists and journalists were barred from entering the courtroom. Civil society has firmly criticised the meagre judgment, which could have given twice as many years to the killer.

Another human rights activist, Bakhtiyar Hajiyevev was kidnapped by masked men and tortured. A man on the metro in Baku threatened to kill LGBT people with a hammer. On 2 September, two gay men were attacked in Ganja. The perpetrators brutally beat the men and wanted to throw them off a bridge, saying "we don't want people like you here".

On 13 April, a gay man jumped out of his apartment window in Baku and was hospitalised in a serious condition.

A 15-year-old was subjected to violence by her family and locked up at home. The teenager was also molested by a cousin. The father bribed the police to cover up the violence.

A trans woman was beaten by her boyfriend in Sumgait and on a different occasion by another man. The police refused to investigate either case. On 7 September, a trans woman Emily Hajizade was attacked in Baku Boulevard by the park's security guards. Emily was also abused by her family, who threatened to kill her. Also in September, a trans woman was stabbed several times in Baku's Narimanov park. She was previously detained and her head was forcibly shaved by the police. The police denied the murder and said they merely detained her. Activists and her family have been unable to find her since.

A 16-year-old teenager suffered police violence and verbal abuse in September after sharing a TikTok video showing him dyeing his hair blue.

BODILY INTEGRITY

A 17-year-old was repeatedly subjected to physical and sexual abuse and was locked up at home by his family. In 2019, he was forced to undergo so-called 'conversion therapy' for seven months in a hospital,

where he also suffered sexual violence. The ‘therapy’ was paid for by the family.

EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION

In January, the PACE adopted a resolution on ‘Alleged violations of the rights of LGBTI people in the Southern Caucasus’, including Azerbaijan. The resolution calls on Azerbaijan to adopt legislation and policies that safeguard against discrimination on the basis of SOGIESC, to sanction hate crimes and hate speech against LGBTI people, to introduce legal gender recognition procedures on the basis of self-determination, to provide comprehensive sex education in schools, to address the wrongful arrest of LGBTI people and prevent and combat police violence, among others.

FOREIGN POLICY

On 4 November, Turkey and Azerbaijan signed the protocol on the ‘Action Plan on Cooperation in the field of policy on family, women and children’, which sets out joint activities to strengthen ‘family values’.

FREEDOM FROM TORTURE, CRUEL, INHUMAN OR DEGRADING TREATMENT

In August, two trans women were detained by the police in Baku and held for ten days. The police forcibly shaved the hair of one of the women.

FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY

On 8 March, feminist and queer activists held a Women’s Day rally, demanding that the government ensure equal rights for all without discrimination on grounds of SOGI, investigate femicides, bring perpetrators to justice, take effective measures to prevent violence and femicides, and ratify the Istanbul Convention. The police ordered a participant to remove his rainbow face mask and confiscated a rainbow and a trans flag.

On 14 May, activists, journalists and civil society representatives held a march condemning the increase in violence against journalists, political and human rights activists, and impunity. Pro-government media reporting focused on LGBTI+ flags at the protest, distracting the public from the rally’s message.

Three LGBTQ+ and feminist activists held the country’s first Pride event on 9 June, in the form of a press briefing. This is the second time in the past ten years that LGBTQ+ activists have directly engaging with the media in this way. The three activists said they would try to organise similar events in the future, to commemorate Pride month every year.

FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION

On 6 November, activists launched the Queerdian initiative to challenge the current socio-political underrepresentation of LGBTIQ+ citizens and address all forms of oppression.

HEALTH

The rate of HIV infections increased among men who have sex with men and trans people over the past year.

HOUSING

Civil society reported that trans people faced evictions again this year.

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

In May, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) initiated a resolution on threats to journalists and human rights defenders in Azerbaijan.

On 8 October, Minority Azerbaijan was targeted by an unsuccessful hacking attempt.

PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC, CULTURAL AND POLITICAL LIFE

On the occasion of IDAHOBIT in May, Minority Azerbaijan screened the movie *The Sun on My Body*, directed by an Azeri trans woman.

Nafas LGBTI Azerbaijan held filmmaking workshops as part of its Queer Art Festival. The short films were screened by the Festival in October.

A and 24 others, narrating the 2017 mass arrests against LGBTI+ people, was featured at the Sevil International Women’s Documentary Film Festival.

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