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Head of state: **Ilham Aliyev**

Head of government: **Artur Rasizade**

The government continued to intimidate and imprison people and groups who criticized the government. Peaceful protests in the centre of the city were banned and dispersed by the police with excessive use of force. Torture, especially in police custody, was frequently reported.

Prisoners of conscience

Four prisoners of conscience were released on 26 December by presidential pardon: activists Vidadi Iskandarov and Shahin Hasanli, arrested in connection with the 2011 protests; and Taleh Khasmammadov and Anar Bayramli, both convicted on fabricated charges in 2012. Human rights defender Taleh Khasmammadov was sentenced to four years' imprisonment for allegedly attacking police officers in a police station shortly after he had published several articles implicating the involvement of local police in organized criminal activities. Anar Bayramli, a journalist working for the Azeri language and Iranian-sponsored television station Sahar, was arrested on 17 February for drugs possession, shortly after relations between Azerbaijan and Iran deteriorated.

Freedom of expression

The government targeted human rights defenders and journalists for their work and subjected them to intimidation, harassment and arrest. The authorities used arrests and spurious charges to clamp down on activities and protests at the time of the Eurovision song contest in the capital Baku in May.

- On 7 March, Khadija Ismayilova, a well-known investigative journalist with Radio Free Europe (Azadliq Radosu), received a threatening letter containing intimate photos of her, after her apartment was broken into and a hidden camera installed in her room. The letter threatened to "shame" her if she did not abandon her work. After Khadija Ismayilova publicly exposed the blackmail attempt, a video showing her in an intimate relationship was published on the internet.
- On 8 April, Ogtay Gulaliyev, a human rights defender with the Kur Civil Society Organization working

on environmental issues was arrested on charges of hooliganism and "inciting violence". He was released on bail on 13 June and by the end of the year his trial had not begun, although the charges against him remained, carrying a sentence of three years' imprisonment. On 8 June Ilham Amiraslanov, another human rights activist with the Kur Civil Society Organization, was arrested on charges of illegal possession of a gun and ammunition, which he maintained were planted on him. On 12 September, he was sentenced to two years in prison after an unfair trial. Both Ogtay Gulaliyev and Ilham Amiraslanov had been helping flood victims and were vocal against the cases of aid embezzlement by the local authorities. Ilham Amiraslanov's arrest came a few days after he met with the Minister of Emergency Situations regarding the problems of the flood victims.

- On 18 April, several journalists were violently assaulted when they tried to film illegal house demolitions on the outskirts of Baku. Among them, journalist Idrak Abbasov was beaten unconscious by police and state employees.
- On 13 June, trumped-up charges of hooliganism were brought against pro-democracy activist Mehman Huseynov apparently in retaliation for his journalism and campaigning activities before the Eurovision song contest. He was later released from pre-trial detention, but remained under investigation.
- On 21 June, Hilal Mamedov, editor of a minority language newspaper *Tolyshi sado* (The Voice of Talysh), was arrested on spurious drugs charges. The next day a Baku city court ordered him to spend three months in pre-trial detention. On 3 July, additional charges of treason and inciting religious and national hatred were also brought against him. The case did not reach court before the end of the year.
- On 29 September, Zaur Gurbanli, pro-democracy campaign activist and chair of the opposition youth movement *Nida*, was imprisoned for 15 days after he posted an article criticizing the government for nepotism and a poem by the daughter of President Aliyev being mandatory reading in the school curriculum.

Freedom of association

NGOs working on human rights and democracy issues faced pressure and harassment and found it difficult to hold meetings or operate freely, especially outside Baku.

- On 7 February, Democracy Development Resource Centre, an NGO operating in Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic, and the Institute for Reporters' Freedom and Safety received a letter from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which warned them against "spreading inflammatory information" through their websites *Nakhchivan Human Rights and Media Monitor*.
- Aftandil Mammadov, co-ordinator of the Guba branch of Election Monitoring and Democracy Studies Centre, reported being summoned to the local police station on 27 July and again on 27 August, and warned against organizing any activities without the knowledge and permission of the local police. He previously reported being persistently followed by the police and prevented from holding group meetings.
- The Baku branch of the Human Rights House, an international NGO, remained closed after authorities forcibly shut down the organization on 7 March 2011 on the grounds that they had failed to comply with registration requirements.

Freedom of assembly

Public protests continued to be banned in the centre of Baku. In November, amendments to the Criminal Code increased the maximum punishment for those organizing and participating in "unauthorized" or "banned" protests. The new sentence could be up to three years in prison and a fine of US\$10,000.

Peaceful assemblies were regularly dispersed with excessive force by police and those who attempted to take part in peaceful rallies faced harassment, beatings and arrest.

- In March and April, police violently broke up several peaceful protests by youth groups and opposition activists, beating and arresting participants. The youth groups had applied for but had been denied permission to hold a peaceful rally in areas officially designated for demonstrations.
- On 20 October, police dispersed a peaceful rally of approximately 200 people. The protest called for the dissolution of parliament in response to video recordings published online which revealed the extent of political corruption and bribery in parliament. Over 100 people were arrested at the protest and 13 leading activists were jailed for periods ranging from seven to 10 days, on charges of "disobeying police orders" and for attending an "illegal protest".
- On 17 November Dayanat Babayev, a former prisoner of conscience, was arrested for taking part in a protest in the centre of Baku that called for the President's resignation and the dissolution of parliament. He was sentenced to seven days of administrative detention for allegedly disobeying police. On 24 November, when his administrative detention expired, new criminal charges of hooliganism were brought against him and he was re-arrested as a suspect in a criminal case. On 26 November, the Nasimi district court released Dayanat Babayev, but the charges against him have not been dropped.

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