



October 19, 2018

The Hon. John R. Bolton
National Security Advisor of the United States
National Security Council
Eisenhower Executive Office Building
Washington, DC 20504

Re: Human Rights Violations in Azerbaijan

Dear National Security Advisor Bolton:

We are writing regarding your upcoming trip to Azerbaijan. We urge you to address Azerbaijan's human rights record in your discussions with senior officials.

According to the 2017 State Department ("DOS") Azerbaijan Human Rights [report](#), "[t]he most significant human rights issues included unlawful or arbitrary killing; torture; harsh and sometimes life-threatening prison conditions; arbitrary arrest; lack of judicial independence; political prisoners; criminalization of libel; physical attacks on journalists, arbitrary interference with privacy; interference in the freedoms of expression, assembly, and association through intimidation, incarceration on questionable charges, and harsh physical abuse of selected activists, journalists, and secular and religious opposition figures, and blocking of websites; restrictions on freedom of movement for a growing number of journalists and activists; severe restrictions on political participation; and systemic government corruption; and police detention and torture, of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) individuals; and worst forms of child labor, which the government made minimal efforts to eliminate."

In addition, [Amnesty International](#) has documented how Azerbaijani authorities routinely violate freedom of expression and jail critics. The government controls all major media outlets and has used a combination of legislation and outright violence to intimidate human rights defenders. Individuals detained by Azerbaijani authorities face unfair trials and are prevented from mounting a fair defense. Some of detainees have died in custody.

We have seen how this administration's pressure on Azerbaijan can yield positive human rights outcomes. When the Azerbaijan government ordered the arrest of journalist Mehman Aliyev in 2017, [the DOS strongly condemned the arrest](#). Azerbaijani authorities subsequently moved Mr. Aliyev to house arrest and later dropped all charges against him.

We recommend that you raise the following human rights issues in your discussions with senior Azerbaijani officials:

- Call for the immediate and unconditional release of Afgan Mukhtarli: In May 2017 Mr. Mukhtarli, an Azerbaijani investigative journalist, [vanished from Tbilisi](#), Georgia and later reappeared in custody in Azerbaijan. He reports that he was abducted by plain-clothed security services who tied him up and transported him across the border to Azerbaijan. In January 2018 he was sentenced to a six-year term in prison. According to [recent media reports](#), Mr. Mukhtarli was placed in a "punishment cell" and left outside in the rain in retaliation for visiting a medical unit to seek treatment without permission. Amnesty International has recognized Mukhtarli as a "[prisoner of conscience](#)" and is campaigning for his release.
- Press for reinstatement of disbarred Azerbaijani Human Rights Lawyers: Human rights lawyers in Azerbaijan are subject to routine harassment and disbarment. In a December 2017 amendment to the Code of Civil and Administrative Procedure, the Azerbaijan government [barred human rights attorneys](#) from attending court proceedings unless they are members of the Bar Association of Azerbaijan. The Bar Association of Azerbaijan has limited the bar to [only 934 attorneys](#), most of whom refuse to take on politically sensitive cases. Consequently the Bar Association has few, if any, human rights lawyers. In practice, these measures all but guarantee that accused persons cannot obtain a fair trial. We urge you to press Azerbaijan to repeal the amendment and to immediately reinstate those attorneys who have been disbarred for defending human rights activists.
- Request a resumption of the Democracy and Human Rights Dialogue: The dialogue, [initiated in 2006](#), aimed to increase Azerbaijan's respect for human rights. The meetings continued over time until they were ended [at Baku's request](#) under the Obama administration. Resuming a robust government-to-government human

rights dialogue is an essential step in encouraging the Azerbaijani government to address the deteriorating human rights situation.

Thank you for your consideration. Please do not hesitate to contact Daniel Balson, Eurasia advocacy Director at (202) 509-8132.

Sincerely,



Joanne Lin
National Director, Advocacy and Government Affairs
Amnesty International USA



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