



**55th session of the United Nations Human Rights Council  
Agenda Item 6: UPR Outcomes: Azerbaijan**

25 March 2024

**Oral Statement**

Mr President,

Although Lawyers for Lawyers welcomes the decision of Azerbaijan to accept<sup>i</sup> recommendations on the training and qualification of lawyers made at its 4<sup>th</sup> UPR, we continue to be alarmed at the human rights situation in Azerbaijan and regret that Azerbaijan refrained<sup>ii</sup> from accepting any recommendations pertaining to the rights of lawyers.

Access to legal services provided by an independent legal profession is fundamental to the rule of law and an effectively functioning justice system. Lawyers must be able to work independently without fear of harassment, intimidation, or improper interference.

In Azerbaijan, lawyers working on sensitive cases are subjected to attempts by investigative authorities to harass and disrupt their work. Lawyers face threats, intimidation, and (physical) attacks in connection with their legitimate work. In addition, some lawyers are subjected to criminal or disciplinary proceedings related to their professional legal duties, often based on vague or unsupported claims, which result in disbarment or imprisonment. The unlawful use of surveillance software to target lawyers and other human rights defenders also remains of great concern and violates lawyer-client confidentiality as well as other human rights such as the right to privacy and the right to a fair trial.

We are further concerned about persistent reports that the Azerbaijan Bar Association does not operate as an independent self-governing institution and actually plays a role in undermining the work of lawyers defending human rights. Constituent bodies of the Bar Association are under the direct influence of the executive branch and appear to have insufficient leeway to carry out their functions in an independent manner.

We call on Azerbaijan to support instead of only note<sup>iii</sup> the recommendations on the need for effective, prompt, and independent investigations in all cases of harassment and violence against lawyers to hold perpetrators to account, and the need to bring the Lawyer's Code of Conduct in line with international human rights law, and we urge Azerbaijan to reconsider and accept all other recommendations pertaining to the rights of lawyers.

Thank you.

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<sup>i</sup> Addendum to the Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review of Azerbaijan, 6 March 2024, A/HRC/55/15/Add.1.

*Supported recommendations:*

44.32 Continue the training of judges, lawyers and police officers on legal instruments for promoting human rights (Mali);

44.112 Continue relevant reforms aimed at increasing the number of qualified lawyers in the country (Cameroon).

<sup>ii</sup> Addendum to the Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review of Azerbaijan, 6 March 2024, A/HRC/55/15/Add.1.

*Rejected recommendations:*

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44.123 End all politically motivated legal proceedings against government critics and independent civil society actors, including journalists, human rights defenders, and lawyers (Sweden);  
44.136 Immediately release all persons incarcerated for exercising their human rights and remove undue restrictions on NGOs, media outlets, political parties, religious activists, and lawyers (United States of America);  
44.156 End the practice of illegal covert surveillance, including through the use of Pegasus and similar spywares against journalists, activists, lawyers, government opponents and human rights defenders (Costa Rica).

<sup>iii</sup> Addendum to the Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review of Azerbaijan, 6 March 2024, A/HRC/55/15/Add.1.

*Noted recommendations:*

44.113 Ensure that provisions of the Lawyers' Code of Conduct that interfere with lawyers' right to freedom of expression and other human rights are amended to adhere to international standards (Norway);  
44.148 Ensure effective, prompt and independent investigations of all cases of harassment and violence against civil society organizations, lawyers, journalists, human rights defenders or activists, and bring perpetrators to justice (Uruguay).