



Gender Resource Center

Statement by Ayna Initiative Group: UPR Pre-Session on Azerbaijan Geneva, 29 August 2023

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I represent Aйна Initiative Group. This statement is delivered on behalf of a national coalition of independent civil society organizations combating gender-based violence in Azerbaijan: Aйна, Fem-utopia, Femicide Azerbaijan Platform, For Woman, Gender Resource Center and Nafas LGBTI Azerbaijan Alliance

None of these organisations were able to participate in the national consultations, and if there were any such consultations held, information about them has not been publicly shared. We have no knowledge of such consultations taking place.

Our statement focuses on gender-based violence.

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Azerbaijan received 18 recommendations on gender-based violence:

- 7 recommendations to combat violence against women
- 5 to ratify the Istanbul Convention
- 3 on legal reforms and a National Action Plan
- 3 on raising awareness and strengthening responses.

Key achievements include:

- Adoption of the National Action Plan to Combat Domestic Violence for 2020-2023.
- Establishment of a new state-funded shelter in 2020.
- Conducting training sessions for several judges, lawyers, and other legal professionals.

However, significant challenges are:

- The Istanbul Convention has not yet been ratified.
- And the two challenges on which I will focus in my statement: A lack of support services for survivors of gender-based violence (GBV) and cyber-attacks against feminist activists.

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Issue I. Lack of Support Services for GBV Survivors

Currently only 175 survivors of domestic violence can be sheltered at one time, which is inadequate number considering the population of 10 million. This is ten times less than international standard. In average only registered domestic violence crimes are 1300 per year. The difference between the reported crimes each year and the capacity of available shelters is clear.

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The shelters are located only in two major cities (Baku and Ganja). Survivors sometimes have to travel around 300 km to reach a shelter.

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Shelters in Azerbaijan are divided by gender, designed mainly for women and children. Transgender and gender-diverse individuals encounter difficulties in accessing shelter services. In many instances, these shelters reject their admission. Even if they are admitted, they often have to leave due to discrimination.

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Survivors of rape and sexual assault require access to healthcare, testing, and treatment for infections, as well as access to emergency contraception. They also need counseling and mental health support, legal assistance. Unfortunately, such specialized rape centres are not available in Azerbaijan.

Also, forensic testing centres are not operational 24/7. For example, during periods like the spring holidays which can last for up to 9 days, forensic examination becomes inaccessible. This makes it challenging, and sometimes even impossible, to gather evidence needed and prosecute perpetrators of sexual violence.

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Our recommendations for the first issue are:

- Increase the number of shelters for survivors of gender-based violence countrywide to meet international standards and ensure their inclusivity, particularly for vulnerable populations like LGBTQ+ individuals.
- Ensure the establishment of specialized rape crisis centres and provide 24/7 forensic testing for victims of sexual assault and rape.

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The second issue concerns:

- Cyber Attacks against Feminist Activists since the start of the Feminist Movement in Azerbaijan in 2019. Instagram and Facebook pages advocating feminism and LGBTQ+ activism were hacked and deleted.
- Their personal communications, private photos, and audio recordings were shared via social media. Between 2020 and 2021, there were 15 cases involving smear campaigns, hacking, and blackmail against feminist activists. In 2022, attempts to hack accounts and install spyware were recorded, affecting various human rights defenders and activists, including feminist activists. As a result they were targeted with slut-shaming and online harassment.
- Despite official complaints, none of the cases were resolved or redressed.

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Our recommendation regarding the last second issue is:

- Launch an investigation and ensure accountability for those responsible for cyber- attacks and online harassment against feminist activists.

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Thank you!