

**APRIL-
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**A quarterly
summary of the
human rights
situation in
Azerbaijan**



A quarterly summary of the human rights situation in Azerbaijan – April-June 2019

The Election Monitoring and Democracy Studies Centre (EMDS) presents a quarterly Factfinder based on information gathered from alternative and open sources of human rights in Azerbaijan.

EMDS is a non-governmental organization promoting human rights and democratic institutions in Azerbaijan.

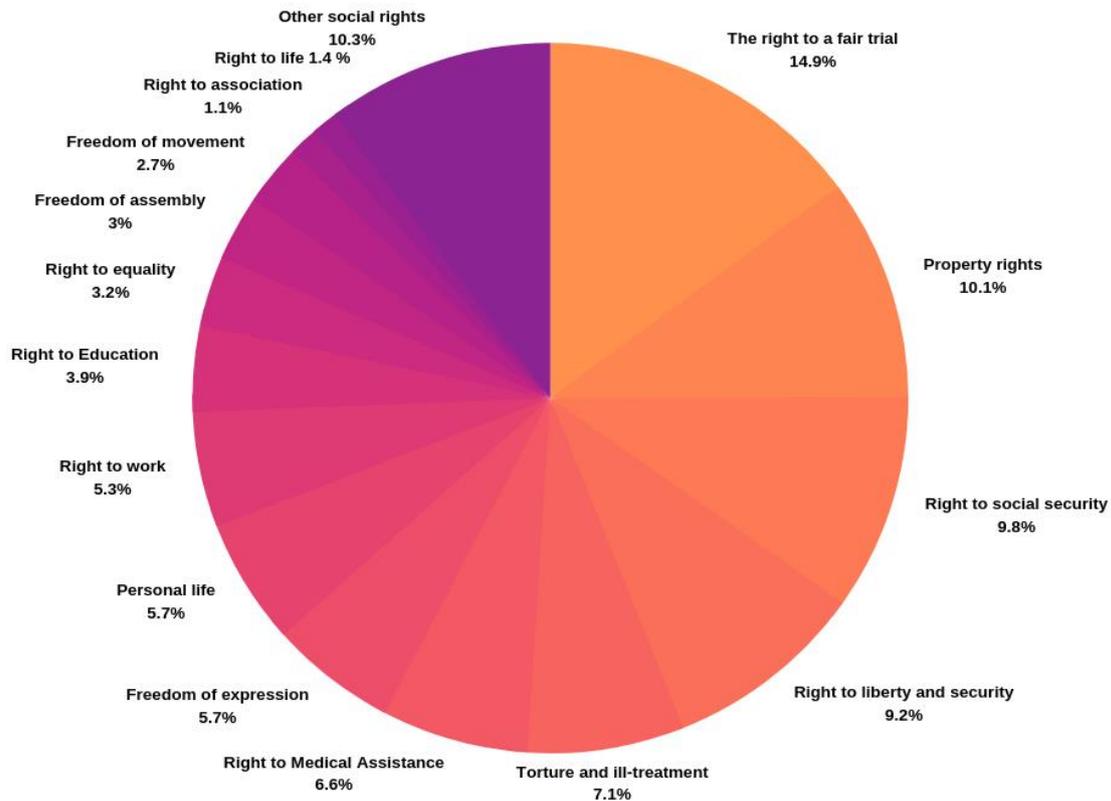
Quarterly Human Rights Report

Complaints and observations happened in the second quarter of 2019 have shown that no significant step has been taken to ensure that human rights and freedoms are respected. The measures taken were superfluous and did not contribute to the elimination of human rights violations. The problem of political prisoners remains unresolved in the country. At present, 81 political prisoners in the country have been registered by the Working Group on Political Prisoners. Independent media were still under pressure and continued to be banned from accessing independent news sites in previous years. The travel ban that imposed on 13 journalists and writers collaborating with the Meydan TV has been removed.

Among the complaints received from the regions and the observed violations, there were administrative arbitrariness in using the authority, the unfair verdicts made by the courts, the persecution of political activists and the discrimination. Complaints about economic and social rights violations include more breakthroughs in gas, electricity and water supply, barriers to low-income families to targeted state social assistance, lack of adequate medical care, and in many places, especially in the regions sewerage systems are not working, hence anti-sanitary the creation of conditions, the failure of state bodies to take action on this issue and other similar issues.

EMDS recorded 437 human rights violations based on 328 facts collected during the second quarter of 2019 as a result of monitoring of human rights cases in the country and checking complaints received from citizens. This figure is higher than the previous quarter. Observations show that, there is an increase in the number of violations of human rights in every quarter compared to previous. For comparison, 428 offenses were registered in the first quarter of 2019 while overall 484 have been recorded in 2018.

EMDS has divided 437 human rights violations, collected in April-June 2019, into 16 categories:



Civil and political rights

Restrictions on civil and political rights in the previous quarters were still common. New restrictions on freedom of assembly in January 2019 continued in the second quarter of the year. Virtually freedom of assembly was banned in the country. The oppositional organizations - the National Council for Democratic Forces and the Karabakh Committee have received a negative response to their application for holding the demonstration at the “Mahsul” stadium near the city centre where opposition has been holding rallies since 2013. There was a decrease in political motivated administrative arrests which was used as one of the basic pressure methods compared to the first quarter of the year.

In this quarter concerns about the problem of political prisoners remain. According to the Working Group on Political Prisoners, there are currently 81 political prisoners in the country. In addition, the Working Group has monitored 54 people whose arrests were supposed to be politically motivated but did not receive necessary documents to consider them as political prisoners.

Compared with the previous quarter, relative improvements were observed in travel ban which was used as a method of pressure against social and political activists. Thus, in the report prepared by the EMDS regarding the persons exposed to political-motivated travel bans, travel ban of the 15 activists including 13 journalists from 31 activists, was lifted. However, during the quarter, more than 4 activists were banned. The number of activists currently who are banned from leaving the country is 20.

Complaints and observations throughout the quarter show that torture and ill-treatment in law enforcement are still widely used as a means of political pressure and confessions. The allegations filed against the law enforcement authorities in relation to ill treatment resulted in favour of law enforcement agencies without any effective investigation.

Economic and social rights

During the quarter, complaints regarding the right to social security prevailed over the economic and social rights violations. Complaints and observations received show that although living standards of many low-income families meet the requirements for targeted social assistance, they are unable to benefit from this because of various reasons, particularly because of wilful decisions of bureaucracy and relevant authorities and their demand to bribe. There were also cases which causes trouble for granting citizens a disability status and a bribe is demanded. Complaints regarding cutting off allowances without a reasonable cause which are given to low-income families and people with disabilities and health status as a social support have been increased during the quarter.

There were also cases regarding demolition of dwellings or other facilities by executive authorities, forced evictions of residents, violation of the principle of fair compensation, the forced labour of citizens in the regions to sell their land, the conclusion of the complaints to courts on the matter in favour of state bodies within Violations of property rights. The complaints regarding material loss in large quantities which farmers faced as a result of acquisition and privatization of their lands used for cattle by farmers for many years continued in the second quarter.

Complaints regarding the right to medical care have increased even more compared to last quarter. Difficulties are mainly due to the inexperience and negligence of physicians in cases of death and maternity death, requiring payment for free medical care, otherwise, refusal to provide services, sale of medicines which should be free of charge to patients or suspension of these drugs without any cause were observed. Complaints regarding inadequate reproductive health services for women living in regions, particularly in rural areas, and in remote areas have been recorded.

Employers were hired without employment contract, salaries of official employees were embezzled by the relevant authorities, wages were deducted under various pretexts. Complaints regarding not paying salaries for months have increased even more compared to the previous quarter. The complainants said they had been protesting about it, but no step to eliminate the problem has been taken. For example, the un-registered worker who worked for the Special Purpose Road Operation Department # 8 of the State Agency of Azerbaijan Automobile Roads, was forced to hold a hunger strike in protest because he did not receive the collected wages. Employees in state-funded organizations also complained about the pressure that employers ask supporting the ruling party on social networks and demanding to like such sharing.

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