



For immediate release – 20 July 2009

**PRESS RELEASE**

**UN: ARTICLE 19 Holds Azerbaijan to Account at the UN Human Rights Committee**

**As the United Nations Human Rights Committee (HRC) today examines the Government of Azerbaijan’s commitment to human rights, ARTICLE 19 urgently calls attention to the ongoing and systematic abuses of the right to freedom of expression in that country.**

Under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (“the Covenant”), States must submit to a periodic review of their implementation of the Covenant’s provisions. Azerbaijan’s third periodic report comes under scrutiny today at the current session of the HRC in Geneva.

ARTICLE 19 believes that the Azerbaijani Government has failed to implement a number of provisions of the Covenant that relate to the rights to freedom of expression and freedom of information. In Azerbaijan, journalists and media workers who voice critical views are often harassed, arbitrarily arrested, attacked and in one case, even killed, while perpetrators of attacks are rarely identified or brought to justice.

In its shadow report submitted to the HRC, ARTICLE 19 details a number of incidents of human rights abuses of journalists and media workers, and draws particular attention to the case of Elmar Huseynov, an opposition journalist murdered in 2005, whose death has never been properly investigated. A climate of impunity for crimes against media workers and human rights defenders pervades Azerbaijan.

ARTICLE 19 also finds that media freedom is deteriorating in Azerbaijan, despite legislative provisions guaranteeing freedom of the press and access to information. The Government uses licensing and regulatory powers to limit the ability of independent broadcasters to operate freely and this year banned a number of international radio stations from broadcasting on national frequencies. In addition, the Government uses criminal defamation laws and other seemingly unrelated criminal charges, such as “hooliganism” to intimidate journalists and silence critical views.

*“ARTICLE 19 calls on the Human Rights Committee to carefully examine and expose the deplorable human rights record of the Government of Azerbaijan, and to ensure that this regime is held accountable for its actions under international law,”* says Dr Agnès Callamard, ARTICLE 19 Executive Director.

This alarming state of affairs becomes particularly relevant today, as the HRC examines Azerbaijan's implementation of the Covenant. ARTICLE 19 urges the Government of Azerbaijan to address its shortcomings by introducing necessary legislative changes, and adopting comprehensive policies and mechanisms to both prevent future violations and remedy those that have already occurred.

**NOTES TO EDITORS:**

- For more information please contact: Nathalie Losekoot, Senior Programme Officer, Europe, at: +44 796 985 6069 or [nathalie@article19.org](mailto:nathalie@article19.org); or Barbora Bukovska, Senior Director for Law, at: +44 207 324 2500 or [barbora@article19.org](mailto:barbora@article19.org).
- The full version of the *Written Comments of ARTICLE 19: Global Campaign for Free Expression Concerning the Republic of Azerbaijan for Consideration by the United Nations Human Rights Committee at its 96<sup>th</sup> Session, 13-31 July 2009* is available at <http://www.article19.org/pdfs/press/written-comments-of-article-19-global-campaign-for-free-expression-concernin.pdf>
- ARTICLE 19 is an independent human rights organisation that works globally to protect and promote the right to freedom of expression. It takes its name from Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which guarantees free speech. For more information on ARTICLE 19 please visit [www.article19.org](http://www.article19.org).