



Art for Democracy Campaign under Attack in Azerbaijan

Baku, 6 March 2013. Since its launch in December 2012, the Art for Democracy campaign has been under attack by the Azerbaijani authorities. Campaign staff and attendees of the Art for Democracy launch event have been targeted, and the group behind the campaign, the Human Rights Club, has been denied registration. These moves have occurred against a backdrop of a vicious ongoing crackdown on broader civil society in Azerbaijan. The Human Rights Club calls for urgent action by the international community to protect these critical voices and hold Azerbaijan accountable for its human rights obligations.

Following the 11 December Art for Democracy launch event, the Azerbaijani authorities took aggressive action to target the campaign and its supporters. One week after the launch event, while traveling outside of the country, Art for Democracy's Advocacy Director, American-British human rights activist Rebecca Vincent, was notified that her Azerbaijani residence permit had been revoked. No official explanation has been given. Since that time she has not been permitted to enter the country to return to her home.

Also following the event, prominent filmmaker Ulvi Mehti was detained by police and questioned for two hours in connection with his participation in the event. Although the explanation given for his detention was that two diplomats had allegedly lost some documents at the event, a written statement later provided by the police confirmed that there had been no such report.

Art for Democracy, as well as foreign governments which supported the launch event, was harshly criticized in articles published by ruling party newspapers that labeled Art for Democracy as "anti-national" and intended to "sabotage" Azerbaijan.

Further, the Human Rights Club, the primary group behind Art for Democracy, was denied registration by a Baku Court on 19 February. The Human Rights Club has been attempting to register with the state as a non-governmental organization for the past two years.

"The government's aggressive reaction to the launch of Art for Democracy is deeply disturbing," said Art for Democracy Project Coordinator Rasul Jafarov. "The campaign is intended to be positive and creative, and we approached the launch event in a constructive manner, inviting government officials to

attend and speak. The targeting we have faced since our launch shows the government's unwillingness to allow freedom of expression of any form, including artistic freedom of expression."

"These acts of retaliation against Art for Democracy and the Human Rights Club are alarming, especially in the context of the broader ongoing crackdown on civil society in Azerbaijan," said Art for Democracy Advocacy Director Rebecca Vincent. "Azerbaijani NGOs are facing attack on all fronts at an unprecedented level. There is a serious need for immediate support to protect these precious few remaining critical voices in the country."

The Human Rights Club calls for urgent action by the international community to address these violations and protect independent civil society in Azerbaijan. The authorities must be held liable for their international human rights obligations.

Notes to Editors:

Art for Democracy is an initiative of the Human Rights Club and its partner organizations, the Institute for Reporters' Freedom and Safety and the Center for National and International Studies. Building upon the previous Sing for Democracy Campaign, Art for Democracy seeks to use all forms of artistic expression to promote human rights and democratic reform in Azerbaijan.

For any enquiries, please send a message to artfordemocracy@gmail.com. Rasul Jafarov is available for interview on +994 50 586 3537. Rebecca Vincent is available for interview on +44 7583 137751.

For more information, follow Art for Democracy on Facebook and Twitter: www.facebook.com/Art4Democracy and www.twitter.com/Art4Democracy.