**Human Rights Council
30th Session of the Working Group of the Universal Periodic Review**

**Review of AZERBAIJAN**

**Statement by Austria**

Austria welcomes the delegation of Azerbaijan to the UPR and thanks them for the report and their presentation today.

Austria thanks Azerbaijan for accepting its recommendations made during the second UPR cycle. We have taken note of a number of positive steps taken, including the accession to international human rights instruments. We hope for a swift ratification and effective implementation of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance.

We also welcome Azerbaijan’s cooperation with the Human Rights Council’s special procedures as recommended during the last review. Yet, we particularly urge the Azeri government to continue collaborating with the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Assembly and Association in order to organize a country visit in the near future.

Austria is worried about further restrictions to freedom of expression and freedom of assembly and association since 2013. We emphasize the concerns raised by the Venice Commission in respect to the new constitutional provisions on freedom of speech, introduced in 2016. We also note the observations by the Special Rapporteur about the continued stigmatization of Human Rights defenders and an alarming tendency to criminalize civil society actors and to curtail the ability of NGOs to operate.

**Therefore, we would like to make the following recommendations:**

* Review administrative and legislative provisions, including on defamation, to fully guarantee the enjoyment of freedom of expression, assembly and association;
* Ensure effective, prompt and independent investigations of all cases of harassment and violence against journalists and human rights defenders and bring perpetrators to justice.
* Establish independent and transparent mechanisms for disciplinary proceedings against lawyers in conformity with the Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers and Recommendation 21 (2000) of the Council of Europe [on the freedom of exercise of the profession of lawyer](https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectId=09000016804d0fc8) ;
* Ratify the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.