**Universal Periodic Review Working Group – 30th Session**

**Universal Periodic Review of Azerbaijan**

**Statement by Australia**

Australia commends Azerbaijan’s efforts to strengthen legal protection of human rights, including through laws to combat human trafficking and forced marriage. We welcome the draft Law on Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

We acknowledge the release of a number of human rights defenders, journalists and political activists in 2015 and 2016, but are concerned by steps to restrict the operation of civil society leaders and organisations. **Australia** **recommends Azerbaijan release all activists, journalists and bloggers held on politically-motivated charges, and dismiss the criminal charges against those individuals that have already been released. Australia also recommends Azerbaijan remove legislative and practical obstacles to the registration, funding and operation of Non-Government Organisations.**

We note Azerbaijan has initiated a number of measures aimed at guaranteeing freedom of the media. **Australia recommends Azerbaijan remove libel and defamation as criminal offences and take further steps to ensure journalists may work freely and without fear of retribution**.

We note with concern reports of mistreatment of activists in custody and use of force to obtain false confessions. **Australia recommends allegations of ill-treatment of individuals in police custody be investigated thoroughly, with perpetrators being held to account.**

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