

Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev announces comprehensive reforms for rights and freedoms

Azerbaijan's president Ilham Aliyev has announced a comprehensive national action programme for the more effective protection of human rights and freedoms in the Republic of Azerbaijan. The Presidential Decree on 27 December 2011 called on the Government, the legal administration and the presidential administration to present comprehensive proposals for improvements to the compliance with internationally valid rights and freedoms. The President also announced that regular reports would be issued on the observance of rights and freedoms in Azerbaijan. In addition, a catalogue of measures are to be implemented including

- The improvement legislation relating to human rights,**
- A new law ensuring the rights and freedoms of people held in prison (modern penal code),**
- An improved law on extradition,**
- Immigration laws to ensure the rights of migrants,**
- Upgrading of prisons and the creation of modern penal institutions.**

Azerbaijan is currently going through a process of social transformation. This calls for a comprehensive legislative reform and places administrative demands on the government and the authorities. These democratisation measures cannot be implemented within a few months or years. This is a continual process.

The national action programme has the goal of ensuring the broader protection of human rights and also of basic social freedoms. To this end, the legal system and legal culture of the society must be developed further. Azerbaijan commits itself to the goals of the United Nations Charter and the objectives of the Council of Europe, of which Azerbaijan is a member.

President Ilham Aliyev has announced: "We will continue trying to deepen political reform in Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan has done a lot to promote democracy, human rights, the rule of law, and these policies will be pursued in the future too."

A special focus is on the measures to implement this action plan. The responsibilities for implementing the programme are precisely specified in the presidential decree. Azerbaijan's Ombudsman for Human Rights will be given broader powers and comprehensive privileges. In addition, capacities will also be increased in the fight against corruption. A special action plan was announced for the coming years in order to further strongly ensure the transparency of state activities. Further training concerning human rights will be intensified for students, lawyers, judges and prosecution authorities. Education events and training courses on human rights will be organised in accordance with UN General Assembly's Declaration on "Human Rights Education and Training", and publications and illustrative materials on this topic will be prepared for the general public. Details are also given for the dissemination of international documents on human rights, in particular the European Human Rights Convention, to all state employees, court personnel, public prosecutors and prosecution authorities, lawyers, and members of municipal and local councils, as well as the expansion of the sections on human rights in official libraries. The Web sites of authorities dealing with the protection of human rights are to be improved and expanded. It was also announced that joint-projects will be conducted with specialist institutions of the United Nations and international regional organisations in the field of human rights.

Further, additional legislative steps will be undertaken in the field of social welfare, in particular:

- Improvements to maternity protection,**
- Improved protection of the rights of employees,**
- More effective health and safety measures in the manufacturing and construction industries,**
- Intensive education about drug and alcohol addiction and HIV infections,**
- Improvements to the situation of women on the labour market,**
- Rehabilitation programmes for women who have been the victims of domestic violence,**
- Increased efforts to combat child labour,**
- Measures against homelessness and for the social rehabilitation of minors,**
- Creation of crisis centres for the victims of violence and human trafficking.**

A newly established "Working Group to coordinate the implementation of the national action plan" will regularly report directly to the President.