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**HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL
29th session – June 24, 2015
Item 4: General Debate**

Oral statement delivered by the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) and the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), within the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders.

Mr. President,

OMCT and FIDH have been documenting a truly unprecedented crackdown against civil society in **AZERBAIJAN**.

The repression has particularly escalated over the past year, as the date of the Baku European Games approached¹. The result is the arbitrary arrest and detention on trumped-up charges of almost all prominent human rights defenders and journalists, notably: **Leyla Yunus**, member of OMCT General Assembly, **Arif Yusunov**, **Intigam Aliyev**, **Rasul Jafarov**, **Khadija Ismayilova**, **Hilal Mammadov**, **Anar Mammadli** and **Rauf Mirqadirov**. This occurs in a context of new laws restricting freedom of association, the freezing of bank accounts of major independent human rights groups. Today any credible and independent human rights work by civil society has become impossible.

A paradigmatic example is that defenders such as our colleagues Leyla Yunus and Intigam Aliyev remain imprisoned despite their deteriorating health condition due to the refusal of Azerbaijan to at least release them on humanitarian grounds.

It is important to highlight that the repression seems to be a strategy closely linked with the celebration of the Games in Baku in order to prevent criticism from spoiling the event as it happened with the Eurovision contest.

The Observatory welcomes the steps forward taken by some major political and sports stakeholders from various States and international organisations such as the Council of Europe, the OSCE, the UN, the European Parliament, the German Olympic Sports Confederation or the German and the Swiss Governments just to mention some.

Mr President,

The Observatory considers that this Council has to take decisive action to respond to the human rights crisis in Azerbaijan. And we call on all states united here in the council to leave geopolitical and economic interests aside and to take a stand for human rights in Azerbaijan.

It is time for this Council to join the call for the immediate and unconditional release of all arbitrarily jailed human rights defenders and journalists before it is too late.

We thank you Mr. President.

¹ See the Fact-Finding Mission Report of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders (joint OMCT-FIDH programme) available at <http://www.omct.org/human-rights-defenders/reports-and-publications/azerbaijan/2015/04/d23097/> and <https://www.fidh.org/International-Federation-for-Human-Rights/eastern-europe-central-asia/azerbaijan/azerbaijan-repression-escalates-in-run-up-to-european-games>.