



"Political prisoners in Europe and personal security for human rights defenders, journalists and members of the political opposition."

In 2014 a large number of people in Europe are jailed for no other reason than for disagreeing with their government.

In Azerbaijan, a wave of repression against human rights defenders, independent journalists, youth protesters, election observers, opposition leaders and Muslim believers is taking place, with many receiving long jail terms.

In Russia, people who participated in peaceful protests in Moscow's Bolotnaya Square after Vladimir Putin's reelection in 2012 have received harsh sentences. Many other activists and government critics have also been brought before the courts.

The situation in Azerbaijan is clearly the most alarming development today. In the beginning of August this year, a list of 98 political prisoners was presented, a list developed by Azerbaijani civil society, because the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly and other international institutions had failed to do so.

Developing and publishing the list has come at a high price: Several of those central in the work, including Leyla Yunus, Intigam Aliyev and Rasul Jafarov have now been arrested. Their names have become the last three on the list they themselves helped to compile. Other are subjected to harassment, threats and some are forced to seek a life in exile.

Lawyers defending the activists and journalists writing about abuse experience being subjected to the same abuse.

Many of those jailed over the last year are familiar faces to this very audience. By silencing those who act and advocate for the rights of others, the Governments attempt to inhibit rights and freedoms that the OSCE participating states have vowed to defend.

The OSCE and its participating states must now step up to stop this irresponsible and unacceptable practice in OSCE member states.

The OSCE bodies and participating states should:

Organize a high level special session on the existence of political prisoners in Europe, inviting human rights defenders from countries where political prisoners exist, to establish the facts and to develop a decisive plan of action for a speedy resolve of the problem;

Attend the trials where human rights defenders, journalists or activists are being charged on spurious grounds, because of their professional activities; and swiftly publish the reports on the observations,

Establish emergency procedure to ensure their personal safety on short and long term, by issuing multi entry visas free of charge for the activists and their closest family;

Establish flexible possibilities for persons at risk to find temporary safe havens by establishing scholarships for work or study in other OSCE participating states;

The Norwegian Helsinki Committee has already written a letter to our Foreign Minister Børge Brende asking the Norwegian Government to secure such measures.