

Dr. Ahmad Shahidov
Head of Azerbaijan Institute for Democracy and Human Rights
www.shahidov.info
+99450 372 87 30

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen!

I am Ahmad Shahidov, represent the Azerbaijan Institute for Democracy and Human Rights.

Today's topic is very sensitive and usually Azerbaijan is criticized on this issue. Unfortunately, most criticisms here are biased and subjective. Of course, it would not be right to say that everything in the field of human rights and fundamental freedoms is perfect in Azerbaijan. There are certain problems, but the thoughts expressed here are exaggerated. I want to express the real situation in Azerbaijan.

For example, freedom of expression is criticized in Azerbaijan. There is some inaccurate and ridiculous information that if anyone who criticizes the government of Azerbaijan is immediately arrested. That is completely false. Because the internet is completely free in Azerbaijan today, and any person can publicly criticize the Azerbaijani government, ministers, and even President on social networks. Any activity of the Azerbaijani government may be criticized. As a human rights defender, I also sometimes criticize the government's activities.

Sometimes people do not understand the difference between criticism and insults. These are different concepts. For example, I may criticize states and their presidents here, but I have no right to insult them. For example, today's event has its own rules and regulations. Now, if I insult here someones family members in my speech, of course, the moderator will interrupt my speech and limit my freedom of expression. And this is very normal.

The same rules are in Azerbaijan. There are some youth groups in Azerbaijan. They call themselves ultra-free and democratic. In fact, they are radicals who are prone to chaos. They violate the rights of others by their actions. For example, I would like to talk about members of NIDA Civil Movement. These young people are insulting people's religious beliefs in Azerbaijan. There is no difference, they openly insult Muslims, Christians and Jews. They drink beer in mosques, churches, and

synagogues, and insult those who come to worship. And they call it freedom of expression. Naturally, this is unacceptable and those people are legally responsible. I want to disclose another fact. For example, anarchist members of NIDA damages various historical monuments and writes insulting words. The police arrest them. Later some countries and international organizations make statements that democratic young people are being arrested or freedom of expression is restricted in Azerbaijan. I ask everyone here. Let's go and stand in front of the headquarter of the Polish presidency and insult the President of Poland, his family members. Then, write insults on the walls of the Presidential Palace. How do you think the Warsaw police will arrest us or not? Yes, of course. Of course, we will be responsible for this. Or lets go to the synagogue in Warsaw and insult the Jews who come to worship and pray, lets enter the synagogue and drink beer inside. Is this freedom of expression?! What is the difference between us and fascists or anarchists?! Of course, this is unacceptable and we are responsible for this.