

SUMMARY

of the activities of the Commissioner for Human Rights (Ombudsman) of the Republic of Azerbaijan during 2015-2016 within the third phase (2015-2019) of the World Programme for Human Rights Education

A. Strengthening human rights education in the primary and secondary school systems and in higher education, as well as human rights training for civil servants, law enforcement officials and the military.

The importance of human rights education is highlighted in several international treaties which the Republic of Azerbaijan is a party to, as well as in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities etc.

Besides that, the paragraphs 4.4-4.10 of the National Program for Action to Raise the Effectiveness of the Protection of Human Rights and Freedoms in the Republic of Azerbaijan, approved by the Presidential Order dated 27 December, 2011, states enhancing of teaching of human rights at specialized vocational and higher education institutions and develop stage-by-stage teaching of the rights of the child in secondary schools, continuation of conducting competitions, exhibitions and other activities on the human rights among pupils and students, of work on preparation, publication and dissemination of educational and visual aids, booklets and posters on human rights, improvement of scientific research work on human rights and freedoms at higher education and research institutions, in order to promote the UNESCO principle “Education for All” and facilitate a more effective protection of human rights and freedoms, preparation of trainers in the field of legal education for different population groups (women, children, youth, disabled, elderly, refugees and internally displaced persons, prisoners, soldiers, drug addicts and people with HIV/AIDS infection), the establishment of specialized human rights centers (school of human rights, house of human rights, etc) or networks in order to improve effectiveness of education in the field of human rights and facilitate proper coordination in this sphere, conduct the awareness activities in order to develop a proper culture of law and respect to human rights, prevent discrimination, promote a culture of peace and tolerance and national and spiritual values of our people.

Guiding in her activity by the abovementioned international and national legal acts the Commissioner for Human Rights (Ombudsman) of the Republic of Azerbaijan has continued her activities during 2015 – 2016 years in the direction of human rights education that is an integral part of her activity from the first days of term. Thus, these measures were targeted at improving legal knowledge and thought of population, training and strengthening the capacity of state officials, civil servants in charge with human rights, as well as at raising the awareness on human rights protection and promotion in secondary and higher education facilities. Conduction of trainings and seminars, round tables, conferences and other topical events covering different actual issues of human rights consist the important part of the awareness raising activity of the Ombudsman and her staff. Involvement to this process of highly qualified specialists, experts contributes to this work.

In 2015 and 2016 years the Commissioner continued the conduction of wide-scaled public hearings for monitoring the fulfillment, promotion and implementation of the abovementioned National Program for Actions. The active participation in this process of the representatives of local executive powers of cities and regions of the republic, law-enforcement, other state bodies, municipalities, local communities, refugees and internally displaced persons, national minorities, NGOs and mass media, education and healthcare staff, active women and youth, as well as the elderly, wide audience was ensured.

The project “Hierarchic Education on the Child Rights” initiated by the Commissioner is one of the best practices carried out in our country in the field of human rights education and legal awareness. The main purpose of this program is to raise awareness on rights and responsibilities of children enshrined in the CRC and national legislation being based on Peer-To-Peer method with inclusiveness and participation of children themselves, of children, who are trained as trainers, conduct trainings for one level lower classes that make up the essence of the hierarchic education on the rights of the child. This project aimed at learning and promoting the CRC and running in partnership with the Ministry of Education has been continued in 40 schools during 2015-2016 in secondary schools of Baku city and rural areas of the country and contributed to further development of legal culture, realization of child rights at school and in the society in a whole through human rights education. Up to present it covered 7500 pupils from more than 130 schools all over the country. All pupils actively participated in the project were awarded with certificates by the Commissioner, as well as over 600 teachers and directors were got a letter of appreciations.

Another activity of the Commissioner in human rights education field that could be considered as best practice, is teaching the “Human rights” and “Introductory to Gender” as separate subjects at the university level. Thus the manual “A collection of lectures on Human Rights” taught for a Law Faculty students in Baku State University was compiled and published. At the initiative of the Commissioner, the UNESCO Department on Human Rights and Right to Information was established at the Baku State University. The teaching of these subjects and work of that Department have been successfully continued during 2015-2016 years.

The Special Short-term Human Rights Education Network was created at the Ombudsman Office. This network’s program included lectures and seminars on such topics as basics of human rights and freedoms, national and international legal acts, the establishment and development essence of the Ombudsman Institution, legal reforms carried out in the country in human rights and freedoms provision, as well the structure and directions of activity of the Commissioner, the procedure of receiving applications and investigation of the citizens’ complaints, the Constitutional Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan on the Commissioner for Human Rights (Ombudsman) of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

During 2015-2016 students of various academic years and of master level, of the Baku State University, the Academy of Public Administration under the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Baku Slavic University, Azerbaijan University of Languages, Caucasus University have passed continuous internship at the Ombudsman Office.

The activity of the Commissioner and the Office in strengthening the human rights education are targeted not only the students of primary, secondary schools and higher education facilities, but

also to the active visitors and members of the Resource Center of the Ombudsman for the Elderly and at the School of Leadership under the Azerbaijan Child and Youth Peace Network that is a resource center of the Ombudsman on child rights. The awareness events in the field of human rights for women and elderly and children are regularly conducted for them with involvement of well-known persons of the country, they are provided with the free of charge legal, psychological assistance by relevant staff members of the Office.

The Ombudsman Office closely and effectively cooperated with the Police Academy under the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) in order to enhance knowledge of listeners as well as of police officers with regard to human rights. Thus, at the Commissioner's initiative the seminars, lectures, also round tables and trainings were organized jointly with the MIA at the Police Academy, dedicated to the various topics related to the Optional Protocol on to the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OPCAT) and on the issues of activities of the Ombudsman as a National Preventive Mechanism (NPM), June 18 – the National Human Rights Day in Azerbaijan and other topics. The comprehensive information on the activities of the Azerbaijani NPM was given to the participants of those events, all questions of participants, listeners, as well as of police officers of different police departments virtually joined to the events were replied to. The Ombudsman and members of National Preventive Group continued legal educational work also during the visits to military units, police stations, temporary detention facilities, investigatory isolators, penitentiary institutions, military guardhouses, psychiatric institutions, the center of detention for illegal migrants and other places, which detained persons cannot leave on their own will.

Trainings on human rights, the national and international legislation in this area were provided for the staff of the Penitentiary Service of the Ministry of Justice, including medical staff.

The legal awareness of military servants is one of the directions of the Commissioner's activities. As in previous years, in 2015-2016 the Ombudsman and her staff members specialized on protection of rights of military servants held various legal education events in military units and institutions of the Ministry of Defense, MIA, as well as Ministry of Emergency Situations upon the approved joint plan of actions, organized individual and collective meetings with military personnel during the regular events in military units, as well as attended the oath-swearing ceremonies and gave the recommendations to young soldiers.

As the practice shows, conduction of such legal awareness measures contributes in strengthening the legal though, educational and behavioral environment in the military units, other relevant facilities. The Commissioner and her staff members held events in the institutions under the jurisdiction of Ministry of Defense, Internal Troops of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Civil Protection Troops of the Ministry of Emergency Situations. The questions of military servants covering different aspects of their service and social life were investigated on the spot and replied to. The administrations of those facilities are also actively involved in the legal education measures conducted by the Ombudsman Office.

The staff members of the Ombudsman Office gave range of lectures on ensuring human rights and freedoms, the multidirectional activity of the Commissioner and other related topics at the training, vocational courses, conferences and seminars organized at the Military Academy of Armed Forces, Higher Military School of Internal Troops of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the

Military Lyceum after Jamshid Nakhchivanski, as well as the Academy of Public Administration under the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Academy of Justice under the Ministry of Justice, the Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy, the Azerbaijan Academy of Labour and Social Relations.

In 2015-2016 the Commissioner continued the cooperation with the Central Election Commission and staff in the direction of promotion of the citizens' right to vote. During the public hearings conducted in 2015, as well as on the eve of the fifth call elections to the Milli Mejlis (Parliament) of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the referendum on making amendments to the Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the trainings on the right to vote for the staff of the Ombudsman Office and of the regional centers were organized at the initiative of the Commissioner jointly with the Central Election Commission within the frames of the National Program of Actions.

During 2015-2016 the activities of the Commissioner in the field of legal awareness, aiming at legal education of various groups of the population and raising awareness on human rights, are developed within multilateral cooperation with state authorities, mass media, non-governmental organizations and communities, and also the respected international organizations.

The staff members of the Ombudsman Office in order to improve their capacities in promotion and protection of human rights, using more flexible and modern remedies, benefiting from best practices of other human rights institutions, the efficient cooperation was built with the EU, active participation was ensured in Eastern Partnership (EaP), in "Support to the Strengthening of the Commissioner for Human Rights (Ombudsman) of the Republic of Azerbaijan" 24 months component realized within the Twinning project, that are an important part of the multidirectional activity of the Commissioner.

Continuation of traditionally held month campaigns in the republic at the initiative of the Ombudsman such as Peace Month Campaign from August 21 – September 21, Child Rights month-long Campaign from October 20 - November 20, also such best practice in the activity of the Commissioner as public hearings covering all cities and rayons of country, for monitoring the state of fulfillment, promotion and implementation of the National Program for Action to Raise the Effectiveness of the Protection of Human Rights and Freedoms in the Republic of Azerbaijan, significantly contributes to the raising the legal education, culture and thought among different groups of population. Also different events are held on the occasion of the UN international days. All these are aimed at drawing the attention of state and society to the protection of human rights of various groups of population and providing awareness raising events.

B. Promoting human rights training for media professionals and journalists, in particular in the areas of policies and related implementation measures; training processes and tools; and the enabling environment

The Commissioner always paid attention to the issues of legal awareness of journalists specialized in human rights and initiatives of mass media specialized in the field of concern, the cooperation with them was continued and media members intensively attended the events organized by the Ombudsman Office.

Thus, in 2015, in the frame of the CoE Project “Freedom of expression and media in Azerbaijan” trainings were held on security of journalists and freedom of expression, to which the Ombudsman’s staff members were involved as experts.

Different events dedicated to National Press Day and World Press Freedom Day were held at the initiative of the Commissioner with participation of representatives of mass-media, discussions were held on protection of freedom of thought, speech and press, proposals and recommendations were sent to competent authorities.

The Commissioner stresses the importance of the contribution of media representatives in highlighting the national priorities and their active participation in delivering to the international community the truth about dynamic processes, the priority issues for people in the country, in supporting the justice. Stating the importance of increasing of professionalism and legal knowledge of journalists, the Commissioner proposed to pay more attention to writings and articles with non-discriminative elements about various issues in the society.

The Office is closely focused on the issues of development of internet and print and digital media, active usage of information and communication technologies, benefiting from them, also of online-journalism, advancing professionalism of journalists and media representatives specialized in human rights and law issues, extension of usage of modern information technologies; measures were taken for increasing legal knowledge of journalists and those specializing in human rights issues were involved into the competitions traditionally organized by the Commissioner.

In 2015 and 2016 on the occasion of December 10 - International Human Rights Day two conferences were held with the participation of the members of the Parliament, state bodies, civil society organizations and international organizations. At the end of the conference, traditionally held each year, the competition of journalists’ writings entitled *Rights for Everybody* was concluded, winners were rewarded. In the end, the importance of protection of freedom of opinion and speech, as well as of press, its role in formation of civil society was highlighted.

Organization of workshops for mass – media representatives and journalists in the capital and in regions, draw out and publication of appropriate educational programs and modules, creation of Working Group consisting also of mass media representatives and journalists, training of journalists, raising the professionalism and specialization of mass-media representatives is of particular importance. In this regard, series of events on development of electronic and printed media, digital and online journalism, improvement of professionalism of journalists, as well as media representatives writing about law, legal issues, human rights, increasing the opportunities to use modern information-communication technologies, information publicity and transparency, improvement of internet resources, public relations; views and comments of media representatives are taken into consideration.

In the time when information society is established, empowering the Commissioner to monitor the execution of the Law on Access to Information by the information owners-state bodies and municipalities and their officials and extension of her mandate and competences lead to better promote her independence as it is specified by the relevant Constitutional Law. Thus, the Commissioner supervises over execution of duties by the information holding state bodies,

municipalities and state officials in accordance with the requirements of the Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan “On access to information”. Events and discussions on learning and sharing experiences towards ensuring the right to get information, developing the relevant recommendations were also profitable.

The activity of the Commissioner and the work of the Ombudsman Office are comprehensively highlighted in mass media. Thus, 280 press-releases were prepared in 2015 and 289 press-releases - in 2016 by the Press service of Ombudsman. They were translated into English and sent to the Council of Europe. 342 articles and information were issued in 2015 and 556 articles and information - in 2016.

The paragraph 1.3 of the Open Government Initiative National Action Plan for 2012-2015, reflects improvement of the structure of the Ombudsman Office in 2012-2014, involvement of relevant employees to the specialized training. Moreover, paragraph 2.1 of the Open Government Initiative National Action Plan for 2016-2018 says that measures should be taken for enhancing the resources of the Commissioner to monitor fulfillment of duties arising from the Law on Access to Information, recommends providing information about the resources allocated for implementation of the plan and measures to be taken in this regard.

On November 25, 2016, the Office of the Commissioner jointly with CoE conducted training for the staff of the Ombudsman Office, other respective state bodies and some mass media. The training was attended by well known international and local experts.

In the reviewed period series of consultations were held with the representatives of state bodies, CSOs, well known media experts who are information holders, perspectives of future cooperation with state bodies, NGOs and mass media for ensuring the right to obtain information were discussed.