***To***: Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers

Ms. Margaret Satterthwaite

***From***: Office of the Commissioner for Human Rights

(Ombudsman) of the Republic of Azerbaijan

***Date:*** May 5, 2023

**Response to the questionnaire of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers for the upcoming report on legal empowerment**

We would like to present to your attention the answers to 2 of the questions reflected in your questionnaire. The answers mainly cover the public legal education modalities implemented by the Office of the Commissioner for Human Rights (Ombudsman) of the Republic of Azerbaijan (*hereinafter the Ombudsman Office*) and the activities implemented to foster access to justice by all.

* *Examples of legal empowerment modalities and innovations at the community, local, national, and international level*

As a national human rights institution, the Commissioner for Human Rights (Ombudsman) of the Republic of Azerbaijan conducts various activities to contribute to the promotion of legal culture and legal thinking among different groups of population.

Every year the Ombudsman declares month-long campaigns, i.e., Human Rights Month on the eve of June 18 - Human Rights Day in Azerbaijan and Child Rights Month on the eve of November 20 - World Children’s Day in order to support the legal empowerment at national level. The Ombudsman annually issues statements calling on the relevant state bodies and the whole society to join these month-long campaigns and to hold different awareness-raising events.

This legal education modality helps to reach more people and involve different groups of population, mainly those living in regions and rural areas. The Ombudsman has four regional centers covering Western, Northern, Southern and North-West regions, which hold awareness events on different topics at community and local levels on a regular basis.

Furthermore, the persons residing in facilities which they cannot leave on their own will are also target groups for legal awareness work. The Ombudsman and her staff regularly visit those facilities and inform the elderly, children, convicts, persons with disabilities about their rights enshrined in the national and international legal acts.

At present the Ombudsman Office organizes awareness raising events for the schoolchildren as training sessions based on group-works in order to raise their awareness on different topics, including violence against children, different forms of discrimination, child rights protection mechanisms, relevant legal instruments etc.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Our institution joins the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence campaign as well, and regularly organizes awareness events to empower women.

This year, the Ombudsman also called on everyone to join World Autism Awareness Month and introduced a special hashtag (#AutizmləMümkündür) which means “It’s possible with Autism”. During this campaign the Ombudsman Office introduced booklets entitled “Benefits of Early Diagnosis” to inform the society about the signs, risk factors of the autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and to call for the social integration and inclusion of people with ASD. This booklet was presented in an event which brought together different state bodies, civil society organizations and parents of children with ASD.[[2]](#footnote-2) The regional centers of the Ombudsman also held awareness events during this campaign.[[3]](#footnote-3)

In general, during 20-years activity term, the Ombudsman Office has published 226 educational materials. Human Rights Library of the Office has distributed these books, leaflets, booklets, brochures to state bodies, libraries, educational institutions, penitentiary and correctional facilities. The Ombudsman Office is also represented with its booth in International Book Fair held in Baku Expo Center where the educational materials, as well as reports of the Ombudsman are exhibited[[4]](#footnote-4).

Every year bachelor’s and master’s students of several universities have internships with the Ombudsman Office and increase their knowledge on human rights. So far, 503 students have had their internship with the Ombudsman Office.

Moreover, the Ombudsman Office holds regular sessions for human rights education of judge-candidates who are involved in the capacity building trainings. These lectures are aimed at increasing the awareness about human rights protection and the relevant international instruments.

The future judges trained at the Academy of Justice were given lectures about the human rights standards and the Ombudsman’s activities. During the training the relevant staff members of the Ombudsman Office informed the trainees about the OPCAT, Istanbul Protocol, which is the OHCHR’s document on effective investigation of ill-treatment and punishment, SPT recommendations and the standards included in the general reports of the CPT. The trainees were also informed about the provisions of national legislative acts related to human rights.

During the trainings held in the Academy of Justice, Police Academy, State Migration Service, and military education institutions, the judges, lawyers, civil servants and military servicemen are accordingly informed by the staff of the Ombudsman Office about the human rights standards and the Ombudsman’s competencies.[[5]](#footnote-5),[[6]](#footnote-6) It’s worth to mention that an educational-methodical tool entitled “Practicum on Human Rights Subject” was jointly prepared by the Ombudsman Office and Police Academy and presented in 2022.

At the international level, the first online training within the Association of Ombudspersons and National Human Rights Institutions of Turkic States (TURKOMB) was organized by the Ombudsman Office of Azerbaijan on the topic of access to information. Another such training was held for the member institutions of the Ombudsman Association of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC OA).[[7]](#footnote-7)

Regular capacity-building of the staff members of the Ombudsman Office is also kept in focus. Within the framework of the international cooperation relations, the staff are involved in different training sessions. As such, trainings on anti-discrimination, gender equality, elimination of domestic violence has been organized for the staff of the Ombudsman Office within the EU/CoE project “Partnership for Good Governance II” and ICMPD/EU project “MOBILAZE-2”. [[8]](#footnote-8),[[9]](#footnote-9),[[10]](#footnote-10)

As part of the cooperation with UNDP both the staff of the Ombudsman Institution and representatives of civil society organizations have attended training on business and human rights.

The staff have also participated in study visits for the exchange of experiences on the above-mentioned topics as part of these projects.[[11]](#footnote-11),[[12]](#footnote-12),[[13]](#footnote-13),[[14]](#footnote-14),[[15]](#footnote-15)

Memorandums of Understanding signed with different counterparts consider this practice as well. In 2022 such exchange of experience was organized mutually for the staff of the Human Rights and Equality Institution of Türkiye[[16]](#footnote-16) and the Ombudsman Office[[17]](#footnote-17).

* *The contribution of legal empowerment and other people-centered approaches to efforts to achieve equal and effective justice for all in line with Sustainable Development Goal 16*

The Ombudsman receives applications on this ground and investigates the issues indicated by the complainants in order to achieve the effective access to justice.

During the last year, the 24/7 Call Center 916 of the Ombudsman has been an effective mechanism to solve the problems concerning the violation of lawyer’s right to meet with the detained persons. The Ombudsman has intervened, within her competencies, to ensure the right of access to justice and the problems have been solved after taking necessary measures (*Particular cases in detail can be found in the Ombudsman’s Annual Report for 2022, page 9-10[[18]](#footnote-18)*).

The Action Plan for 2023 adopted by the National Coordination Council for Sustainable Development (NCCSD) of the Republic of Azerbaijan recommends the Ombudsman to hold such events to promote the Goal 16 of the SDGs.

The Ombudsman has close cooperation with Bar Association in the field of providing legal assistance to low-income people who lodged applications in this regard.

One of the relevant good practices has been free legal aid campaign jointly organized by the Ombudsman Institution and the Bar Association for the vulnerable populations on the eve of the Human Rights Day in Azerbaijan in order to support ensuring equal access to justice (target 16.3). This free legal aid campaign targeted different groups of population who were consulted on issues arising out of civil, social, economic, administrative, family law and domestic violence.

The Ombudsman of Azerbaijan also has a mandate to oversee the implementation of the right of access to information.[[19]](#footnote-19) Numerous events were held in the regions in order to raise the awareness of people and information-holding bodies about their rights and duties.[[20]](#footnote-20),[[21]](#footnote-21),[[22]](#footnote-22) The Ombudsman Office published several booklets on the right to information which were also distributed among the participants of those awareness raising events.

Moreover, a video clip was prepared by the Ombudsman Office and broadcasted in the TV channels for informing society on the public access to information (target 16A) and the Ombudsman’s relevant competencies.

1. <https://www.ombudsman.az/en/view/news/3869/the-trainings-have-been-held-in-general-schools> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <https://www.ombudsman.az/en/view/news/3887/an-event-on-the-topic-benefits-of-early-diagnosis-was-held-on-the-iitiative-of-the-ombudsman> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <https://www.ombudsman.az/en/view/news/3891/ombudsmans-regional-centers-held-educational-events-dedicated-to-the-rights-of-persons-with-autism-> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. <https://www.ombudsman.az/en/view/news/3458/ombudsman-office-participated-in-the-viii-baku-international-book-fair> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. <https://www.ombudsman.az/en/view/news/1876/legal-awareness-events-are-underway-within-framework-of-npm-activities-of-ombudsman> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. <https://www.ombudsman.az/en/view/news/1741/legal-awareness-raising-activities-are-underway-as-part-of-the-ombudsmans-national-preventive-mechanism-activity> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. <https://www.ombudsman.az/en/view/news/3127/azerbaijan-ombudsman-institution-held-an-online-training-under-the-leadership-of-the-oic-ombudsmen-association> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. <https://www.ombudsman.az/en/view/news/1705/a-training-seminar-on-anti-discrimination-was-held-in-guba> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. <https://www.ombudsman.az/en/view/news/3273/the-staff-of-the-ombudsman-institution-participated-in-a-training-held-in-lankaran-city> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. <https://www.ombudsman.az/en/view/news/3270/ombudsman-awarded-certificates-to-the-participants-of-the-training-on-combating-discrimination> [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. <https://www.ombudsman.az/en/view/news/3442/staff-of-the-ombudsman-office-participated-in-the-council-of-europe-training-in-strasbourg> [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. <https://www.ombudsman.az/en/view/news/2866/-study-visit-of-the-representatives-of-the-ombudsman-office-to-georgia> [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. <https://www.ombudsman.az/en/view/news/3622/representatives-of-the-ombudsman-office-were-on-a-study-trip-to-spain> [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. <https://www.ombudsman.az/en/view/news/3534/the-staff-of-the-ombudsman-office-visited-austria-during-the-mobilaze-2-project/> [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. <https://www.ombudsman.az/en/view/news/3635/study-visit-of-the-representatives-of-the-ombudsman-office-to-denmark/> [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. <https://www.ombudsman.az/en/view/news/3308/threi-delegation-paid-a-visit-to-azerbaijan> [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. <https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=pfbid02n7P8VMtYFhMBXB7RooBgH8Cjv8JY6g6bxnDjxYpivGpvVYSYUjSf6BxVT1YPtYu4l&id=184151902161914> [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. <https://www.ombudsman.az/az/view/pages/59> [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. <https://www.ombudsman.az/en/view/pages/46> [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. <https://www.ombudsman.az/en/view/news/2596/an-awareness-raising-event-dedicated-to-the-right-to-information-was-held-in-sumgayit-> [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. <https://www.ombudsman.az/en/view/news/3082/awareness-raising-events-on-the-topic-ensuring-the-right-to-information-in-the-context-of-human-rights-were-carried-out-in-shemkir-and-tovuz-districts> [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. <https://www.ombudsman.az/en/view/news/2620/another-awareness-raising-event-about-the-right-to-information-was-conducted-in-mingachevir-> [↑](#footnote-ref-22)