

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

September 25, 2026

The Honorable Marco Rubio
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Mr. Secretary,

The Trump Administration has taken positive steps to improve our relationship with the Republic of Azerbaijan, including the signing of the Strategic Partnership Charter. We also commend you and Vice President Vance for your efforts to secure a more peaceful and prosperous region through the Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity (TRIPP).

For the U.S.– Azerbaijan partnership to thrive, it must be grounded in a commitment to strengthen democratic institutions, the rule of law, and protect fundamental rights. That is why we are greatly concerned with the pattern of arbitrary detentions and denial of due process under President Aliyev’s administration. There are more than 300 political prisoners in Azerbaijan, and the repression of independent journalists, opposition leaders, and civil society advocates continues throughout the country.

We share the Administration’s interest in advancing peace in the region and urge that the release of all political prisoners held in Azerbaijan be a condition of the Strategic Partnership. We have been encouraged by the Administration’s success in obtaining the release of political prisoners in Belarus and urge the Administration to pursue a similar approach with Azerbaijan. This process should start by prioritizing the release of the following individuals who are emblematic of different sectors of Azerbaijani civil society that have been targets of longstanding repression:

Ali Karimli, former Secretary of State of Azerbaijan and current leader of the opposition Popular Front Party, has been held for more than nine months in pretrial detention on politically motivated charges. In April, one of his bodyguards testified in open court that he had been tortured in order to provide false testimony against Mr. Karimli, which he refused to give. Mr. Karimli is being denied family visits and faces life in prison. According to recent reports, he has been denied access to clean drinking water, and his health has severely deteriorated.

Alasgar Mammadli, a prominent media lawyer, co-founder of the independent Toplum TV, and longtime partner of Internews and IREX, was detained on March 8, 2024, and is being prosecuted on fabricated charges as part of the broader crackdown on independent media. Mr. Mammadli has provided expertise to the OSCE, the Council of Europe, and other international organizations on media freedom and the rule of law. He suffers from a serious medical condition and his health has reportedly deteriorated; Azerbaijani authorities have repeatedly denied him adequate care, and his lawyers’ requests for transfer to house arrest on medical grounds have also

been rejected. On July 27, 2026, Mr. Mammadli, along with eight other journalists and activists, was sentenced to 14 years in prison.

Anar Mammadli is a prominent human rights defender, leader of the country's largest independent election watchdog, and member of the Network of Human Rights Houses. He was awarded the Václav Havel Human Rights Prize in 2014 during a previous detention that the European Court of Human Rights determined was politically motivated. Mr. Mammadli was arbitrarily detained again in April 2024, and on September 7, 2026, sentenced to 13 years in prison.

Dr. Gubad Ibadoghlu is a world-renowned economist and anti-corruption scholar who was arbitrarily detained by Azerbaijani authorities three years ago on politically motivated charges. He remains under indefinite house arrest, denied access to urgent medical treatment despite his deteriorating health, and is subject to a travel ban. His brother, Galib Bayramov, was arrested in 2025 simply for publicly supporting him. Dr. Ibadoghlu has taught at universities in the United Kingdom and United States, where one of his children lives, and has received awards and fellowships from several American institutions.

Farid Mehralizada is an economist and journalist for Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's Azerbaijani Service. He was unjustly detained in May 2024 as part of the government's crackdown on independent media and was sentenced in June 2025 to nine years in prison. While in prison, Farid missed the birth of his only child. In July 2026, his wife Nargiz Mukhtarova received a 7.5-year suspended sentence with 3 years' probation.

Rufat Safarov is a prominent human rights defender, advocate for religious freedom, and former prosecutor. He was arrested in December 2024, days before he was scheduled to travel to the United States to receive the U.S. Secretary of State's 2024 Human Rights Defender Award. In June 2026, he was sentenced to eight years imprisonment on fabricated charges.

Tofiq Yagublu is a prominent opposition figure and outspoken critic of the Azerbaijani Government. He was most recently detained in December 2023 and sentenced in March 2025 to nine years in prison. Poor prison conditions, two hunger strikes, and inadequate medical care have reportedly led to drastically deteriorated health.

Ulviyya Guliyeva (known as Ulviyya Ali) was Voice of America's Azerbaijan correspondent until February 2025, when Azerbaijani authorities revoked VOA's accreditation. Her last reporting was on Tofiq Yagublu's court hearings. Ms. Guliyeva was unjustly imprisoned in May 2025. During interrogation, she was allegedly struck in the head several times by police and threatened with sexual violence. Ms. Guliyeva suffers from chronic health conditions and has been denied adequate medical care, resulting in a deterioration of her health.

The Republic of Azerbaijan's continued practice of wrongfully detaining individuals for political purposes undermines the credibility of its commitments to peace, the rule of law, and partnership with the United States. All those wrongfully detained should have direct access to their families, legal counsel, and medical treatment. Ali Karimli, Dr. Gubad Ibadoghlu, Tofiq Yagublu, Farid Mehralizada, Ulviyya Guliyeva, Rufat Safarov, Alasgar Mammadli, and Anar Mammadli should be immediately released. All charges and travel bans against those who are released should be

withdrawn.

The Administration's decision to waive Section 907 of the FREEDOM Support Act reflects a willingness to deepen engagement with Azerbaijan in pursuit of broader U.S. interests. As the United States has taken this significant step in good faith, we urge the Administration to press the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan to demonstrate a similar commitment to strengthening bilateral relations. The immediate release of the above identified individuals, as well as all others unjustly detained, would represent a meaningful demonstration of that commitment. Such action would underscore that an enduring U.S.-Azerbaijan partnership is strengthened by both shared strategic interests and respect for fundamental freedoms and the rule of law.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



Peter Welch
United States Senator



Thom Tillis
United States Senator



Tim Kaine
United States Senator