

## **One year has passed since Rufat Safarov's unlawful arrest**

Today marks one year since the arrest of lawyer, human rights activist, and founder of the “Defence Line” human rights organization, Rufat Safarov.

His arrest stands as one of the most serious examples of the systematic repression targeting lawyers and human rights defenders in Azerbaijan.

For 365 days, Rufat Safarov has been deprived of his liberty without any lawful basis, and throughout this period his detention has been marked by numerous blatant violations of both national legislation and international human rights standards.

On 3 December 2024, Safarov was violently detained by police, and his whereabouts remained unknown for several hours, effectively placing him in unlawful incommunicado detention. The following day, he was brought before the Binagadi District Court and charged under Criminal Code Articles 127.2.3 (intentional infliction of less serious harm to health—when committed by a generally dangerous method or with hooligan intent), 178.3.2 (fraud—causing large-scale damage), and 221.1 (hooliganism). The court ordered four months of pre-trial detention.

Although the defence filed well-grounded motions for house arrest and other alternative preventive measures, the court rejected all of them without providing any sufficient reasoning. The decision failed to provide the legal basis required under Article 155 of the Criminal Procedure Code for each preventive measure and lacked case-specific justification. According to ECtHR precedents—*Letellier v. France*, *Rasul Jafarov v. Azerbaijan*, and others—detention may only be applied on the basis of real and substantiated risks. Yet, as in all politically motivated cases, no such risks were presented by the investigative authorities nor assessed by the court.

Over the past year, Safarov's pre-trial detention has been extended four times, totalling 12 months. All defence appeals to the Baku Court of Appeal against each extension were rejected. During this period, approximately 20 motions submitted by the defence were either dismissed or not examined at all. Safarov appeared before the Binagadi District Court, the Baku Court of Appeal and the Baku Grave Crimes Court a total of 13 times, but none of these courts ensured a full and objective examination of the complaints.

Throughout the proceedings, the defence repeatedly filed motions aimed at securing an objective investigation: for an economic expert examination, for witnesses to be questioned without pressure, for forensic examination of documents, for technical analysis of digital data, and for an on-site inspection of the alleged crime scene. All were denied, undermining the principles of objectivity and impartiality.

Most motions were either immediately rejected or not considered at all—a clear violation of the obligation to conduct a full examination of the case on both factual and legal grounds.

During the hearings, Safarov stated that the charges against him were politically motivated. He noted that as a human rights defender who for years has monitored torture, produced reports on political prisoners, defended victims of rights violations, and publicized unlawful court practices, he has long been a target for the authorities.

Several days before his arrest, Safarov had been selected for the U.S. State Department's Human Rights Defender Award and had received an invitation to the ceremony from Secretary of State Antony Blinken. According to his lawyer, Elchin Sadigov, it was precisely after this award that the Azerbaijani authorities made a “political decision” to arrest him, and the charges were fabricated afterwards. At the Washington ceremony, the symbolic “empty chair” dedicated to Safarov drew international attention to his unjust imprisonment.

It is important to note that this is not the first time Safarov has faced such persecution. In 2015, after resigning from the Prosecutor's Office and publicly exposing corruption and legal violations, his home and workplace were searched, a criminal case was launched against him, he was briefly detained and later placed under house arrest. This history demonstrates the long-standing pattern of political pressure and retaliation against him.

His current arrest has been sharply criticized both domestically and internationally. The U.S. State Department immediately expressed concern, emphasizing the importance of enabling human rights defenders in Azerbaijan to work safely and without obstruction. [Amnesty International](#), the [International Federation for Human Rights \(FIDH\)](#), and [other international organizations](#) declared the charges politically motivated, the investigation biased, and the trial incompatible with legal standards, calling for his immediate release.

The trial in Safarov's case began on 30 June 2025 and is currently ongoing at the Baku Grave Crimes Court. The existing picture shows that the prosecution has not presented any factual or legal basis for its allegations. The systematic rejection of the defence motions, the failure to examine evidence, the court's failure to exercise "full jurisdiction," and the absence of legal assessment of political-motive claims all demonstrate that the proceedings fail to meet the requirements of national law and the European Convention on Human Rights concerning the right to liberty and fair trial guarantees.