



**The Commissioner for Human Rights
of the Republic of Azerbaijan
(Ombudsman)**

**2023 Annual Report
of the Commissioner for human rights (Ombudsman)
of the Republic of Azerbaijan**

**on the protection of human rights
in the Republic of Azerbaijan**

Baku - 2024



The 2023 Annual Report of the Commissioner for Human Rights (Ombudsman) of the Republic of Azerbaijan was prepared in accordance with Article 14 of the Constitutional Law on the Commissioner for Human Rights (Ombudsman) of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

The Ombudsman presents the annual report to the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan within two months until the end of the calendar year and subsequently, speaks with that report before the Parliament of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

The annual report is submitted to the Cabinet of Ministers, Constitutional Court, Supreme Court, and Prosecutor-General of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

The report is published in the newspaper "Azerbaijan" and "Legislative Compilation of the Republic of Azerbaijan."

Foreword

Actions taken to fulfill the obligation to ensure human and citizen's rights and a decent life for citizens of the Republic of Azerbaijan aim at strengthening social-political stability and reliable protection of human rights.

Our republic, which serves the rule of law and the best interests of our people and whose reputation is constantly growing and highly esteemed among the world states, has initiated a number of important projects on the protection of human rights, along with hosting events of global importance.

As a result of local anti-terror military operations carried out in September 2023 in order to ensure public security and address serious threats to the lives and health of human beings, the liberation of Khankendi and surrounding areas from the illegal armed groups of Armenia and terrorists gained exceptional significance for the full restoration of sovereignty over the internationally recognized territories of Azerbaijan, as well as for ensuring human and citizens' rights and freedoms.

Speeding up the ongoing construction and building works and the reintegration process in the liberated areas, aimed at the socio-political development of the Karabakh and East Zangazur Economic Regions and the restoration of the rights and freedoms of former internally displaced persons violated within nearly thirty years.

The ongoing measures taken to effectively protect human rights and large-scale projects implemented pave the way for more efficient protection of human rights and freedoms, the further improvement of the standard of living and lifestyle, increasing attention to low-income families and vulnerable groups of the population, and in general, addressing other problems.

The year 2023 was graced in the history of our country the "Year of Heydar Aliyev" in commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the birth of Heydar Aliyev, the National Leader of the Azerbaijani people, the founder of the independent state of Azerbaijan, and a distinguished political and state leader, and events at national and international levels dedicated to this powerful personality.

Specifically, it should be noted that the Decree "On measures to ensure human and citizens' rights and freedoms" dated February 22, 1998, and the "State Program on the Protection of Human Rights" approved by the Order dated June 18, 1998, issued by the National Leader laid down the foundations of institutional reforms in the field of protection of human rights for the first time in Azerbaijan. As the continuation of these reforms aimed at building democratic and legal state, shaping civil society, and efficiently protecting, ensuring, and promoting human rights and freedoms and only based on the recommendation of the National Leader, the Ombudsman Institution was established as an effective human rights protection mechanism.

These important human rights reforms are being continued by Ilham Aliyev, the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Important initiatives were made to expand the mandate of the Ombudsman, who has a tremendous role in implementing the supreme goal of the state to protect human and citizen's rights and freedoms, in line with the norms of international law, and new activity directions were determined.

As a result of the next such initiative regarding amending the Constitutional Law on the Commissioner for Human Rights (Ombudsman) of the Republic of Azerbaijan (hereinafter the Constitutional Law on Ombudsman), the Ombudsman's mandate was expanded; the fulfillment of functions of an independent mechanism for protection and promotion of the Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC) and ensuring the equality and preventing discrimination was designated; and in accordance with the directions of the activities, the mandate to cooperate with local, regional, and international organizations, human rights institutions of other countries, and enter into agreements for this purpose and be represented in international organizations was officially determined. These amendments also consider issues essential for the implementation of the recommendations made by international organizations and align the activities with the Paris Principles.

The Ombudsman continued her activities with state authorities, civil society organizations, international organizations, and foreign colleagues in effective cooperation and took the necessary measures to strengthen the existing relations and increase capacities in order to ensure reliable protection and effective ensuring of human rights and citizens' rights and freedoms.

The Ombudsman implemented various measures with a view to restoring human rights and freedoms specified in the Constitution of Azerbaijan and international treaties to which our state is a party, as well as those violated by state bodies, municipalities, and legal entities that are in state or municipal ownership or whose controlling stake belongs to the state or municipality (including public legal entities) and budget organizations of Azerbaijan and their officials, and to prevent human rights violations.

The Ombudsman received 29,411 applications in 2023.

These applications are received as a rule, by post, e-mail, online format, during receptions held in the Center for Reception of Citizens, operating in the administrative building "House of Government" and regional centers, via the "916 Call Center" operating 7/24 and official social platforms, as well as during meetings of the Ombudsman, the staff of the Office and regional centers with population groups held across the country, and in the course of the monitoring visits conducted to penitentiary institutions, pre-trial detention facilities, temporary detention places (TDPs), guardhouses, immigration detention places, as well as other places, which persons cannot leave at their own will, including relevant healthcare, social and education institutions.

The necessary measures have been taken regarding each application in accordance with the Constitutional Law on Ombudsman, competent authorities were requested to restore the violated rights, and the applicants have been informed about the results of the measures undertaken accordingly. The applicants were given legal advice regarding applications falling outside the mandate of the Ombudsman.

The practice of investigation and analysis of the applications, and cooperation with state bodies played a significant role in prompt solutions of a number of problems, the prevention of bureaucracy and possible violations, and the improvement of the legislation.

In order to find a complex solution to the problems of the population groups, the Ombudsman has appealed to the relevant competent state authorities and presented recommendations and the problems were gradually addressed.

It should be noted that the Ombudsman's participation each year in the discussions in the Parliament and meetings of the related Committees regarding the bill of state budget for the upcoming years and recommendations proposed by her contributed to the increase in efficiency in ensuring human rights.

At the initiative and organization of the Ombudsman, different events and exchanges of views and practices in the field of human rights were organized for the purpose of increasing awareness of human rights, developing coordination among authorities, and enhancing cooperation with local, regional, and international organizations and human rights institutions of other countries. Under this light, holding events in the framework of the "Year of Heydar Aliyev" in Baku and regions regarding contributions of the National Leader to human rights protection, during "Human Rights Month-Long campaign" declared in connection with 18 June - Human Rights Day, "Child Rights Month-Long Campaign" dedicated to 20 November, the anniversary of the adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), as well as various awareness raising events dedicated to 10 December – International Day of Human Rights and those launched according to the "Action Plan for the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)," "Transformation of Our World: Agenda for Sustainable Development by 2030" were of significant importance.

As well, prior to the early presidential elections in Azerbaijan declared and appointed to 7 February 2024 by the relevant Presidential Order, a large-scale awareness-raising event on the topic "Ensuring Citizen's Electoral Rights"

was organized in cooperation with the Office of the Commissioner for Human Rights (Ombudsman) of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Central Election Commission in Baku, Ganja, Sheki, Masalli, Guba, and Nakhchivan.

The Ombudsman's participation in different international events and speeches dealing with several global problems of human rights plays a significant role in the promotion of reforms in the field of human rights and freedoms in the country and the conveyance of the truths about Azerbaijan to the world community.

Fact-finding missions were carried out within the Ombudsman's mandate, and international experts were involved in this process. The reports about historical, religious, and cultural properties, destructed cemeteries, mass graves found in Edilli village in the liberated areas, as well as missing persons as one of the serious humanitarian consequences of the First Karabakh War and recruitment of children by Armenia in hostilities, armed groups and in general, in the policy of hatred, have been sent to international organizations and the global community, and made calls to an international audience for the prevention of such wrongful actions.

The Ombudsman expediently reacted to double standards and statements accepted against our country in this context and addressed the international organizations related to these issues.

Overall, the annual report included activities in the field of protection and restoration of human and citizens' rights and freedoms in our country, measures aimed at solving the problems of the vulnerable groups of the population, scientific-analytical and legal education activities, international relations, cooperation with civil society organizations, and recommendations and proposals for effective protection of human rights.

In conclusion, I do thank every person who appealed to the Ombudsman, state institutions, and CSOs for the fruitful cooperation with the Ombudsman in the field of protecting human rights.

Sabina Aliyeva

The Commissioner for Human Rights
of the Republic of Azerbaijan
(Ombudsman)

Chapter I

PROTECTION OF HUMAN AND CITIZENS' RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS

1.1. Protection of Civil and Political Rights

Right to liberty. According to the Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan, everyone has the right to liberty. This right refers to that everyone lawfully present within the territory of the Republic of Azerbaijan may freely move, choose their place of residence, and leave the territory of the Republic of Azerbaijan, as well as that a citizen of the Republic of Azerbaijan has the right to freely return to his/her country whenever he/she so desires.

Having an ID card enables a citizen to move freely without any obstacles, to apply to state authorities, enterprises, institutions and organizations, and local self-governing bodies and to ensure the implementation of his/her rights.

According to the requirements of the legislation, citizens of the Republic of Azerbaijan must be registered based on their place of residence and domicile. This aimed at ensuring the registration of individuals living in Azerbaijan, enabling them to fulfill their duties towards others, the state, and society, and ensuring the implementation of human and citizen rights and freedoms, including social protection, pension provision, conscription, execution of court judgments, and other similar matters.

During the investigation of applications received by the Ombudsman dealing with ID Cards and passports and registration based on place of residence and domicile, it has been determined that many complaints were about the de-registration of individuals by the addresses of administrative buildings of police authorities according to Decree No. 55s by the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan, dated 9 April 2003.

As it is well known, according to Clause 1 of the Cabinet of Ministers' Decree No. 55s, citizens of Azerbaijan without a place of residence should be registered at the address of the corresponding authority of the Ministry of Internal Affairs issuing ID Cards, and the address should be conditionally indicated in the "place of residence" section of the ID Card upon issuing.

Under Article 9 of the Law "On the Registration of Place of Residence and Domicile," the grounds for the de-registration by the place of residence were determined. However, analyses of the incoming complaints show that in some cases, citizens were de-registered without statutory grounds and ID cards were de-activated.

(App. No. 3467-23): *Applicant A., who were registered at the administrative building of the Sheki City-District Police Department, together with his child, in 2019, appealed to the Ombudsman, saying that they were de-registered without being informed and without a valid reason. Therefore, he asks to investigate the issue and assist in re-registration.*

After the Ombudsman's appeal to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the applicant, together with his child, was registered at the place of residence in Boyuk Dehne village in Sheki district.

(App. No. 3360-23): *Applicant A. appealed to the Ombudsman, saying that the house belonging to his family was auctioned according to the Binagadi District Court Decision, his family members were de-registered, and since that time, he has been registered at the administrative building of the District Police Office as a person without a place of residence, but currently he is de-registered without any valid reason. The applicants also added that he is a person with a disability of second-degree and suffering from oncological disease. The*

applicant complained that due to the inactive status of his ID card, he is not able to sufficiently use his right to health, and services under the mandatory health insurance and prescribed treatment measures.

Following an inquiry to the Ministry of Internal Affairs regarding the application, the applicant was registered at the address of the administrative building of the District Police Office.

In some cases, the invalidity of the ID cards of the de-registered individuals impeded entering into employment agreements and using the services falling under mandatory health insurance, and the rights to social security, education, and other rights were restricted.

(App. No. 13759-23): *Applicant appealed to the Ombudsman and said that he was de-registered from the administrative building, and as a result he could not change his ID card due to reaching the age of 25. Furthermore, the applicant indicated that he was renting an apartment due to the absence of his own housing, and that since 2017, he has been deprived of the parental care. In addition, it was not possible to sign an employment contract with him as his ID card was invalid. Also, the applicant stated that he could not use the services of the mandatory health insurance.*

After an inquiry to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, eventually, the applicant was registered as a result of the necessary assistance provided him with the documentation.

The applications often cover issues related to the failure of execution of court decisions regarding re-registering by the corresponding police authorities at the administrative building of the police office.

(App. No. 15419-23): *Applicant appealed to the Ombudsman, stating that the Sabunchu District Police Office did not execute the decision of the Baku Administrative Court regarding re-registration at the administrative building of the relevant police office.*

After an inquiry to the Ministry of Internal Affairs regarding the complaint, the decision was executed, and the applicant was provided with the necessary assistance and registered.

Considering the potential risks that emerge subsequently with the registration of citizens of the Republic of Azerbaijan without place of residence at the address of the corresponding authority of the Ministry of Internal Affairs issuing ID cards, as well as the conditional indication of the address in the "place of residence" section of the ID card upon issuing it for them as provided by Decree No. 55s of the Cabinet of Ministers, it is essential to make amendments and additions to the Decree in question and address the problem related to the registration of citizens.

In general, in order to eliminate problems regarding the registration of persons, whose houses are not legally documented for their ownership, it would be appropriate to develop a relevant mechanism in accordance with the legislation.

Also, in previous annual reports, the Ombudsman proposed the inventarization and state registration of houses arbitrarily and illegally built on the lands occupied by various persons in Baku, and in the surrounding settlements and villages, as well as in areas belonging to joint farms (sovkhozes/state-owned farms) since the middle of the last century, as well as the houses built on lands provided by the municipalities for individual housing, as well as the provision of addresses to real estate and transport infrastructure in those and new residential areas.

Everyone lawfully present in the territory of the Republic of Azerbaijan is entitled to leave the country. This is one of the most important elements of the right to liberty.

Article 9.3 of the Migration Code of the Republic of Azerbaijan provides the grounds for temporary restriction of the right to leave the country.

The Ombudsman has received several applications dealing with the removal of restrictions imposed on leaving the territory of the Republic of Azerbaijan and ensuring the freedom to move outside the country's territory. The relevant state authorities have been addressed regarding these applications, and necessary measures have been taken to restore rights.

(App. No. 9284-23): *Applicant A. appealed to the Ombudsman and reported that despite the closing of the criminal case against him, the ban on his leaving the country has not been lifted.*

Following an inquiry to the Prosecutor General's Office of the Republic of Azerbaijan regarding this complaint, the ban has been lifted.

Analysis of the complaints reveals that court decisions regarding the unlawful imposition of temporary restrictions on leaving the country are sometimes not executed.

(App. No. 4830-23): *Applicant H. applied to the Ombudsman, stating that the Binagadi District Court decision considered unlawful the ban imposed on his departure from the country since November 2021, and the decision was sent to the Anti-Corruption Directorate with the Prosecutor General's Office of Azerbaijan for execution, but the ban was not lifted.*

After an inquiry to the corresponding authority, the travel ban imposed on the applicant was lifted.

Not informing individuals about the travel ban and being informed only at the moment of changing their ID (national passport) or when crossing the border restricts their other rights as well. Therefore, the Ombudsman once again proposed to amend the legislation regarding the obligation to send notifications to the citizens, whose right to exit and enter the country has been restricted, from the moment of the entry of the information about them into the "Entry-Exit and Registration" interagency automated information-search system.

In recent years, several people have appealed to the Ombudsman, requesting assistance in returning close relatives, especially women and children, who are involved in armed groups fighting in the Republic of Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic, back to our country.

After receiving those applicants at various times, the Ombudsman has continued cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan and other competent state authorities to investigate and resolve the existing problem and assist our citizens in returning to the country. Within this framework of activity, in 2023, a total of 60 citizens of Azerbaijan, including 13 women and 47 children, were repatriated from Syria to our country.

As a result of measures taken by the Government of Azerbaijan, a total of 469 women and children have been repatriated from Iraq and Syria.

In order to strengthen repatriation activities, several measures have been implemented to advance legislation in this regard.

It is noteworthy that the "Rules for the Repatriation and Rehabilitation of Azerbaijani Minor Citizens in Difficult Conditions Abroad" were approved by the Presidential Decree dated 28 October 2023. These Rules aim to regulate organizational and legal issues related to the repatriation and rehabilitation of Azerbaijani minor citizens, unaccompanied or other legal representatives, in difficult conditions abroad, and coordinate the activities of relevant state bodies in this area and protect the rights of individuals in neglected and socially vulnerable situations.

Implementation of NPM functions as envisaged in the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

Within the Ombudsman's mandate, a total of 347 monitoring visits were conducted to institutions, which persons cannot leave at their own will across the country, including police authorities, temporary detention centers, pre-trial detention facilities, penitentiary facilities, immigration detention centers for irregular migrants, psychiatric institutions, and state childcare facilities.

In 2023, in order to investigate the detention conditions, treatment and incoming applications, as well as review the documentation, the Ombudsman and its National Preventive Group (NPG), carried out monitoring visit to places, which persons cannot leave at their own will, including 51 to the institutions of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, 169 to penitentiary facilities of the Ministry of Justice' Penitentiary Service, 45 to the institutions of the Ministry of Science and Education, 25 to the institutions of the Ministry of Health, 9 to the institutions of the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of Population (MLSP), 1 to the institutions of the Ministry of Defense, 2 to the institutions of the State Migration Service, 6 to the institutions of the State Security Service, and 39 to the children's homes. 104 of these visits were unscheduled.

During the visits, the implementation status of previously issued recommendations was followed up. Also, the incoming applications to the Ombudsman, information disseminated in the media and social networks regarding detainees, as well as the situation regarding ensuring their rights, were investigated.

Arrested and detained persons, as well as those held in facilities where persons cannot leave at their own will, were privately interviewed in the facilities where they were detained. During the interviews, the conditions of detention, treatment, and provision of healthcare services were investigated. The interviewed persons were informed about their rights. Furthermore, the relevant state authorities were requested as deemed necessary.

Armenian-origin persons who were accused of committing crimes in the liberated territories of Azerbaijan following the cessation of military operations as per the trilateral Statement dated 10 November 2020, including those who were identified as a result of the local anti-terror operations in September 2023, and imposed restraint measures based on the court orders, were also received in the facilities where they are detained. In the course of the visits, their detention conditions, treatment, accessibility to medical services, and applications were investigated. They were informed about the Ombudsman's mandate and provided with educational materials on the rights of detained persons in their own language. In addition, their right to phone contact with family members was also ensured.

It should be noted that one of the main concerns found in penitentiary institutions is overcrowding. It was observed that in pre-trial detention facilities and some penal institutions, the number of detainees exceeded the designated capacity of the facilities. Subsequently, during the visit, it was found that in the Baku Pre-trial Detention Facility, with an overall capacity of 2,500 detainees, the number of detainees was beyond the limit. Also, in the Pre-trial Detention Facility No. 2 with a capacity of 700 detainees, 800 people were detained; in Pre-trial Detention Facility No. 3 with a capacity of 1,050 detainees, 1,400 were detained; and in Penitentiary Institution No. 2 designed for 1,200 detainees, there were 1,411 inmates.

Complex measures are continued in penitentiary institutions to reduce overcrowding. However, in many cases, the abundance of submissions on pretrial detention, and the extension of detention periods issued by investigative authorities, and the execution of these submissions by the courts have as a rule, led to overcrowding in pre-trial detention facilities.

The analysis shows that more than 100 people, who were subjected to pre-trial detention, are later acquitted by court decisions each year. Despite the acquittal of up to 200 detainees in some years, pre-trial detention has not only been applied but also, in several cases, extended during the criminal proceedings.

Considering the analysis of applications received by the Ombudsman and the outcomes of monitoring visits to pre-trial detention facilities, it is once again necessary to emphasize the importance of choosing alternatives to detention. Therefore, it is essential to expand the frequent application of non-custodial measures and give preference to alternatives to detention when determining penalties.

According to statistics, the number of repeated offenders is steadily increasing. Thus, this number was 2,859 in 2020, and 4,374 in 2021, but increased to 5,127 by 2022. For this reason, the relevant state institutions should analyze and take measures to address the underlying reasons and conditions that lead to the reoccurrence of crimes.

In order to ensure the execution of penalties by court decisions, the measures undertaken by the penal execution authorities should be analyzed, and their effectiveness should be evaluated.

Education plays a crucial role in the social integration of prisoners and in stimulating personal development.

It is important to ensure the right to education for juveniles and young prisoners, in particular, and to implement different approaches for such individuals.

According to the principles outlined in UN General Assembly Resolution 45/111 on “Basic Principles for the Treatment of Prisoners” all prisoners have the right to take part in cultural activities and education aimed at the full development of the human personality. Therefore, it would be appropriate to amend punishment-execution legislation and other legislative acts that allow non-dangerous and less serious juveniles and young convicts to serve in different regimes and to create a special pilot institution for this purpose.

Analysis of incoming applications, inbound calls by the “916 Call Center”, monitoring visits to penitentiary institutions by the NPG, and information published in the media and circulated through social networks show that in 2023, for the rehabilitation of prisoners, the Penitentiary Service applied a number of new approaches that allowed for positive developments. E.g., the expansion of the experience of releasing prisoners from the institutions where they serve. Although this experience existed before, it was mainly applied to juvenile offenders. Since 2023, for the first time, non-dangerous and less serious offenders have been allowed short-term release to visit their family members for up to 7 days.

The Ombudsman welcomed the exploitation of the Penitentiary Service’s Call Center, the activity of social media network, and improvements in detention conditions, especially regarding nutrition and food issues. The Call Center contributes significantly to ensuring a prompter investigation of citizen complaints and enabling either applicants or detainees to receive immediate information about their next of kin.

It is crucial to inform families when the detainees are transferred to different institutions. Therefore, along with the right of the detainee to phone contact as provided by the law, it is relevant to amend the legislation regarding providing information about changing penal institutions, transferring to medical facilities, and ensuring the long-distance calls of detainees at the state level.

The detainees’ right to legal assistance and contact with a lawyer is one of the fundamental safeguards for their protection from ill-treatment. Experience shows that ill-treatment increases from the moment when freedom is restricted. Accordingly, ensuring access of the detainees under police custody to legal counsel during this period is one of the key mechanisms against ill-treatment.

As in previous years, in 2023, the Ombudsman’s “916 Call Center” was an effective mechanism for addressing potential difficulties for lawyers meeting their clients. Although this right was ensured with the intervention of the Ombudsman, the problem remains relevant.

The complaints regarding Khatai, Nasimi, Nizami, and Binagadi District Police Departments in Baku, as well as from the Absheron District Police Department and the Main Department for Combating Organized Crime under the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Azerbaijan, were mainly about obstacles created by the noted authorities to the meetings of detainees and prisoners with their lawyers, despite the provision of appropriate orders for the meetings.

In some cases, shortcomings in the documentation at police agencies cause improper organization of registration processes, making it difficult to determine compliance with procedural deadlines related to detention and often leading to failure to identify such violations.

Bearing in mind the requirements of the legislation, comprehensive and detailed registration must be conducted for each detained person, including his/her name, reason for and time of detention, interrogation, transfer to another institution, all procedural actions related. Other relevant information should be described in detail.

Medical screening of detainees is a fundamental guarantee against mistreatment. Furthermore, according to the law, detainees shall initially undergo a medical examination by doctors at the detention facility within 24 hours of their admission. The medical examination of the arrested or detained person can also be conducted by a doctor of his/her own choice based on the petition of the detained person or his/her representative, and on the decision of the body conducting the criminal process. In this case, according to the law, the costs of the medical examination are covered by the detainee himself.

One of the issues focused on in monitoring visits to places where persons cannot leave voluntarily is the accessibility to medical care. In the medical rooms of some places of temporary detention, e.g., in the Garadagh and Yasamal District Police Offices, as well as the Goychay District Police Department, expired medication was found. Furthermore, in some cases, medical records were recorded by police officers instead of medical personnel.

Under the law, the detained persons are entitled to be informed about their rights, and it is an obligation. Therefore, persons taken into police custody should be informed of their rights by the police without delay and in a language they understand. In order to ensure this, a form setting out those rights in a straightforward manner should be systematically given to persons detained by the police at the very outset of their custody and should be asked to sign a statement attesting that they have been informed of their rights.

According to police legislation, a person detained should be informed of the reasons for his arrest and any charges against him to the extent possible. They should be promptly informed of the specific procedures applied to them. Therefore, during the monitoring visits implemented within the framework of the Ombudsman's NPM activities, ensuring the rights of detained persons, and informing them of the proceedings against them were primary subjects of investigation.

It is necessary to hang written boards in easily readable places in all institutions from where detained persons can easily read and understand their rights and duties.

One of the shortcomings found in TDPs was the placement of arrested or detained persons in cells without considering their previous conviction or health status. For instance, during the visit to the Nizami DPO, it was found that first-time offenders were held together with recidivists in violation of internal disciplinary regulations. Similar violations were observed by the members of the NPG at TDPs in the Khatai RPO, Sabail DPO, Shamkir DPD, and Aghstafa DPD. So, it is obvious that there are still some shortcomings regarding detention conditions in TDPs.

Attention should be paid to proper lighting, ventilation, providing seats considering the number of detainees in cells, organizing walking areas in alignment with international standards, and creating necessary conditions for outdoor physical exercise.

During 2023, the NPG conducted preventive visits to psychiatric institutions and narcological treatment centers under the Ministry of Health, and the overall situation regarding the protection of patients' rights, detention conditions, and treatment was investigated.

In psychiatric hospitals located in the Baku and surrounding regions, there are problems of overcrowding, patients' living areas not meeting international standards, and wards being closely located, sometimes adjacent to each other. Consequently, most psychiatric facilities across the country require substantial renovation, considering modern standards during the rebuilding process.

A shortage of personnel in these overcrowded hospitals creates impediments to the provision of quality and effective medical care, although there were vacancies for medical and paramedical staff. Thus, during the monitoring visit to the Republican Narcological Center, it was determined that there is a significant long list of those waiting for treatment. Therefore, there is a need to increase the number of narcological facilities nationwide.

Considering the problems found in narcological treatment institutions, the overcrowding in these facilities, and the high number of individuals seeking treatment, it is crucial to apply modern approaches to treating and rehabilitating substance users, to increase the number of narcologists and clinical psychologists, and establish rehabilitation centers in order to achieve the goals in this field. In addition, it would be appropriate to create specialized departments within medical institutions for the treatment of drug addicted adolescents.

During monitoring conducted at the Infants House and Child Psychoneurological Center based in Baku under the Ministry of Health of Azerbaijan, ongoing shortcomings related to children's nutrition have been found. The shortcomings were mainly about menus not meeting modern standards, food products failing to meet children's needs, a lack of fruit variety, and inadequate provision of natural dairy products to children. Recognizing that every child has the right to be healthy and develop properly, it is essential to revise and update the "Nutrition Standards for Children in Infant Houses, Kindergarten-Infant Houses, and Children's Homes" to align with modern standards.

The lack of psychological work with children in infant houses, as well as the absence of a psychologist job, is still a problem. The Ombudsman takes the view that it is important to make relevant amendments to the Cabinet of Ministers' Decision No. 61, dated 29 May 1996, "On the model staff list of budget-funded educational institutions" to include positions such as "child psychologist" and "early development specialist."

During monitoring at educational institutions under the Ministry of Education, it was found that some recommendations and proposals previously given were implemented, however, certain shortages still remain uneliminated. The institutions that are in need of overhaul, especially the integrated training boarding schools, need to improve their conditions of accommodation.

In boarding schools for children with disabilities (limited health capacities), shortcomings were found in the provision of appropriate learning and teaching materials for middle- and upper-grade students with special education needs. Furthermore, there is a need to increase attention to the mental health of younger children in these schools, to develop standard documents and individual work plans for conducting psychological work with children, and to ensure classrooms are equipped with necessary materials for relevant activities.

During monitoring visits, it was observed that there is a need for the organization of effective recreation time for children, as well as the importance of identifying their interests, abilities, and professional interests. Also, most schools lack the financial and technical infrastructure, including workshops, needed for conducting arts and crafts lessons and vocational training.

The Ombudsman was granted the competence to use technical means to make photo, audio, and video recordings during preventive visits under the amendments made to the Constitutional Law on the Ombudsman made on 9 June 2023, and to take measures to eliminate identified violations by inviting representatives of state bodies, municipalities, and other institutions (including the representative of the prosecutorial authority). These

amendments allow them to contribute to the effectiveness of preventive measures against torture and ill-treatment, along with expanding the Ombudsman's mandate as an NPM, and creating opportunities for the effective protection of the rights of persons in places that they cannot leave at their own will.

It should be noted that, as a part of the awareness-raising activities for the employees of places of detention, cooperation with the Police Academy and the Academy of Justice was continued. During lectures given in the Police Academy to the deputy chiefs of district and city police departments, as well as regular listener-officers. On the other hand, the Academy of Justice, and candidates for judges, court experts, and recruits to judicial bodies in the Academy of Justice, were informed about the Ombudsman's activities under the NPM mandate, including preventive visits.

In addition, during interactive trainings organized by the Ombudsman Office in the institutions of the Penitentiary Service, the trainees were informed of the assistance and social adaptation support mechanisms established by the state; questions of the convicted persons were answered in detail, and the Ombudsman's recommendations were delivered, and the imprisoned persons' complaints were accepted for investigation.

Protection of the right of access to information. The protection of the right of access to information is the main safeguard for the freedom of speech, increasing transparency in the activities of state authorities, combating corruption, and increasing public accountability. Furthermore, it plays a crucial role in the protection of their rights as well.

Within the framework of the control mechanism as provided by the legislation, the Ombudsman continued its activities to ensure the right of access to information, investigate and respond to complaints about the violation of this right, increase awareness about this right, and conduct monitoring and analysis.

According to the Law on Access to Information of Azerbaijan, an information owner is obligated to provide anyone who lawfully seeks information freely, on an unrestricted and equal basis, with the opportunity to disclose public information through internet resources. Furthermore, the information owner bears responsibility for organizing the availability of information as defined by legislation.

As a result of monitoring and investigations, it was found that most state institutions have made significant progress in the creation of internet information resources. However, the information resources of some institutions still do not fully comply with the requirements of the legislation.

The Ombudsman promptly investigated complaints about serious violations of the right of access to information, such as the information owner's failure to disclose requested information in internet information resources, not responding to information requests within the legally determined period, providing incomplete information, or refusing to respond without a valid reason. The relevant authorities were contacted regarding the complaints, and the complaints were resolved.

(App. No. 15368-23): *Applicant N. appealed to the Ombudsman, saying that the Regional Water Supply Department No. 7 of the "Azersu" OSJC did not provide two of his information requests, and asked for help. Following an inquiry to this OSCJ regarding this complaint, the information request was responded.*

(App. No. 15581-23): *Applicant A. appealed to the Ombudsman, asking for assistance in responding to his information request addressed to the Penitentiary Service of the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Azerbaijan necessary for his doctoral thesis. The complaint was investigated, and the issue was raised before the institution, and the request was provided.*

According to Presidential Decree No. 1361 dated on 3 May 2017 on the Approval of the "List of Authorized Persons to Draw Up Protocols on Administrative Offenses Handled by District (City) Courts," the Ombudsman, the Chief of the Ombudsman Office, and the deputy head of the Office are authorized to draw up protocols on administrative offenses specified in Articles 371-374, 381.2, 381.3, and 554 of the Code of Administrative Offenses of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

The complaints about the violation of the right of access to information were investigated and relevant information was requested from the respective information holders.

When the requirements of the legislation were found to be violated, protocols on administrative offenses were drawn up under Article 374 of the Code of Administrative Offenses and sent to the appropriate courts. Subsequently, information holders were subjected to administrative punishment measures according to the decisions made.

(App. No. 10130-23): *Applicant A. applied to the Ombudsman, complaining that his rights were violated as his written information request was not responded to by the Director of the public-legal entity "Sheki District Central Hospital."*

During the examination of the complaint, it was found that the requirements of Articles 10.4.1, 10.4.4, 10.4.5, and 24.1 of the Law on Access to Information of Azerbaijan, by failing to respond to the request within the legally determined period, including sending inaccurate responses to the Ombudsman Office. Consequently, an administrative offense falling under Article 374.1 of the Administrative Offenses Code was committed.

The protocol on administrative offense regarding the violation and supporting documents were sent to the Sheki District Court for investigation, as a result of which the information owner was subjected to an administrative fine as a punitive sanction. After the court's decision entered into legal force, the information request was responded to by the information holder.

In addition to the abovementioned, information requests sent to the Ombudsman as an information owner were fully and comprehensively answered within the timeframe specified by the Constitutional Law on Ombudsman and the Law on Access to Information.

(App. No. 15980-23): *Applicant M. addressed the Ombudsman with an information request. The complainant asked to provide information on the incoming applications about domestic violence for the period of 2021-2022. The applicant's information request was responded to within the legally determined period.*

(App. No. 17334-23): *Applicant T. addressed the Ombudsman with an information request, the requester asked to provide him with information about the number of recommendations that have been given to the state authorities since 2019, and about their implementation status. The information request was responded to within the legally defined period, and the requester thanked the Ombudsman.*

To eliminate conditions that lead to negative situations and create equal opportunities for citizens to obtain information, the Ombudsman has consistently conducted comprehensive awareness-raising activities for information holders across the country. Educational publications addressing various groups of the population have been prepared as part of these activities.

The Ombudsman Institution has established effective collaboration with state agencies, several regional and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and national human rights institutions of other countries in the field of protection of the right of access to information. Currently, it continues to maintain this cooperation. Furthermore, the Ombudsman Office has become an institutional member of the International Conference of Information Commissioners (ICIC), which brings together information commissioners and other relevant institutions working in these fields with a view to recognizing their significant influence ensuring the right of access to information and advocating for public access to information.

Membership in the ICIC plays significant role in terms of promoting the activities implemented to protect the right of access to information, and exchanging good practices, and supporting the country's position on the international stage.

The experience acquired from international events plays a crucial role in the effective protection of the right of access to information.

In order to strengthen the role of information commissioners in protecting and promoting the right to information and sharing international experience in the relevant field, the ICIC and the Government held the 14th Edition of the ICIC in Manila, Philippines. The representatives of the Ombudsman Office took part in this international conference, where they spoke about the activities of the Ombudsman of Azerbaijan in the respective field. At the end of the conference, the ICIC officials voiced the position of the Ombudsman of Azerbaijan at the conference, emphasizing the importance of ICIC members supporting the efforts in resolving the existing landmine problem in our liberated territories.

As a continuation all that was noted, following the Azerbaijan Ombudsman's appeal to the ICIC, the ICIC Executive Committee adopted a statement calling on the parties to initiate dialogues and discussions for developing effective mechanisms for peacebuilding, ensuring reliable and timely disclosure of information, as well as combating disinformation, hate speech, and violations of human rights.

To increase their professional capacities, the staff members of the Ombudsman Institution joined an online Global Conference on "The importance of access to information for online space", which was organized jointly by UNESCO, the Bonavero Institute of Human Rights of the University of Oxford, and the Foreign, Commonwealth, & Development Office of the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland on 28 September, the International Day for Universal Access to Information.

The large-scale activities towards promoting the right of access to information support the more effective realization of this right in the country, contribute to the development of the information society, and promote open government.

Judicial Guarantees for Rights and Freedoms. In democratic societies, the role of the judiciary system is determined by the constitutional principles of the state, the rule of law, and the protection of human rights and freedoms.

The Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan guarantees everyone's protection of his/her rights and liberties through court. Measures taken to effectively implement this right and the improve the national judicial system are ongoing.

Within the authority defined by the Constitutional Law, the Ombudsman has established effective cooperation with the Ministry of Justice and its institutions, the Judicial-Legal Council, the Constitutional Court, the Supreme Court, and other judicial bodies in order to ensure and more effectively protect human rights and freedoms in Azerbaijan. This cooperation, as well as the complaint investigation practice in relevant areas, including identifying and promptly addressing existing problems and gaps in the activities of courts, plays a significant role.

Under the Constitutional Law, the Ombudsman has the authority to review complaints about human rights violations related to judicial procrastination, loss of documents or failure to provide documents in a timely manner, and delays in the execution of court judgments (Art. 1.9), to apply to the court for the restoration of rights violated as a result of the decision or action (inaction) of the state bodies, municipalities, and other institutions, or an official (Art. 13.2.7), and to submit an inquiry to the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Azerbaijan when an individual's rights are violated by the normative acts in force (Art. 13.2.8).

The Ombudsman consistently participates in legislative analysis and improvement, including the preparation of a bill of normative legal acts, providing opinions and recommendations, and conducting generalized analysis of complaints in the relevant areas. These analyses are crucial in terms of improving the activities of courts and eliminating existing shortages. Furthermore, as part of cooperation with the Judicial Academy of the Ministry of Justice, the Ombudsman and employees of the Office deliver lectures on human rights-related topics for judges and candidates for judges enrolled in long-term courses.

In 2023, complaints received by the Ombudsman were mainly about judicial protection of rights and freedoms, such as of rejection of claims without valid reason, disregard for petitions, dissatisfaction with the judge's actions (or inactions), violation of procedural legal norms during court proceedings, artificial extension of the time for the case review in some instances, assistance in review petition in respect of re-hearing of court act on new established circumstances, assistance in ensuring fair investigation, non-timely delivery of court decisions to the parties, dissatisfaction with court records, non-execution of court decisions, assistance in provision of legal counsel for cassation and additional cassation, and other issues. The complaints were investigated within the Ombudsman's mandate, and the complainants were explained the legal requirements regarding the complaints falling outside the mandate.

Some complaints were also about violations of citizens' right to appeal, non-compliance with legally determined procedural deadlines, multiple bureaucracies in court proceedings leading to delays, and failure to conduct court expertise within the specified timeframes.

(App. No. 7023-23): *Applicant appealed to the Ombudsman, saying that he was not informed about the status of her appeal to the Aghjabedi District Court, and asking to investigate the issues and take appropriate measures. After the appeal to the District Court, the applicant was received, his concerns were heard, and questions were answered. He was also informed of his rights and duties.*

(App. No. 2854-23): Applicant lodged a file with the Ombudsman, complaining that a criminal case against him pending in the Ganja Court of Grave Crimes has not been completed within one year and six months, and was added that delays were allowed in the judicial process.

In the response to the inquiry addressed to the Court-Legal Council regarding the complaint, it was stated that the criminal case is still pending due to the involvement of multiple defendants.

However, it was also noted that the prolonged review of the case in the court without reaching a conclusion has been brought to the attention of the relevant court, and it was recommended that necessary procedural steps be taken without further delay to ensure the issuance of the final court decision.

According to Article 97 of the Civil Procedural Code of Azerbaijan, the court shall, for the purpose of clarification of matters emerging in the course of hearing and requiring special knowledge, upon application of a person participating in the case or further to its own initiative, appoint an expert examination. Article 101 of that Code stipulates that an expert, shall issue an opinion and submit it immediately in written form to the court within one month from the day of receipt of the court decision regarding the appointment of an expert examination, with

exceptions specified in the Code, where the deadline may vary from 3 to 10 days. In addition, under Article 97.5 of the Code, where any party refrains from participating in an expert examination or causes obstacles in the course of the performance of an examination, and it is impossible by circumstances of the case to hold an expert examination without the participation of said party, the court shall, depending on fact which party refuses to participate in the expert examination and the importance of such an expert examination for said party, have the right to acknowledge a fact for the establishment of which expert examination is appointed, as established or rejected.

(App. No. 12605-23): *Applicant M. appealed to the Ombudsman, the civil case based on his claim “regarding the division of the share, payment of compensation in case division is not possible, and sale by auction” has been pending for nearly three years, before the Sabail District Court. It is also indicated that no relevant decision has been made on the case, indicating a delay in the legal process.*

In the response to the inquiry addressed to the Sabail District Court regarding the complaint, it was reported that the mentioned civil case entered the court on December 30, 2021. A preparatory meeting for the case was held on February 3, 2022. A construction-technical expertise for the civil case in question was appointed by the Decision of the Sabail District Court dated March 28, 2022, and it was sent to the Court Expertise Center on April 13, 2022, for execution. However, after repeated refusals from the construction-technical expertise, the civil case was returned to the court on June 14, 2023. In the letter, it was indicated that due to the non-submission of the investigation object by the respondent, it was not possible to conduct the examination and answer the question posed before the experts in the decision.

The relevant property items with disputed subjects in the civil case, as noted in the court's decision, cannot be legally evaluated, and the final court decision cannot be accepted without examining the possibility of dividing the properties in nature. Therefore, a new construction-technical expertise has been appointed for the case, along with the execution of other civil matters, and sent to the Center. After receiving the respective expert opinion, the proceedings regarding the case were updated, and a court session was scheduled.

So, as it can be seen based on the abovementioned information, especially the complaint investigation practice, the Ombudsman faced sufficiently important facts related to the activities of courts and judges found while fulfilling her independent activities implementing within the mandate of the Constitution and based on legality, justice, and impartiality principles. Recognizing this comprehensive activity and acquired experience, the Ombudsman's representation at the Legal Council can significantly contribute to the Council's activities and also the improvement of the judicial-legal system and ensuring a prompter and more effective defense of human rights and freedoms in this field.

In addition, the Ombudsman Institution can further expand its relations with courts by considering international experiences. For instance, in many countries, ombudspersons have closer cooperation with courts, especially with the Supreme and Constitutional Courts. In some countries, within the authority of the Ombudsman, it has an *amicus curiae* – function (assisting the court by providing important information relevant to the case, even though not directly involved in the proceedings and not summoned by the parties involved). Good experiences ensuring more reliable protection of human rights and freedoms in the administration of justice can play a crucial role in the development of new directions in collaboration among institutions.

The implementation of court decisions constitutes an integral part of the right to judicial protection and, in general, the administration of justice. Failure to execute judgments not only limits the right to judicial protection but also undermines the authority of the courts.

According to Article 129 of the Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the courts of law shall render judgments on behalf of the state, and the execution thereof shall be obligatory.

Complaints regarding the non-enforcement of judgments were mainly about delays in execution measures, prolonged suspension of execution actions based on enforcement documents due to the lack of results in search operations against debtors, non-application of mandatory enforcement measures despite the decision not being voluntarily enforced for a long time (especially concerning state institutions), unethical behavior, cruel treatment, and so on by execution officials. The applicants were informed about the investigation conducted based on inquiries addressed to the Ministry of Justice and relevant (debtor) state institutions and its results. In some cases, the actions taken that resulted in the execution of judgments were fully ensured.

(App. No. 2690-23): *Applicant T. appealed to the Ombudsman, saying that the decision of the Salyan District Court regarding the relevant civil case was not enforced by the District Execution and Probation Office, and mandatory enforcement measures were not implemented.*

The Ombudsman requested the Ministry of Justice regarding the complaint and in response to the request, it was stated that based on the enforcement document dated September 8, 2021, a certain amount of funds should have been collected from the debtor and paid to the complainant, but this was not executed voluntarily by the debtor during the voluntary execution period at the Salyan district enforcement and probation office, and the property against which the claim could be directed was not identified.

In the response, it was also mentioned that during the review of the current complaint, the demand had been fully met as a result of measures taken by the local institution.

Sometimes, difficulties in implementing enforcement measures arise due to the failure to identify the location of the debtor. In such cases, even if a decision is made by the local enforcement institution to search for the debtor and sent to law enforcement agencies, sometimes the search measures are not carried out or are delayed. In response to inquiries addressed by the Ombudsman regarding these complaints, the location of a debtor was identified and given to the local enforcement institution, enforcement measures were continued, and in several cases, the demand was fulfilled. It should be noted that one of the main reasons for such delays in enforcement cases is the lack of effective coordination among relevant institutions.

(App. No. 4394-23): *Applicant Q. appealed to the Ombudsman regarding the non-execution of a civil case by the relevant decision of the Ganja Court of Appeal. During the investigation, it was found that, based on the enforcement document dated 19.02.2021 of the Ganja Court of Appeal, any interference with the applicant's contact with the child was prohibited. According to another enforcement document dated 18.11.2021 of the same court, the child was to be taken from the debtor and given to the custody of the applicant. Furthermore, a fixed monthly alimony of 130 manats was ordered to be paid to the applicant until the child reaches the age of majority.*

In response to the request addressed to the Ministry of Justice, it was indicated that due to his disappearance and change of residence with his underage child, a search procedure was initiated against the debtor on 25.02.2022. However, since there was no information available about the outcome of the search measures, a query was sent to the Sumgayit City Police Department. As a result of the measures taken, the debtor was apprehended on 16.05.2023 and handed over to the local institution. The child was transferred from the custody of the father to the applicant. In addition, according to the Ministry of Justice, measures were taken to fulfill the alimony demand.

There are still challenges regarding executing court decisions by the state institutions due to the inadequate mechanism for the execution of court decisions in relation to the debtor state institutions, the ineffectiveness of necessary enforcement tools, the poor coordination between enforcement agencies and relevant state bodies, and sometimes the lack of effective oversight over the execution of court decisions. Although there have been

positive results from related complaints, the process has sometimes been lengthened due to bureaucratic hurdles. In other cases, it has been challenging to achieve positive outcomes during the investigation period.

(App. No. 1437-23): Applicant A. lodged a repeated appeal to the Ombudsman, saying that the relevant decision of the Baku Administrative Court regarding the case has not been enforced by the debtor State Agency Azerbaijan Automobile Roads, and indicating that procrastination has occurred.

In the responses given to inquiries addressed to this Agency, it was stated that financing the compensation from the state budget to ensure the enforcement of the court decision falls under the authority of the Ministry of Finance. It is noted that if the allocated compensation is disbursed, the execution of the decision will be ensured.

According to the letter of response from the Ministry of Finance, it was stated that the Agency has no specific obligation regarding the claim demand based on the court decision, emphasizing that the Agency is an independent entity. The Agency generates income through its activities as defined by regulations. Therefore, it is noted that the enforcement of the court decision can be provided from the income earned through the responsible institution's independent activities.

Following the Ombudsman's subsequent application, based on the relevant court decision, the Agency ensured the payment of 172,451.48 manats to the applicant.

(App. No. 5762-23): Applicant Q. applied to the Ombudsman, stating that the decision of the Sumgayit Administrative-Economic Court dated 12.11.2019 regarding to consider demolition of the mansion located in Gobustan city is illegal and the restoration of the mansion to its previous state at the expense of the accountable Gobustan District Executive Authority (DEA), has not been executed.

In the response to the inquiry addressed to the Sumgayit Administrative Court, it was stated that the decision was sent to the debtor, Gobustan District Executive Authority, for execution on January 27, 2021. In the letter dated 10 February, 2021, of the Executive Authority, it was indicated that the execution of the decision is pending.

At a later stage, the court also sent reminder letters to the debtor, Gobustan DEA, for the execution of the decision, and warned that in case of failure to execute the decision, the entity would be fined up to 50,000 manats in accordance with Article 120 of the Code of Civil Procedure of Azerbaijan.

Despite subsequent warnings sent by the court to the Gobustan DEA, the execution of the court decision has not been ensured.

As it is obvious, in some cases, evading responsibilities by debtor institutions to execute court decisions and attempts to shift the burden to another institution negligence towards the execution process led to artificial delays in deadlines, and subsequently, seriously infringe the rights of the claimant. Furthermore, the limited implementation of forced execution measures and regulatory cautionary measures envisaged in legislation by courts in relation to state institutions open the door for these violations to be repeated. Therefore, it is essential to improve the experience of enforcing court decisions related to debtor state institutions.

One of the essential issues is the lack of effective court oversight established by legislation concerning the enforcement of court decisions. This is especially evident when court decisions are enforced by indebted state institutions. According to the decision of the Administrative Collegium of the Supreme Court of Azerbaijan dated May 11, 2023 (case No. 2-1(102)-623/2023), the measures taken by the debtor should ensure the final factual and legal consequences intended by the decision. In the first instance, courts should assess whether the enforcement of the court decision by the indebted administrative body constitutes "formal execution," investigate the reasons for the non-execution of the decision within the specified period and take into account the behavior of both parties

regarding the implementation of execution actions, considering the circumstances of the case and the content of the enforcement actions to be carried out.

(App. No. 13848-23): *Applicant B. appealed to the Ombudsman, and the Narimanov District Court issued a decision regarding his restoration to the position of principal in one of the general secondary schools in Absheron district and payment of compensation for dismissal on 29.07.2022. The higher-instance courts have upheld the decision; however, the executive decision document has not been enforced until the present time.*

In the response to the inquiry addressed to the Ministry of Science and Education of Azerbaijan, it was indicated that according to the Order dated 07.09.2023, the applicant has been compensated for unpaid wages on 22.09.2023 due to mandatory dismissal from their previous position.

In the response, it was also stated that the applicant was repeatedly dismissed from the position of school principal on 25.09.2023 based on the relevant order of the Ministry of Science and Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan, due to the serious shortages in management and supervision of the institution, and had failed to fulfill obligations under the labor function and employment contract, in accordance with Article 70, paragraph "c" of the Labor Code of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

It should be noted that the applicant in his application stated that on 08.09.2023, the employees of the Absheron-Khizi Regional Education Department took him to the school to execute the court decision. During the signing of the handover document, he was subjected to pressure and humiliated by the former school principal and other employees. He was also prevented from coming to work by taking the school's seal and stamp from him by the security police. Consequently, the court decision was executed formally.

Obviously, despite the legal restoration of the applicant to his previous position on 07.09.2023 and being invited to the workplace on 08.09.2023, on the same date, he was dismissed from the workplace by security police, and he was prevented from starting his duties in fact, and consequently, the court decision was not executed.

Overall, in order to ensure the execution of court decisions, efforts for supervision over the activities of enforcement officers, fulfillment of legal procedures in enforcement, development of a sense of responsibility, and prevention of instances of obstruction should be further strengthened.

Along with the abovementioned, in both 2023 and previous years, the analysis of applications received by the Ombudsman gives a reason to say that the legislation on the execution of court decisions should be advanced.

Mediation plays a special role in the alternative resolution of disputes handled by an impartial and interested third party, which results in upholding human rights and freedoms. From this perspective, the Ombudsman Office and the Mediation Council collaborate to investigate complaints related to mediation activities, identify and address issues in this field, improve legislation, and organize public awareness activities. So, the first meeting of the Working Group (WG), composed of representatives from relevant state institutions, and created the initiative of the Cabinet of Ministers and the Mediation Council, was held at the Ombudsman Office in early 2023. The Ombudsman has presented her opinions and proposals regarding bills amending the "Law on Mediation" submitted by the WG, as well as some normative legal acts associated with this bill.

The analysis of incoming applications reveals that parties to participate in the initiation mediation session related to commercial, family, and labor disputes, in accordance with the Law on Mediation, are unaware of the mediation institute and the mediation process. When responding to such applications, the applicants are explained to the requirements of the "Law on Mediation" and the relevant provisions of the Labor, Family, and Civil Procedure Codes of Azerbaijan.

Considering all the above, in order to increase public awareness in the field of mediation, it would be appropriate to enhance awareness-raising activities, including educational and campaigning activities across the country.

Right to Legal Aid. This right is a fundamental right that ensures the implementation of human and citizen rights and freedoms. This right not only enables people to exercise and protect their rights and freedoms but also guarantees protection against unlawful restrictions on rights and freedoms. Under this umbrella, Article 61 of the Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan establishes the right of everyone to receive qualified legal assistance.

The Ombudsman continues cooperation with courts and the Bar Association of Azerbaijan to ensure the right to receive professional legal aid, increase awareness in this field, and improve legislation. In 2023, the Ombudsman provided additional opinions and proposals regarding the draft law on amendments to the "Law on Lawyers and Legal Practice" of Azerbaijan.

The incoming applications about the violation of the right to legal aid were primarily about cases requesting state-funded legal aid due to insufficient funds to pay for the lawyers' services, unsuccessful applications for state-funded legal aid or in some cases, dissatisfaction with the performance of lawyers providing legal aid, on behalf of the state, and attorney misconduct, including misuse of trust and unethical behavior. Corresponding inquiries have been sent to courts and the Bar Association for the purpose of investigation and taking necessary measures. When the applications fell outside the Ombudsman's mandate and applicants have been explained requirements of the law.

Protection of the rights and freedoms of participants in pre-trial criminal procedures. Protection of the rights of participants in criminal proceedings was continued in cooperation with law enforcement agencies.

The complaints received by the Ombudsman regarding the protection of the rights and freedoms of participants in the criminal proceedings during the pre-trial stage often were about biased or non-objective preliminary investigations or inquiries, lack of information provided to the citizen about the progress of the investigation, rejection of initiating criminal proceedings without valid reason, failure to initiate criminal proceedings despite evidence, termination of criminal proceedings without reasonable ground, failure to issue procedural decision related to claims or to provide copy of decision, rude behavior, and other related matters.

Based on the Ombudsman's inquiries, and inquiries addressed to the prosecutorial authorities under the procedural supervision framework, in some cases, the legality of decisions to reject the initiation of criminal proceedings has been checked and when a failure to conduct a thorough and comprehensive investigation was found, such decisions were annulled. In addition, the material was returned to the relevant investigative and prosecutorial authorities for further investigation, in some cases, criminal proceedings were initiated, and decisions regarding the conclusion of criminal proceedings were revoked, leading to a reinvestigation of the case.

As a result of analyses of the incoming applications, including response letters to inquiries addressed to the prosecutorial authorities, it was revealed that in some cases, decisions regarding refusing to initiate criminal proceedings under Articles 39.1.1 and 39.1.2 of the Criminal Procedure Code. Furthermore, it was disclosed that cases were returned to the prosecutor carrying out the initial investigation, the senior prosecutor, or the court implementing procedural guidance, repeatedly for additional investigation due to the fact that decisions to suspend criminal investigation activities based on Article 53.1 of the Criminal Procedure Code, were found to be illegal and unfounded. However, each time, similar decisions were made without conducting substantial investigations, or fulfilling relevant investigative tasks, and in some cases, the criminal cases were left inactive.

(App. No. 6391-23): *Applicant A. appealed to the Ombudsman, complaining about a non-objective investigation of a criminal case initiated against him under Article 188.4.1 of the Criminal Code by the Investigation Department of the Nizami District Police Office, and therefore, requested taking appropriate measures as provided by the law.*

Following an inquiry to the Nizami District Prosecutor's Office, the case was investigated in the district prosecutor's office, but no signs of the criminal composition envisaged under the relevant article in the actions

of the individual were found. Therefore, the district prosecutor concluded the criminal proceedings based on Article 39.1.2 of the Criminal Procedure Code.

(App. No. 245-23): *Applicant H. complained to the Ombudsman about a biased investigation initiated by the 6th Police Unit of the Binagadi District Police Office regarding his claim of embezzlement. The applicant also added that, as a result of this biased investigation, a decision was made to reject the initiation of a criminal case. It was pointed out that his claim was forwarded to the Binagadi District Prosecutor's Office for investigation by the Prosecutor General's Office of Azerbaijan, but he was not informed of the outcome. The complainant asked for appropriate measures within the law.*

Following an inquiry to the Binagadi District Prosecutor's Office, the decision to reject the initiation of a criminal prosecution based on the collected material during the investigation was annulled by the district prosecutor for further investigation.

(App. No. 11709-23): *Applicant Q. Lodged a file with the Ombudsman, complaining about a brief and inadequate investigation of his claims regarding embezzlement and asking for taking appropriate measures be taken according to the law.*

In response to an inquiry to the Khatai District Prosecutor's Office regarding the complaint, it was stated that the investigator of the Investigation Department of the Xatai District Police Office, Araz Mehdiyev, did not conducted investigation and followed the instructions of the office, and subsequently, took decision to reject the initiation of a criminal case based on the material.

Furthermore, it was also stated that although the decision was sent back to the Investigation Department for additional investigation due to insufficient grounds, the investigator of the Investigation Department, Orkhan Huseynzade took a decision to unreasonably reject the initiation of a criminal case without conducting additional investigation, violating the requirements of criminal procedural legislation.

Consequently, the decision was deemed unreasonable and revoked, and the material was sent back to the Investigation Department of the Khatai District Police Office for further investigation.

Taking into account all the above, it would be appropriate to include an imperative norm in the Criminal Procedure Code of the Republic of Azerbaijan, regarding transferring the investigation of the criminal case from the preliminary investigator or investigator to another preliminary investigator or investigator when decisions to reject the initiation of a criminal case or to stop the execution of a criminal case are ungrounded and illegal, and such decisions are revoked at least twice by the prosecutor, senior prosecutor, or court (based on a complaint). The issues of responsibility of the preliminary investigator or investigator dealing with these circumstances should be increased.

During investigations conducted on the basis of the Ombudsman's inquiries about verifying the alleged violations indicated in the complaints, law violations and police unethical behavior were found, but as a consequence, the appropriate disciplinary measures were taken to address these issues.

(App. No. 9183-23): *Applicant A. complained to the Ombudsman and said that he was unlawfully taken to police custody in the Saray Police Unit of the Absheron District Police Office and subjected to other illegal actions.*

After the Ombudsman's inquiry to the Absheron District Prosecutor's Office, the respective employees were subjected to disciplinary proceedings by the relevant order of the Minister of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

The incoming calls received by the “916 Call Center” about unlawful detention, delays in transferring detainees in temporary detention to pre-trial facilities, failure to inform the family of the detainee about the detention, and requests for legal counsel, were promptly investigated and addressed.

(App. No. CM-8812-23): *A lawyer, S. requested the Ombudsman via the Call Center, stating that he was not allowed to meet with his client Q., who was detained at the Absheron District Police Office, and asked for help. As a result, the lawyer’s meeting with his client was ensured.*

(App. No. CM-8461-23): *A lawyer N. contacted the Ombudsman's Call Center and complained about impediments created for him to meet with his client, who was detained at Police Unit No. 6 of the Binagadi District Police Office and requested appropriate assistance. Consequently, the lawyer was given the opportunity to meet with his client.*

Considering the abovementioned, measures should be taken to address the challenges faced by lawyers in contacting their clients, including confidential meetings.

1.2. Protection of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

Right to labor. The right to labor of everyone refers to ensuring a livelihood by earning a living, choosing the form or type of labor freely, and combining protection mechanisms against unjust dismissal. Guaranteeing this right contributes to the development of the well-being of individuals and societies, as well as the elimination of existing negative conditions.

The incoming applications regarding violations of this right were about non-payment or delays in payment of wages, non-payment of compensations for industrial damages, insurance payments, and benefits for temporary loss of work capacity (disability) benefits, incorrect calculation or non-payment of final settlements (payment), along with requests for assistance in preventing the termination of employment contracts, extending the duration of employment contracts, providing assistance in employment, and other issues. The relevant government agencies, including the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of the Population, and the State Labor Inspectorate Service under this Ministry, were appealed regarding those complaints. As a result of the investigations, legal measures have been taken to eliminate violations.

As a result of the investigations, in some cases, employers who violated labor laws were subjected to administrative disciplinary measures, the payment of wages and final settlements was ensured, and giving mandatory instructions on the proper application of the relevant articles of the Labor Code while issuing dismissal orders (employment record books) was ensured. Furthermore, when it is deemed necessary, appeals are made to the Department for Non-Criminal Proceedings of the Prosecutor General's Office of Azerbaijan.

(App. No. 12988-23): *Applicant H. stated in his complaint that “Milan A” LTD did not pay him final settlements and made other violations of the law.*

In the response letter addressed to the State Labor Inspectorate Service under the MLSPP regarding the complaint, it was stated that according to the documents provided by the management of the LTD, the complainant was hired according to the fixed-term employment contract dated 08 May 2019 and was dismissed by the LTD under Article 28 (2) b (expiration of employment contract) of the Labor Code. However, the executive director of the LTD was subjected to administrative liability due to the violation of labor legislation as he terminated the employment contract before it expired, which was revealed during the investigation.

The complainant was ensured full payment of the final settlement (wage and monetary compensation for the unused vocation).

(App. No. 388-23): *Applicant M. stated that he was not paid by "T-Finans LTD" and threatened with dismissal.*

In the response letter addressed to the State Labor Inspectorate Service under the MLSPP regarding the complaint, it was indicated that while screening the Centralized Electronic Information System, it was determined that the employment contract concluded between the applicant and the LTD on 08 September 2022 was terminated on 16 September 2022 based on Article 68(2)(a) upon the initiative of one of the parties) of the Labor Code. In addition, according to the data system, the notification about an employment contract for additional labor was registered on 24 October 2022 between him and LTD, which is in effect.

Furthermore, when the employment contract was terminated, the applicant was not paid the final settlement and wages by the LTD. A decision was made to issue an administrative penalty to the director of the company based on Article 192.4 of the Code of Administrative Offences of Azerbaijan, as the requirements of Article 83(2) and Article 172 of the Labor Code were violated. Furthermore, a letter of instruction regarding the payment of the final settlement was sent to the institution on behalf of the complainant.

An inquiry was sent to the Department for Non-Criminal Proceedings of the General Prosecutor's Office to take measures regarding the presentation of the required documents that were not provided.

The relevant body's authority to investigate complaints about violations of labor rights and address legal violations was limited by the Law "On Suspension of Inspections in the Field of Entrepreneurship" dated 26 October 2015. Furthermore, the Law "On Regulation of Inspections in the Field of Entrepreneurship and Protection of Entrepreneurs' Interests," dated 2 July 2013, has determined the measures for evaluating the compliance of inspection- bodies in the field of entrepreneurship with mandatory requirements related to entrepreneurs' entrepreneurial activities as a set of actions.

The laws have not differentiated between "investigation" and "inspection". Therefore, in many cases, during the investigation of complaints about violations of labor rights, the relevant state body noted that it is not able to conduct the investigation due to the application of the requirements of Article 2.1 of the Law "On Suspension of Inspections in the Field of Entrepreneurship." Consequently, it was not possible to gather workers' input, obtain relevant documents, and ensure the rights of citizens. In this case, the person whose rights have been violated is compelled to appeal to the court, which not only limits the effectiveness of non-judicial mechanisms for protecting rights and freedoms but also leads to an unnecessary workload in courts.

(App. No. 11919-23): *Applicant M. in his complaint indicated that "Korkmaz Group" LTD did not fully pay his final settlements and asked for the restoration of his rights.*

In the response letter addressed to the State Labor Inspectorate Service under the MLSPP regarding the complaint, it was stated that while reviewing the Centralized Electronic Information System, a notification about termination based on Article 68(2)(a) of the Labor Code of Azerbaijan, dated 25 May 2022, regarding the employment contract concluded between the applicant and the management of the company, was registered for termination on 1 May 2023. It was indicated that, in accordance with the Law on the Suspension of Inspections in the Field of Entrepreneurship, inspections in the relevant field ceased until 1 January 2024. Therefore, it was not possible to investigate the matter on site.

It was also said that the documents related to the applicant were not provided by the management of "Korkmaz Group" LLC, so a complaint was transferred to the Department for Non-Criminal Proceedings of the Prosecutor General's Office to take appropriate measures in this regard.

Obviously, the noted requirements of the Law on the Suspension of Inspections in the Field of Entrepreneurship seriously limit access to legal protection mechanisms when human rights are violated. According to Law No. 1084-VIQD dated 26 December 2023, the word "2024" in Article 1 of the Law in question was replaced with "2025," and the relevant period has thus been extended. Therefore, in that Law, it is necessary to distinguish investigations of human rights violations from inspections, or to add "cases of violations of human rights and freedoms" to the list of inspections specified in the first sentence of Article 2.1 of that law. This will not only contribute to the reliable protection of labor rights but also serve purposes in the field of business and human rights.

According to labor legislation, the order (decree, decision) regarding the termination of an employment contract must be signed by the employer and authenticated by the enterprise seal. A copy of this order shall be given to the employee together with the employee's record book and the employer's final payment (compensation for unused leave time due the employee and other payments) during the last working day. However, in some cases, these legal provisions are violated by employers, and as a result of the measures taken, the restoration of rights has been ensured.

(App. No. 228-23): *Applicant K. appealed to the Ombudsman, stating that he was dismissed from Imishli District Housing Communal Services Union, but final and other payments, especially for unused leaves, were not ensured.*

In the letter of response addressed to the State Labor Inspectorate Service under the MLSPP regarding the complaint, it was stated that the applicant's employment contract, signed on 12 August 2020, was terminated on 1 November 2022 in accordance with Article 70(e) of the Labor Code (when the employee of the agency funded by the state budget reaches the retirement age). However, due to violations of the law, the final payment (payment equivalent to unused leave, wages for work, and other payments owed to the employee) was not made.

Therefore, a Decision was made to issue an administrative punishment regarding the employer in accordance with Article 192.4 of the Code of Administrative Offenses. The shortcomings in the calculation and payment of the employee's wages and leave entitlements were eliminated, ensuring the payment of the final payment.

During the restructuring of the institution and changes in its structure, as employment relationships with workers are not fully regulated by legislation, some employers take advantage of this situation, leading to cases of abuse. Also, employers demand employees write not only a request to terminate their contract but also a request for new employment. In addition, the employer selects some of these workers for reemployment, while others are terminated based on their dismissal requests. Subsequently, these individuals are not subjected to downsizing; they do not receive any severance pay, and they are deprived of the right to receive unemployment benefits. In several countries, when institutions are reorganized or undergo structural changes, cases of dismissing and rehiring employees are considered violations of the law. Considering the mentioned aspects, it is essential for labor legislation to consider the norms on conditions for restructuring of an institution (or changes in structure) and regulation of labor relations with employees.

Right to social security. Everyone is entitled to social benefits in cases defined by law, such as reaching the legally established age limit for an illness or disability, losing the main breadwinner, losing work capacity, unemployment, and other situations as stipulated by law.

Ensuring the employment of people, improving their livelihoods, and eliminating dependency on targeted state social aid are key priorities of state social policy in our country. Significant projects in the social sphere contribute to the steady development of the well-being, especially of vulnerable groups, and to reducing the level of poverty.

The incoming applications about the violation of this right were mainly about inaccurate calculation of pensions, determining social allowances, including targeted state social aid, enrollment in self-employment programs, and assessing disability.

The determination and timely payment of pensions are crucial factors for the social well-being of those, who are entitled to receive a retirement pension.

The violations regarding inaccurate calculations of pensions, failures to consider periods of employment for certain periods, and not considering additional benefits in the pension calculations were investigated.

(App. No. 110-23): *Applicant T. appealed to the Ombudsman, stating that his work experience and pension were not accurately calculated, and that the period of his education at the higher education institution was not included in the work experience. Therefore, he asked to investigate the matter and recalculate his pension.*

In the letter of response regarding the complaint addressed to the State Social Protection Fund, it was stated that according to the documents provided by the applicant, his pension was recalculated taking into account his insurance part (the period of his actual education), and the pension capital recorded in the insurance part based on the individual account has been recalculated. As well, the amount of the pension was recalculated as an applicant fell into the category of non-working pensioners.

(App. No. 11969-23): *Applicant K. lodged a file with the Ombudsman complaining that his applications regarding the recalculation of his pension were unsuccessful and requested assistance.*

In the letter of response regarding the complaint addressed to the State Social Protection Fund, it was stated that the complainant's pension has been recalculated based on his work history, including periods of full-time education and military service, taking into account the insurance period and the pension capital recorded in the individual account in the insurance section. This recalculation was done due to the complainant falling into the category of non-working pensioners according to the insurance period.

Analysis of the applications received by the Ombudsman regarding the determination of targeted state social assistance reveals that citizens still face some difficulties and bureaucratic hurdles during the process of determining this social aid. However, some of these complaints have been positively resolved as a result of certain measures.

(App. No. 11542-23): *Applicant Sh. called the Call Center complaining that his applications for targeted state social assistance as a low-income family were unsuccessful.*

Following an inquiry to the State Social Protection Fund in the MLSPP, based on the citizen's application submitted to the "Targeted Assistance" (VEMTAS) subsystem, monthly social assistance in the amount of 506.08 manats was allocated to his family.

(App. No. 666/2-23): *Applicant M. contacted the Ombudsman's Call Center and said that the targeted state social assistance allocated to his family was unjustifiably suspended.*

Following an inquiry to the State Social Protection Fund in the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of the Republic of Azerbaijan, based on the citizen's application submitted to the VEMTAS subsystem, monthly social assistance in the amount of 765.32 manats was allocated to his family.

Considering all the above, some citizens complained that despite the long processing time of applications for receiving targeted state social assistance, their financial and household conditions (the assessment of the family's financial and household conditions) were not monitored.

According to the "Rules for Applying, Appointing, Granting, and Refusing Targeted State Social Assistance," approved by the Cabinet of Ministers' Decision No. 37 dated 5 February 2016, on the day the application is accepted, the employee of the State Social Protection Fund's structural units, or "DOST" centers selected by VEMTAS is tasked with conducting an assessment of the family's financial and household conditions in accordance with these Rules. So, that employee, in the presence of one person from a family, should take a video and photo to assess the family's financial and household conditions with the specialized technical equipment provided by the relevant program, approve that with an electronic signature, and transmit the results to VEMTAS in real-time mode.

It is obvious that the relevant rules do not specify a timeframe for conducting the assessment of the family's financial and household conditions, which leads to delays and complaints. Therefore, it is essential to specify the timeframe in the Rules.

The Medical-Social Expert Commissions (TSEK) in their decisions (responses) regarding the refusal to assess the degree of disability do not explain the valid reasons, but instead indicate general responses. This often-created difficulties for the relevant medical institutions' medical advisory commissions to eliminate shortages and issue referrals. This fact resulted in numerous complaints. Therefore, the approach taking decisions on referrals issued for the assessment of disability status, should be changed; the coordination with medical advisory commissions should be improved; transparency and promptness should be ensured, and delays and obstacles should be eliminated.

During the enforcement and analysis, it was determined that there were inconsistencies between certain provisions of the "Regulations on Determining, Calculating, Recalculating, Converting from one type to another type, and Paying Labor Pensions," approved by the Cabinet of Ministers' Decision No. 175 dated 28 April 2022, and the "Law on Labor Pensions."

The relevant law has a norm stating that *"the average monthly nominal wage across the country is indexed based on the annual increase rate determined by the relevant executive authority based on the decision of the relevant executive authority."* According to Article 6.1.3 of that Regulation, the recalculation of labor pensions is related to the increase in wages, state benefits, and compensation expenses, as stipulated in Article 20 of the Law, for individuals mentioned therein.

Article 29.2 of the "Law on Labor Pensions," according to the Presidential Order dated 15 December 2022, as well as Presidential Decree No. 142, dated 25 June 2018, "On approval of the "Regulations on the Recalculation of Additional Benefits for Years of Service for Labor Pensions Determined by 1 July 2017," are considered repealed due to the implementation of Law No. 627-VIQD, on amendments to the "Law on Labor Pensions," dated 5 November 2022.

The Presidential Decree of 10 February 2023, regarding "Indexation of Labor Pensions," envisages only indexation of pensions, but does not consider the increase based on insurance expenses. Therefore, as mentioned earlier, the norm on increases based on insurance expenses is no longer in force.

According to Article 6.1.5 of the regulation, other cases for recalculating labor pensions are specified in Article 29.2 of the law. However, as already noted, that particular article of the law is also no longer in force.

According to Article 6.2, it is stated that under *Article 20 of the Law, the amount of the pension is reduced by the amount of the additional pension for service years based on the individual account of the pensioner recorded in the*

insurance part of the pension fund when recalculating the pension amount, up to the increased amount of the insurance part, in cases envisaged in the first sentence of Article 37.3.4 of the Law, the paid portion of the additional pension is reduced by up to 50 percent of the increased amount of the insurance part of the labor pension". However, this provision was not considered in the Law on Labor Pensions.

Considering all the above, the Ombudsman proposed to the Cabinet of Ministers to amend 6.1.1, 6.1.3, 6.1.5, and 6.2 of the "Regulations on Determining, Calculating, Recalculating, Converting from one type to another type, and Paying Labor Pensions," approved by the Cabinet of Ministers' Decision No. 175 of 28 April 2022, to align them with the requirements of Articles 20, 29.1, and 37.3.1 of the "Law on Labor Pensions."

After the Ombudsman's submission, the relevant changes were made to that Decision by the Cabinet of Ministers' Decision No. 257 of 1 August 2023. The words *"the amount determined in conjunction with these additions for pensioners who are eligible for additions to their pension based on service duration according to Article 20 of the Law"* were added to the 6.1.1 subsection, after the words "insurance part," and subsections 6.1.3 and 6.1.5, as well as section 6.2, were repealed.

The Regulation on the Use of Funds Transferred to the Account of the State Customs Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan was approved by the Cabinet of Ministers' Decision No. 437 dated 17 October 2017.

According to the version of the regulation that was in force until 1 July 2022, *"60 (sixty) percent of the funds are used to provide additional benefits to employees and civilian workers with the special rank of the Committee in their monthly official salaries."* According to this requirement of the Regulation, 60 (sixty) percent of the funds transferred to the State Customs Committee (included in the budgetary development fund of the customs system) have been used to provide additional benefits to the monthly official salaries of the Committee's employees. So, considering those additional benefits noted when the employees with the special rank retire and move to pension, taking into account the payments made from the budgetary extra funds for salaries, wages, and state benefits, has allowed for an increase in the paid pension amount. This situation has been in place until January 1, 2019.

As of January 1, 2019, amendments were made to the "Law on Pensions" with Law No. 1362-VQD, dated 30 November 2018, which added Article 20.30 to the said Law. In this article, it is stated that *"the payments made from the budgetary extra funds for salaries, wages, and state benefits are not taken into account when calculating additional benefits for individuals considered under this article for their pension based on seniority."*

Obviously, according to this amendment, extra payments related to budgetary funds for salaries, state benefits, and position wages are no longer taken into account when calculating additional years of service for pensioners in the mentioned category. This change has led to a significant decrease in pension amounts for retirees starting on 1 January 2019, compared to previous years.

According to Cabinet of Ministers Decision No. 170 of 21 April 2022, "Procedure for the Use of Funds Transferred to the State Customs Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan" approved by the Cabinet of Ministers' Decision No. 437 of 17 October 2017, and entered into force on 1 July 2022, has been amended. The new wording of paragraph 1.3 of the Decision in question is as follows, *"60 percent of the funds are transferred to the state budget, and these funds are used in full for additional payments to employees and civil servants with the special rank of the Committee."*

Since 1 July 2022, the noted above decision has led to an increase in pension amounts for individuals who retired from the respective category due to seniority increments. In other words, the pension for individuals who retired on 1 July 2022, compared to those who retired between January 1, 2019, and July 1, 2022, has increased. 60 percent of the funds are transferred to the state budget and used in full for additional payments to employees and civil servants with the special rank of the Committee.

Thus, when calculating pensions for individuals belonging to the same category but retiring after January 1, 2019, and from July 1, 2022, consideration was given to seniority increments regarding pension payments, state benefits, and additional payments from off-budget funds. However, during the calculation of pensions for individuals who retired between January 1, 2019, and July 1, 2022, seniority increments regarding pension payments, state benefits, and additional payments from off-budget funds were not taken into account.

The different approach in calculating pensions for individuals of the same category but retiring at different times, as well as legal advantages for one over the other, violate the principles of equality and social security rights enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

Based on the above, and numerous citizens' applications, the Ombudsman submitted a proposal to the Cabinet of Ministers, requesting to consider individuals who retired during the period from 1 January 2019, to 1 July 2022, within the scope of the 1.3 provision of the "Rules for the Use of Funds Transferred to the State Customs Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan," approved by the Cabinet of Ministers on 17 October 2017.

The member of a martyr's family and the father of a soldier, M. appealed to the Ombudsman, stating that his son, M.M., was martyred during the battles in the Lachin District during the Second Karabakh War and was posthumously awarded the "For Service to the Motherland" and other medals. The applicant also added that his other son, M.N., was also awarded several medals for his participation in the Second Karabakh War, so, considering the services of his sons to the Motherland, the applicant complained about his unsuccessful applications to the Social Services Agency under the MLSPP to take legal measures for the improvement of housing conditions.

During the initial investigation into the complaint, it was reported by the Sumgayit City Executive Authority that, considering the services of the martyr M.M. who died during the Second Karabakh War and the participation of M.N. in the noted war, the family of the applicant M. was included in the housing list from 1 June 2021, as a martyr and veteran family, with the aim of improving their housing conditions.

During the investigation, in response to the inquiry sent to the MLSPP, a refusal was given by referring to Article 26 of Decision No. 418 dated 14 October 1983, of the Council of Ministers of the Azerbaijan SSR. Furthermore, reference was made to the "Norm for Ensuring the Living Areas of the State Housing Fund" that had not yet come into force and was in the project stage. However, clarity was not provided on the raised issues by providing responses with the same content to repeated inquiries based on the mentioned references. Despite the existence of legal grounds to solve the application of the family member of the martyr and a veteran's father, M., it was not processed, and the reasons for refusal were not substantiated in accordance with legislation.

The 8-square meter minimum limit indicated in Paragraph 26 of Decision No. 418 dated 14 October 1983, of the Azerbaijan SSR Council of Ministers, to which it was referred, was established not as an independent norm, but as a limit of the housing area set in the repealed Azerbaijan SSR Housing Code. Therefore, these relevant norms cannot be applied separately. On the other hand, there is currently no new housing area norm established for the purpose of providing residential areas within the state housing stock. However, in the given response, it is noted that Paragraph 26 of the Decision can be applied on a discretionary basis, stating that citizens with a residential area of less than 8 square meters per person can be provided with a housing unit or private home. It is also mentioned that the different approaches can significantly demonstrate their negative effects on the existing mechanism.

According to Article 65.3 of the Constitutional Law on "Normative Legal Acts," the existing gaps regarding the legal regulation should not be interpreted by the state body at their discretion during the application of the law. Under Article 67.4 of the same Constitutional Law, the non-determination of the timeframes for adoption of normative legal acts does not allow for the replacement of the intended adoption of the normative legal act with individual legal enforcement acts based on free administrative discretion.

On the other hand, according to Paragraph 1 of the Presidential Decree No. 2449, dated 25 January 2021, individuals in need of housing in their residential area registered by the local executive authorities must be provided by the MLSPP with an apartment or individual house. That is, the reasoning of the Ministry, which

contradicts the requirements of the Presidential Decree, cannot be a reasonable ground for denying the improvement of the living conditions of the applicant M., who has already been included in the housing list by the Sumgayit City Executive Authority. Although all the above, the rights of a citizen M. were not upheld.

Right to health. The main goal of the protection of public health is to ensure everyone's rights, implement preventive measures in healthcare, and provide accessible medical and social assistance to all.

The incoming applications about the violation of the right to health were about the problems in availability of essential medication, refusal to issue referrals to medical facilities, unsuccessful applications regarding issuing referrals to healthcare institutions for disability assessment, or failure to issue referrals according to specified requirements, inadequate conditions for exercising medical rehabilitation and compulsory health insurance benefits, lack of support in organizing examinations and treatment at the state's expense, assistance in providing specialized medical services, and similar concerns.

With the Ombudsman's interventions, necessary measures were taken regarding applications for the state-sponsored medical examinations and treatment of citizens, especially those with special needs, addressed to the Ministry of Health of Azerbaijan, the Medical Territorial Divisions Management Union (TABIB), as well as medical institutions under their jurisdiction, and also to the State Agency for Mandatory Health Insurance.

(App. No. 5752-23): *Applicant N. called the Ombudsman, asking for assistance in his child's medical examination and treatment at the expense of the state.*

After an inquiry to TABIB, relevant instructions were given to the Baku Main Health Center.

(App. No. 2495-23): *Applicant A. applied to the Ombudsman, requesting assistance in obtaining a referral for urgent surgery under mandatory health insurance from the relevant polyclinic and Sabunchu Medical Center.*

Following an inquiry to TABIB, the applicant underwent a surgery performed at the Republican Perinatal Center within the scope of compulsory medical insurance.

The proper organization of diagnostic examinations for individuals with health problems and ensuring the availability of necessary medications are of great importance in their subsequent treatment and recovery.

(App. No. 5694-23): *Applicant, Q., contacted the Ombudsman's Call Center, requesting assistance in obtaining a referral for his spouse to undergo a Doppler ultrasound examination at the Fuzuli District Central Hospital.*

Following an inquiry to the TABIB regarding the complaint, a patient underwent Doppler ultrasound at the Aghdam District Central Hospital within the scope of mandatory medical insurance coverage.

(App. No. 3907-23): *Applicant, F., contacted the Ombudsman, stating that he has a cancer and requesting assistance with the treatment.*

Following an inquiry to the Ministry of Health, the applicant was examined by medical specialists at the National Oncology Center, and monotherapy was prescribed and administered as part of their ongoing treatment.

(App. No. 4988-23): Applicant, N., appealed to the Ombudsman, saying that his child has a heart disease and asking for help with state-funded urgent surgery.
Following an inquiry to the TABiB, the applicant's child underwent surgical intervention for "Closure of Atrial Septal Defect (ASD)" at the Central Clinic.

(App. No. 1061-23): Applicant, P. filed a lodge with the Ombudsman, asking for help in obtaining drugs and organizing treatments for him and his spouse's illnesses.
Following inquiries to the TABiB, the applicant and his spouse were provided with drugs by a local medical institution, and they also received specialized treatment at the Clinical Medical Center.

(App. No. 8620-23): Applicant G. applied to the Ombudsman, requesting assistance with obtaining drugs for his child at the expense of the state.
Following an inquiry to the TABiB, the patient was provided with the necessary drugs.

It is highly necessary to create a national, unified electronic medical database. Despite the digitalization of several medical institutions, it is essential to establish a unified "E-Health" platform to ensure operational efficiency in the implementation of medical insurance and increase effectiveness in providing citizens with healthcare services.

On the other hand, it would be appropriate to transfer all medical services and treatments to mandatory medical insurance to effectively ensure the right to health.

Many complaints regarding incomplete filling of official referrals for determining disability also include problems such as incomplete information about patients' final diagnoses, complications confirmed by laboratory and instrumental examinations, incorrect entry of symptoms, and the lack of detailed annotations when submitting to the Electronic Register of the Social Insurance Fund (TSEK) by the relevant medical institutions. Addressing this problem is crucial for eliminating social security-related challenges and preventing bureaucratic hurdles.

It is also important to strengthen medical-preventive control over the healthy physical and mental development of children, as well as facilitate the regular access of persons with disabilities (PWDs) identified before the age of 18 to appropriate medical-rehabilitation services.

The issue of sending citizens abroad for medical treatment at the state's expense remains problematic. Despite the activities of the relevant commission in this area, several issues have not yet found a solution.

As a result, it should be noted that preventing risks threatening the health of citizens and their potential negative consequences requires a strengthening of educational efforts in healthcare and the promotion of a healthy lifestyle.

Right to education. Education is one of the fundamental elements of the state's political, economic, social, and cultural development.

The national education system is regulated based on the Constitution of the country, relevant normative legal acts, as well as international treaties to which our state is a party. Measures taken to improve education standards and modernize the infrastructure of educational institutions across the country play an important role in the development of the education system.

As a result of investigations of the incoming applications regarding the violation of the right to education, several shortcomings were found, and necessary steps were taken to address those problems.

Although new school buildings and pre-school education institutions continue to be constructed, the existing buildings are being repaired and equipped with modern technical facilities in Baku, and across the country, some school buildings are remaining in disrepair and in inadequate conditions, which impede the quality education process.

Material and technical supply of education, use of modern educational technologies, and educational management based on scientific principles are crucial, but fostering positive teacher-student relationships is equally important.

(App. No. 2785-23): *Applicant A. applied to the Ombudsman, reporting that his child has been severely bullied by the teacher at Secondary School No. 1 in Baku, also adding that his child was not given necessary attention and that the child was discriminated against in the class. The applicant asked for help.*
In the response to an inquiry addressed to the Ministry of Science and Education regarding this issue, it was indicated that the situation was resolved as a result of conversations with the teacher, and the school management was instructed and recommended on how training and education should be organized.

(App. No. 5835-23): *Applicant V. complained to the Ombudsman, reporting that his grandchild, who was in the 7th grade, was subjected to slander and humiliation by the history teacher at the secondary school in the village of Jabrayil district. The complainant added that his grandchild was threatened, and his appeals regarding this issue were unsuccessful. He requested assistance.*
In the response letter to an inquiry to the Ministry of Science and Education, it was stated that the issue was discussed at the extraordinary meeting of the Pedagogical Council, and the teacher was given a final warning in accordance with Article 186(2)(b) of the Labor Code due to violating the ethical rules towards the student and received severe reprimand.

Despite the recruitment of specialized teachers through a system of substitution and fixed-term labor contracts, there is a shortage of staff in some remote villages and towns in the country's secondary schools. So, specialized teachers are also required to teach other subjects when needed, along with their own subjects. This decreases the quality of education and paves the way for significant dissatisfaction among students and parents.

(App. No. 2360-23): *Applicant J. applied to the Ombudsman, saying that the classes are not taught by specialized staff at the secondary school in Orand village of Lerik district, which has caused difficulty for his child in grasping the lessons taught. The applicant asked for help.*
In the letter of response to an inquiry submitted to the Ministry of Science and Education, it was stated that a specialized English teacher was invited from a neighboring school to provide English language classes, and a fixed-term employment contract was signed with him as a second job.
Due to the fact that it was impossible to invite specialized teachers from nearby schools for classes in other subjects, as per Article 6.2 of the Cabinet of Ministers' Decision No. 103 dated 3 June 2010 "On Approval

of State Standards for General Education in Azerbaijan,” since there was a necessary need, it was agreed to teach those subjects by the relevant specialized teachers close in content and essence.

Although the ministry in its letter of response refers to the relevant legislative act as a solution, the main complaint of the citizen was about the lack of teaching by other specialized staff in the respective subject. Thus, the referenced norm of the legislative act cannot serve as a solution to the mentioned problem. Given the persistence of these situations and their negative impact on the right to education, greater focus should be placed on the provision of general education facilities with specialized staff in rural areas, particularly in remote areas, as well as encouraging initiatives to recruit such staff.

Changes in the school upon the parents' wishes due to difficulties such as the long distance of educational institutions from the student's home, inadequate security during their commute to school, as well as other reasons, are carried out electronically based on a rotation. The complaints regarding these issues were investigated by the Ombudsman, and the issue has been resolved.

(App. No. 4337-23): *Applicant A. appealed to the Ombudsman's "916 Call Center", saying that his requests for changing the secondary school No. 76, where his child is educated at the 10th grade, to the secondary school No. 292 due to their movement to another place of residence were unsuccessful, and asked for help.*

In the letter of response regarding this complaint by the Ministry of Science and Education, it was stated that the Baku City Education Department created an online request for the student through the "Student relocation" sub-system of the "Education Centralized Information System," and the applicant's children were admitted to the respective class of the secondary school No. 121 in Baku.

Children's mental and physical health depends on receiving careful attention during their early development years. Improving the effectiveness of social services provided to children during this period, along with proper organization of their physical and cognitive development, plays a significant role in their future growth. Therefore, in order to increase the professionalism of teachers and other professionals working with children in pre-school educational institutions, it is important to train them in continuous training sessions about individual approaches to children, children's behavioral guidelines, proper organization of education and upbringing, and presenting education in a manner understandable to children during their early years of development.

After the return of pre-school educational institutions to the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Science and Education in Azerbaijan, the placement of pre-school aged children in these institutions is conducted electronically. The Ombudsman has taken necessary measures regarding incoming applications by parents facing certain problems regarding such placement.

(App. No. 12989-23): *Applicant M. contacted the Ombudsman's Call Center and said that his children were being educated in separate groups at the respective kindergarten and childcare center in Nizami district, and his request to the management of the Center to place them in the same group was not taken into consideration. The applicant asked for help regarding this matter.*

After an inquiry to the Ministry of Science and Education regarding this issue, the applicant's children were placed in the same group.

The lack of timely disciplinary measures towards children, who drop out of school for any reason, as well as children being left unsupervised either by parents or educational institutions, can sometimes lead to undesirable consequences.

(App. No. 11359-23): *Applicant N. complained to the Ombudsman, stating that a resident of Gushchu village in Shamakhi district does not allow his granddaughters to go to school because they are girls, and asked for an investigation into this issue and protection of the rights of the children.*

In response to the letters addressed to the Ministry of Science and Education and the Shamakhi District Executive Authority regarding this issue, it was stated that during the investigation, it was found that despite the individual enrollment of one of the grandchildren in school, the child was excluded from the school due to prolonged absence from classes over two academic years. However, the other grandchild was found to be enrolled in the second grade of individual education at the same school.

During a meeting held at the Daghlig Shirvan Regional Education Department, although it was explained to the parent that a truancy of a school-aged child is against the law, he still refused to send his daughter to school, citing his own reasons.

Furthermore, the school principal, who participated in the meeting, noted that he had personally met with the parent several times to explain the importance of student attendance, but each time encountered serious resistance from the parent. However, the principal, at that time, did not take the appropriate legal steps before the relevant state authorities against the student's truancy by the parent.

So, neither the Daghlig Shirvan Regional Education Department nor the school principal investigated nor clarified the reasons for the absolute refusal to send the girl to school, and necessary measures were not taken to eliminate these reasons.

According to Article 181 of the Code of Administrative Offenses of Azerbaijan, violation of legislation on education, including depriving a person of any level, or form of education, results in fines of one hundred manats for natural persons, three hundred manats for officials, and five thousand manats for legal entities.

In order to solve the mentioned situations and ensure the removal of these issues, it is necessary relevant institutions to monitor to identify truant students and conduct necessary educational and preventive work.

According to Article 42 of the Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan, every citizen has the right to education, and the state ensures the right to free compulsory general secondary education.

The textbooks used in the teaching process are provided to students at the expense of the state. However, necessary supplementary materials and workbooks are purchased personally, which leads to dissatisfaction with fully grasping the educational program. Therefore, it is appropriate for the state to directly provide students with textbooks along with other learning and supplementary materials.

Considering the special importance of food safety and food ration for human life and health, it is necessary to increase attention to them in primary, secondary, and higher education institutions. In order to strengthen control over the sale of prohibited or inappropriate food products for those under the age of majority, it is of great importance to conduct scheduled and ad-hoc joint monitoring activities by the Ministry of Science and Education, the State Service for Antimonopoly and Consumer Market Control under the Ministry of Economy, and the Food Safety Agency of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

Overall, with the intention of identifying the tasks facing the education system and implementing reforms in line with current needs, it is initially crucial to properly systematize theoretical and practical knowledge related to education and consider education in organizational, social and economic contexts. It is important to prioritize

avoiding information overload in students, their intellectual independence, and ensuring their comprehensive development.

Under Article 51 of the Constitution of Azerbaijan, everyone is free to carry out creative activity. The state guaranteed freedom in literary-artistic, scientific-technical, and other kinds of creative activity.

Article 5 of the Law on Education of Azerbaijan ensures that the state provides the corresponding conditions for each citizen to receive education and does not permit the deprivation of any level or form of education. The State secures equal opportunities for each citizen and doesn't tolerate any discrimination, regardless of the individual's gender, race, language, religion, political views, ethnic identity, social status, background, or state of health. According to Article 22.8 of that law, as the highest level of higher education, doctoral studies ensure the preparation of scientific and scientific-pedagogical staff, as well as the advancement of specializations and academic degrees. Pursuant to Article 22.9 of this Law, doctoral studies are conducted in higher education institutions, scientific institutions, and organizations where doctoral programs (in military educational institutions, adjunct professorships) are established and an appropriate academic degree is awarded upon completion of the studies.

Academic degrees are awarded in accordance with the Law on Science of Azerbaijan based on the recommendations of dissertation councils operating in higher education institutions and scientific institutions and organizations. Under Article 19 of the Law on Civil Service of Azerbaijan, to be engaged in scientific and creative activity and to be involved in pedagogical activity with the permission of the head of state body he/she serves in.

(App. No. 6523-23): *Applicant B. appealed to the Ombudsman, saying that he started his scientific research in 2008 and defended his thesis more than five years ago. In the same year, he received a positive evaluation from the Expert Council of the Higher Attestation Commission (HAC) under the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan after the Commission's relevant discussions. Furthermore, the applicant added that he has been working at a state institution for more than ten years and currently holds a teaching position at the educational center of that institution. Despite more than five years passing since the defense of his scientific work and the issuance of a positive evaluation by the expert council, the applicant was refused to provide the relevant diploma on the grounds of working in a state institution. The applicant complained that his appeals on this issue were unsuccessful, and he asked for assistance in protecting his rights.*

In the letter of response given to an inquiry addressed to AAK regarding the complaint, it was stated that, in accordance with the decision of the AAK Presidium dated 19 May 2000, it is deemed inappropriate to award scientific degrees to civil servants and servants of special types of civil service.

Given that the respective decision does not comply with Article 51 of the Constitution of Azerbaijan and Article 19 of the Law on Civil Service, in the letter of response re-addressed concerning the complaint, it was stated that the relevant decision of the Executive Committee of the AAK is not contradicted by Article 51 of the Constitution, according to which the state guarantees the freedom of creativity for everyone and ensures the realization of literary, artistic, scientific, technical, and other forms of creativity. Furthermore, under Article 19.0.5 of the Law on Civil Service, the decision of the AAK Presidium, to engage in scientific and creative activities, as well as participate in pedagogical activities with the permission of the head of the state institution where one serves, does not impede the exercise of the rights of a state official. Also, the relevant decision of the AAK Presidium does not consider it appropriate to grant academic degrees to persons working in special types of public service and state service.

Bearing in mind all the above, the Ombudsman finds it necessary to repeal the decision dated 19 May 2000, regarding the inadmissibility of granting academic degrees to persons working in civil service and special types of civil service, issued by the

the Presidium of the State Attestation Commission under the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan in a view of ensuring the right to education, freedom of creativity, as well as the provision of scientific and creative activities enshrined in the Constitution and national legislation of Azerbaijan, such as the Law on Civil Service and the Law on Education.

Right to housing. Housing is not only a main factor in social and economic lives, but also the basis of individual security and family stability. This right is also protected under the Constitution and national legislation of Azerbaijan.

The incoming applications received by the Ombudsman related to this right were about housing for a privileged category of people at the expense of the state, registration of persons in need of housing in the list of social housing or improving their households, repairing of the houses (apartments) damaged as a result of natural disasters at the expense of the state, solution of problems related to utilities, and many others.

During the investigation of the relevant incoming applications about the violation of this right, the appropriate measures were taken to restore the violated right within the Ombudsman's mandate.

As a result of natural disasters that occurred in Azerbaijan, including heavy downpours, private houses, agriculture, and sown areas in the villages were damaged due to the increase in water levels in rivers.

(App. No. 9068-23): *Applicant H. lodged a file with the Ombudsman, saying that as a result of a natural disaster that occurred on 30 April 2023, in Goranboy district, his house has fallen into disrepair and is in an uninhabitable condition. His appeals to the corresponding authority have yielded no results, and he has asked for compensation for the damage.*

The Ministry of Emergencies and Goranboy District Executive Authority were requested accordingly, and the applicant was compensated.

During the 44-day Second Karabakh War, as a result of missile attacks on areas outside of the combat zone by the Armenian armed forces, the civilian population, residential areas, and businesses located there were seriously affected, and their normal activities were disrupted.

According to the "Presidential Decree regarding the payment of financial assistance related to civilian damages that occurred as a result of the military aggression of the Armenian Armed Forces against Azerbaijan starting from September 27, 2020," dated 4 December 2020, each family, affected by damage and destroyed or fallen into disrepair, must be provided with 6000 manats; each family member affected by damage to personal belongings must be provided with 1500 manats, and each family affected by damage to other living houses must be provided with 1000 manats. However, problems still persist in this area.

(App. No. 7816-23): *Applicant Y. applied to the Ombudsman's Call Center, reported that during the Second Karabakh War, his house had fallen into disrepair as a result of the rocket fire on Ganja city by the Armenian armed forces and that the repair and restoration works were carried out poorly and remained incomplete. As a result, when it rains, his house fills with water. Furthermore, the applicant added that despite on-site inspections conducted by the State Committee of Urban Planning and Architecture of Azerbaijan, no measures were taken, and his appeals to the relevant institution yielded no results. Therefore, he requested help.*

In the letter of response to an inquiry to the Committee regarding this issue, it was indicated that based on the initial and technical inspection reports prepared for that individual residential unit, the repair works were completed.

A large number of old multi-apartment residential buildings and private homes are being demolished as part of pilot projects and new buildings have been constructed in Baku in recent times. The lack of proper calculation of suitable compensation for residents, as well as the non-payment or delayed payment of rent to apartment owners in the demolition processes, resulted in just dissatisfaction among citizens.

(App. No. 3133-23): *Applicant A. contacted the Ombudsman's Call Center and saying that within the framework of the "White City" project, the area where he lives was being demolished. So, due to the low amount of compensation for their property, he refused the compensation. However, his land was occupied by the Khatai District Executive Authority, and the fence was demolished. Therefore, he asked for appropriate measures.*

Following an inquiry to the Baku City Executive Authority, the applicant's private residential unit was valued at 370,25 (three hundred and seventy thousand twenty-five) manats by "Privat Co." LLC (an independent organization licensed for property valuation). Subsequently, a relevant agreement was reached with the applicant, and the money was transferred to the applicant's account.

In order to improve mechanisms for ensuring housing provision for the population, providing housing for citizens with insufficient funds, and developing rental property relations, measures are being taken. However, there are still some difficulties in providing the existing relevant mechanisms.

(App. No. 10561-23): *Applicant B. applied to the Ombudsman, stating that he faced problems regarding the renovation of his apartment obtained through the Mortgage and Credit Guarantee Fund of the Republic of Azerbaijan under the rent scheme. Despite the fund's staff member inspecting the area, no action was taken, and he faced bureaucratic hurdles. Therefore, he asked for protecting his rights.*

During the investigation into the complaint, it was found that the problem originated from the general sewage line of the residential building. The relevant housing-construction cooperative was informed about this issue, and the problem was resolved.

The numerous incoming complaints about utility service areas were investigated by the Ombudsman, and the problems were eliminated.

(App. No. 13238-23): *Applicant Kh. appealed to the Ombudsman, reporting that he is a party to the civil case before the Khatai District Court dealing with the unreasonably incorrect calculation of debts. The relevant resolution of the court was not executed by the "Azerigas" Production Union. The applicant asked to take appropriate measures.*

Following an inquiry to the Union in question, the court's resolution was executed, and adjustments were made to the applicant's (subscriber's) account.

Business and Human Rights (B+HR). The cooperation with relevant state institutions and CSOs in our country has been continued in the hope of protecting human rights and freedoms, restoration of violated rights during the implementation of entrepreneurial activities and studying relevant international experience.

Guiding by the requirements of UN Human Rights Council Resolutions 17/4 and 26/22, the experts of the UN WG on Business and Human Rights have generated a report ¹ with their findings during their official visit to Azerbaijan in previous years. The report specifically emphasizes the political commitment of the Government of Azerbaijan

¹ Report of the Working Group on the issue of human rights and transnational corporations and other business enterprises, visit to Azerbaijan, A/HRC/29/28/Add.1, 3 June 2015

to the “UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights” (UNGPs) and developing a national action plan (NAP) for the implementation of these principles.

The report also described its recommendations for strengthening the multi-stakeholder dialogue mechanism on business and human rights issues based on the coordination activities of the Ombudsman, and for developing a relevant NAP in line with the “UN Guidance on National Action Plans on Business and Human Rights.”

According to the "Edinburgh Declaration" adopted under the auspices of the UN (the document outlines the integration of business and human rights into the strategies and activities of ombudspersons, determining their mandates in this field), since early 2023, the Ombudsman Institution and the UN Country Office have approved a joint action plan on business and human rights, which facilitated the start of work in this direction.

The main goal in this field includes coordinating the work of government agencies, CSOs, and business entities to ensure that human rights are upheld, implementing the Guiding Principles into national legislation, and developing a NAP in this field. So, the Ombudsman has sent relevant inquiries to corresponding institutions in order to conduct an initial baseline assessment of the current situation regarding business and human rights.

In addition, the Ombudsman also pays special attention to raising public awareness about B+HR. In this light, the Ombudsman Office and the Prosecutor General's Office organized a joint international conference on "Ensuring Transparency in the Context of Business and Human Rights" hybrid format is of great importance. The conference was attended by government agencies, NGOs, and international experts. During the event, an educational tool titled "An Overview of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights," prepared by the Ombudsman Office under the initiative of the Ombudsman with the financial support of the UN, was presented to the public.

It should be noted that there are still certain difficulties in investigating complaints related to Business and Human Rights. Although, the Ombudsman has the authority to receive and investigate complaints about human rights violations concerning legal entities under state control, such as shares of state-owned enterprises, within the mandate given under the Constitutional Law, this activity is limited to other business entities. Consequently, despite the fact that the Ombudsman transferred incoming complaints about violations of human rights by such business structures to the corresponding authorities for investigation, it is not possible to conduct thorough and comprehensive investigations based on the Ombudsman’s inquiries due to the restrictions imposed by the “Law on the Suspension of Inspections in the Field of Entrepreneurship.”

Taking into account the above, in order to ensure access to non-judicial redress mechanism for those, who affected by the adverse impacts of human rights by entrepreneurs, it is essential to make amendments in the laws, such as the Law "On Regulation of Inspections Conducted in the Field of Entrepreneurship and the Protection of Interests of Entrepreneurs," the “Law on the Suspension of Inspections in the Field of Entrepreneurship,” as well as in line with the latter legal document, the "List of Inspections Allowed in Cases Posed Significant Risks to Life and Health, State Security, and Economic Interests," which directly consider investigation of complaints of human rights violations by business entities.

1.3. Protection of the Rights of Population Groups

Protection of the rights of refugees, IDPs, and migrants. The State always keeps in focus and takes complex measures for the safe return of Azerbaijanis, who have been longing for their ancestral lands for decades and have been forcibly displaced from their homes, improvement of their living conditions, and addressing their health, education, and cultural development-related problems. Subsequently, the "I State Program on the Great Return to the Liberated Territories of Azerbaijan" for the period until 2026, has been successfully implemented.

The Ombudsman also focuses on issues related to ensuring the protection of the rights of refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs), and those treated equally as such.

The Ombudsman investigated the incoming applications regarding the improvement of household conditions, utility services, IDP status, a single monthly allowance, employment, return to liberated territories, and other related issues. To more effectively protect the rights and freedoms of this category of people, the relevant measures were taken in collaboration with competent state authorities and recommendations were made.

Based on the Ombudsman's initiative, the Western Azerbaijan Society and the Guba District Executive Authority jointly organized a hybrid conference titled "Legal Aspects of Ethnic Cleansing and Crimes of Genocide: In the Context of Historical Facts " dedicated to 31 March - Day of Genocide of Azerbaijanis, held in Guba city.

The measures have been continued towards the protection of the rights of IDPs. Thus, the IDPs were provided free legal assistance regarding civil, social, economic, administrative, family-marriage, and other issues by the Baku Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the Ombudsman Office, and the Bar Association within the framework of a jointly organized legal aid campaign.

The Ombudsman considers that the IDPs, currently living in dormitories and dilapidated buildings, would be appropriate to temporarily relocate to service apartments, handed over by former IDPs who have returned to liberated territories for the purpose of improving their household conditions.

The Ombudsman took measures in collaboration with relevant state authorities to effectively protect the rights and best interests of persons participating in migration processes and to promote regular migration. The initiatives were undertaken to develop this cooperation at multiple platforms and the implementation of international obligations, strengthening constructive dialogue with international organizations on bilateral and multilateral levels, and raising public awareness on monitoring, coordination, migration legislation, including combating statelessness and irregular migration, and new approaches in other directions. Awareness-raising events were made to promptly inform foreign nationals and stateless persons upon their arrival in Azerbaijan regarding their rights and duties, as enshrined by both national and international legal norms. In the course of these events, detailed information was provided on the administrative responsibility for violations of migration legislation and registration procedures for foreigners and stateless persons in Azerbaijan. The issues related to the regulation of their legal status, ensuring their access to state services in migration, economic, social, and other areas, and providing support to vulnerable migrants and their families were raised and maintained as priorities.

The Ombudsman, at different times, appealed to the State Migration Service of Azerbaijan and other competent state institutions regarding the identification and registration of undocumented foreigners and stateless persons, as well as the resolution of other related issues. Some of the difficulties faced by migrants regarding freedom of movement, education, pension provision, employment, and other rights were addressed.

The Ombudsman also expanded its activities to ensure the rights and strengthen the social protection of citizens of the Republic of Azerbaijan living abroad, along with foreigners and stateless persons in our country. Purposeful measures were taken to identify citizens of Azerbaijan in uncertain conditions in other countries, protect their rights, and investigate the difficulties they face.

The applications dealing with the admission, restoration, and termination of citizenship in the Republic of Azerbaijan, as well as ensuring citizenship rights received by the Ombudsman, were also taken. The individuals who were recognized as citizens of the Republic of Azerbaijan and applied to the Ombudsman at various times were provided with valid documents.

(App. No. 14044-23): *Applicant N. filed an application with the Ombudsman and asked for assistance in changing his ID card as a citizen of the Republic of Azerbaijan.*

The applicant was provided with the ID card by the relevant "ASAN service" Center, following the Ombudsman's appeal to the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Azerbaijan.

The applications related to determination of citizenship, repatriation, deportation, readmission, and other similar issues, as well as the formalization of return certificates, were investigated, and appropriate measures were taken. Individuals living within the country and abroad were provided legal advice covering various aspects of migration legislation. The actions taken to ensure freedom of movement, including the rules on how to investigate a citizenship of a person in relation to Azerbaijan, were examined, and coordination work was implemented.

The Ombudsman made efforts on migration issues in collaboration with foreign partners for the purpose of effective coordination.

(App. No. 2105-23): *Applicant Z. appealed to the Ombudsman, saying that despite the expiration of the ban on entry into the Russian Federation, the ban was not removed, and asked for help.*

As a result of complex measures undertaken in the collaboration with the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Russian Federation regarding this issue, the travel ban was removed, and the applicant's right to enter the country was ensured.

(App. No. 9883-23): *A citizen of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Kh., appealed to the Ombudsman requesting an investigation into the health condition of his spouse living and receiving medical treatment in the hospital in the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug of the Russian Federation and assistance in his return to Azerbaijan.*

Following a corresponding appeal addressed to the Human Rights Commissioner of the relevant Autonomous Okrug, as a result of urgent measures, difficulties related to the health of the applicant's spouse were resolved, and necessary documents for the official registration of his return certificate were provided.

Incoming applications were also about the registration of foreigners based on their place of residence, assistance in obtaining temporary or permanent residence permits, or extending the permit duration. Measures were taken to resolve these issues.

In the light of current global challenges and ongoing processes, the Ombudsman has paid particular attention to the issues of documentation of children participating in the migration processes, including those who have suffered harm as a result of armed conflicts, crises, and other extraordinary events in other countries and sought refuge in our country, their social and psychological well-being, as well as their access to education and medical assistance. Their living conditions and quality of life have been investigated, and meetings with them, involving psychologists, have been held. Awareness talks were held with school management where they were educating, and necessary recommendations have been provided.

(App. No. 9576-23): *Applicant E. appealed to the Ombudsman, stating that they moved out from Ukraine and immigrated to Azerbaijan due to the war, and requested assistance in enrolling his children in the first grade of a secondary school near their residence.*

Following an inquiry to the Ministry of Science and Education, a request for the applicant's children to be enrolled in the first grade with instruction in Azerbaijani at a relevant secondary school by the Baku City Education Department has been made.

Under the NPM mandate, the Ombudsman has conducted monitoring visits to the Immigration Detention Centers for Irregular Migrants under the State Migration Service located in Baku, Yevlakh, and Nakhchivan cities. During these visits, the detention conditions and treatment of foreign nationals and stateless persons, the organization

of healthcare and sanitation services, food, and material support, as well as the situation regarding the protection of their rights, have been monitored. The detainees were interviewed in a confidential manner, and their complaints were investigated. The status of implementation of previously given recommendations was reviewed. Furthermore, several foreign nationals detained in these facilities were provided support for their prompt return to their home countries.

In order to expand international cooperation in the field of migration, as a member of the United Nations Network on Migration (UNMN), the Ombudsman has intensively engaged in international partnerships, particularly within the framework of the UNMN in Azerbaijan and the implementation of the Global Compact for Migration, as well as the 2021-2025 Development Plan for Migration.

Several projects have been implemented within the framework of cooperation with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD), the International Committee of the Red Cross, and other international organizations. A series of training sessions have been organized in Baku and Nakhchivan cities based on a special curriculum to increase the professional knowledge and skills of state officials.

The Ombudsman Office has actively participated in coordinating the work of the Regional Training Center on Migration and has organized training sessions on that platform. Meetings were conducted with refugees and asylum seekers as a part of regular awareness-raising activities to increase their awareness about mechanisms and procedures for the protection of migrants' rights, and private talks were also held.

The Ombudsman Office represented in the Working Group on Statelessness Issues under the State Migration Service has continued its activities in the relevant field as well.

Protection of the rights of martyr families and war veterans. One of the important directions of state social policy is the provision of social protection for PWDs, war veterans, and martyr families related to the defense of the territorial integrity, independence, and constitutional structure of the Republic of Azerbaijan. To ensure effective protection of the rights of this vulnerable group of the population, various social support programs in areas such as employment, social security, healthcare, and education are implemented.

The Ombudsman, staff members and regional centers based on the Ombudsman's instructions have consistently shown special sensitivity and care towards war participants and martyr families. They have organized regular visits to families of this category, become familiar with their problems on-site, and taken measures to address them.

Applications from persons with war-related disabilities, martyr families, and war veterans received by the Ombudsman were mainly about concerns regarding implementation of their social security rights, provision of medical and psychological services, rehabilitation services and resources, as well as assistance in resolving employment issues. Measures have been taken to address these problems.

(App. No. 5470/1-23): *Applicant S. appealed to the Ombudsman, saying that he participated in the Second Karabakh War, has financial hardships, and requested assistance in finding an appropriate job. Following an inquiry to the State Labor Inspectorate Service under the MLSP, the applicant was offered appropriate vacancies and provided with a referral.*

(App. No. 1886-23): *Applicant M. applied to the Ombudsman, saying that he participated in the Second Karabakh War, and was awarded medals, and requested to be assisted in admission to the service by internal affairs authorities. After an inquiry sent to the Ministry of Internal Affairs regarding this matter, the applicant was admitted to the Tartar District Police Department.*

(App. No. 6573-23): Applicant S. lodged an application with the Ombudsman, informing her that he participated in the Second Karabakh War, and was awarded medals and his appeals regarding the allocation of the targeted state social aid for his family.

After the complaint was addressed to the MLSPP, the applicant's family was allocated a monthly targeted state social aid in the amount of 489.39 manats for a period of one year.

(App. No. 5470/2-23): Applicant V. Applied to the Ombudsman saying that as a veteran of the Second Karabakh War, he was severely wounded during the war, as a result of which his leg was amputated, and requested assistance in the replacement of the prosthetic fitted to his foot with a new modern type of prosthesis has not been considered.

After an inquiry to the MLSPP, the applicant was provided with a new prosthesis.

Applications lodged with the Ombudsman by war veterans seeking to give him a "war veteran" title and relevant certificates of medals have been investigated in collaboration with relevant institutions, and appropriate measures have been taken.

(App. No. 8582-23): Applicant L. applied to the Ombudsman, saying that as a Second Karabakh War veteran, his appeals regarding giving him a "War veteran" title have yielded no results.

After an inquiry to the Ministry of Defense, the applicant was given the title of "War Veteran" for his participation in counter-offensive operations against Armenian armed formations and military operations for liberation of our occupied territories.

(App. No. 852-23): Applicant- a father of a martyr, N., appealed to the Ombudsman, informing her that his son was martyred during the Second Karabakh War, and was awarded medals posthumously. Nevertheless, it has been indicated that the issue regarding the consideration of awarding any medals due to his son's distinguished performance in combat has not been considered.

After an inquiry to the Ministry of Defense, a motion was submitted to the senior command concerning the posthumously awarding of the applicant's late son with the "For Service to the Motherland" Medal of the 3rd degree.

Applications filed by the family members of martyrs regarding the perpetuation of the names of martyrs have been jointly investigated with local executive authorities. Purposeful work has been carried out in the direction of naming streets and schools after martyrs, as well as creating monuments and memorial complexes.

(App. No. 11992-23): Applicant J. and others applied to the Ombudsman, requesting assistance in naming a street after the martyr to perpetuate his memory.

Following an inquiry to the Absheron District Executive Authority, it was reported that a street in Khirdalan city was named after the martyr, and a memorial complex honoring the martyrs who have fallen for the territorial integrity of our state was also built in Khirdalan city.

Applications regarding the inclusion of persons with war-related disabilities and martyr families in need of living space into the list for social housing for the purpose of improving their housing conditions have been jointly investigated with local executive authorities, and the necessary measures have been taken.

(App. No. 692-23): Applicant L. applied to the Ombudsman, saying that his appeals to the Narimanov District Executive Authority regarding the registration of a person in need, as a member of the martyr's family, for housing yielded no results.

Following an inquiry to the same executive authority, the applicant has been included in the housing list as a member of the martyr's family.

Measures have continued to be taken regarding the solution to the issue of the organization of the examination and medical treatment of war participants and martyr families indicated in the applications received by the Ombudsman.

(App. No. 1394-23): Applicant E. applied to the Ombudsman, informed that his son participated in the Second Karabakh War and suffered from a kidney disease sustained as a result of the war, and requested assistance.

After an inquiry to TABIB, the applicant's son was referred to the Clinical Medical Center by the Sheki District Central Hospital on 15 March 2023, with a diagnosis of "kidney stones" (N 20.0), and lithotripsy surgery was performed.

Many of the applications received by the Ombudsman filed by war wounded were mainly about difficulties encountered during the determination of disability status. These difficulties include challenges in preparing and submitting documents related to disability assessment, delays in processing the relevant information and its inclusion in the system, bureaucratic hurdles during the review process, as well as the strictest conditions for determining disability. Despite the fact that efforts were made to address some issues together with relevant institutions, certain problems regarding disability determination still remain.

(App. No. 6214-23): Applicant A. filed a complaint with the Ombudsman and informed her that his son was seriously wounded during the Second Karabakh War, and these requests regarding the assessment of his disability status have yielded no results.

Following an inquiry to the MLSPP, the applicant's son's disability was assessed based on a 40% impairment of bodily functions for two years. Subsequently, from the date of determination, an appropriate amount of monthly social assistance was allocated considering an impairment of bodily functions ranging from 31% to 60%.

It should be noted that, as a result of the social-economic reforms implemented at the national level, the scope of measures is continuously expanding to ensure reliable protection of the rights of martyr families, war veterans, and persons with war-related disabilities.

Protection of the rights of military servicemen. Under the leadership of the Victorious Supreme Commander, measures continue to be taken to strengthen the social protection of the personnel of the Armed Forces of Azerbaijan, as well as reservists and retired military personnel.

Applications filed by active-duty military personnel, released servicemen and retired servicemen with the Ombudsman were mainly about concerns such as the enlistment of several citizens in military service without considering the grounds for deferral from military service due to health conditions, delays in the review of issues related to discharge of servicemen in active duty from military service because of their health condition or any other reasons, and failures in timely payment of compensation for unused military property and leave days, as well as other matters concerning military personnel.

In a number of applications, it was indicated that concerns was raised about the fact that conscripts are enlisted in the military service by the local departments under the State Service for Mobilization and Conscription of Azerbaijan despite the presence of facts about their health and family circumstances for granting deferral of military service, and in other cases, non-considering the appeals of the active duty military personnel (except for conscripts under active military service) regarding discharge from service due to their health condition. As a result of the investigations into these problems, in many cases, such facts have been either partially or fully substantiated.

Following inquiries addressed to relevant state institutions regarding several applications about health issues (2185-23; 4320-23; 6561-23; 9475-23; 13930-23), the conscripts have been granted deferrals from military service based on their health condition. Furthermore, active-duty military personnel have been discharged from military service in many cases, either as unfit for service during peacetime or as limitedly useful during wartime. In addition, the service location of some military servicemen has been changed due to their health conditions.

Also, with the Ombudsman's intervention, a number of applications (10432-23, 11036-23, 14517-23) dealing with delays in the return of military cards or other documents after discharge from military service, the inability to effectively protect other rights related to this issue, as well as the unsuccessful outcome of applications to relevant institutions, have been resolved.

Under Article 10, Paragraph 5 of the Law "On the Status of Military Servicemen" of Azerbaijan, military servicemen are entitled to receive state-funded food and property according to the standards set by the Cabinet of Ministers, as well as compensation for food and property. According to Article 11, para. 1 of the Law, a military serviceman (excluding active duty military servicemen) who does not take leave during the calendar year or other calendar years as provided in this norm for any reason is entitled to compensation for the unused leave for that calendar year and other calendar years during which they were under active military service, as determined by the relevant executive authority in the prescribed manner and amount. Furthermore, the relevant laws also provide for additional payments to military servicemen for certain special services.

The applications regarding delayed payments (498-23, 3864-23, 4261-23, 6686-23, and 13202-23) have been resolved, and the applicants have been provided with the compensation and other payments stipulated by legislation.

Military servicemen and their family members are registered according to the service location until they are provided with service housing, and they are compensated with the amount stipulated by legislation for renting temporary housing at the service location.

The violations of the payment of temporary housing rent indicated in the applications (8435-23, 10432-23) have been restored.

It would be appropriate to increase the amount of support allowances paid to military servicemen, including salary, as well as the allowances paid for food and military ranks. As a result of investigations of similar applications (1396-23, 3425-23, 4619-23, 5204-23, 6464-23, 7900-23, 8185-23, 9776-23, 10334-23, 13993-23, and 14345-23), it was determined that some servicemen have been discharged from active duty for various reasons, while others will have their cases reviewed in accordance with the law, and decisions will be made accordingly.

Article 76 of the Constitution of Azerbaijan states that the defense of the motherland is the duty of every citizen. The citizens shall serve in the Armed Forces as prescribed by law. If military service is contrary to a person's convictions, then, in cases prescribed by law, it may be permissible to replace regular military service with alternative service.

Considering the above, the Ombudsman proposed to prepare and adopt the "Alternative Service Law."

Legal awareness activities targeted at military servicemen were one of the main directions of activity in 2023, as they have been in previous years. According to the action plan agreed upon with the Minister of Defense, the commanders of the Internal Troops of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and the Civil Defense Forces of the Ministry of Emergency Situations, the Ombudsman and her staff conducted visits to military units located across the country, including those newly established in the liberated areas, throughout the year in order to increase the legal education of the personnel and conduct an on-site investigation of effective protection of human rights.

During the meetings of the Ombudsman and her staff members with the corresponding military personnel held in the course of these events, the questions of the personnel were answered. The servicemen were received individually upon their requests, and their applications were accepted for investigation. During this visit, the living quarters, medical centers, canteens, kitchens, food storages, bathrooms, and sanitary facilities in the military units, recreation areas, sports halls, and other military facilities that do not constitute military secrets.

It should be noted that the conditions created for military personnel in the military units monitored and the treatment of the personnel were positively evaluated. The military commands were provided with recommendations for further improving the quality of work.

Protection of women's rights and ensuring gender equality. The protection of women's rights, as well as the promotion and advocacy of gender equality, take an important place in the Ombudsman's activities.

Incoming applications in this field were mainly related to non-enforcement of court decisions, violation of labor rights, employment, pensions, determination of disability, medical examination and treatment matters, domestic violence, and other similar issues.

The Ombudsman was accessible regarding the protection of women's rights, including their right to appeal as one of the sensitive groups of the population. The Ombudsman has investigated these complaints with sensitivity, conducted numerous investigations, and taken effective measures to restore violated rights and prevent further violations.

During the analysis of complaints, it was revealed that most of the time, the rights of women were violated due to their unawareness of their rights. Therefore, the Ombudsman has undertaken public awareness-raising events throughout the year in Baku and regions in order to increase knowledge about women's rights, women's entrepreneurship, their role in decision-making, gender equality, domestic violence, drug addiction, and harmful habits, as well as combating human trafficking and early marriages. These initiatives also included various educational campaigns, such as the "16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence" campaign, the "Human Rights Month-long campaign," and the "Child Rights Month-long" campaign, along with training sessions and seminars. These events have contributed to promoting gender equality, increasing women's legal awareness, developing women's entrepreneurship, expanding their economic opportunities, preventing girls' education truancy and child marriages, and overall increasing the role of women in society.

In the hope of reducing poverty, promoting sustainable and inclusive development, and ensuring gender equality in the country, it is crucial to develop women's entrepreneurship. In this regard, it is essential to expand women's access to economic resources and support mechanisms, organize specialized business training programs, study relevant experiences of other countries, and increase the role of women in the field of information and communication technology (ICT).

Gender and reproductive health, along with family planning, are extremely important in ensuring women's rights. To achieve this goal, it is essential to improve the quality of medical infrastructure and services and ensure accessibility to family planning options.

The Ombudsman Office, in close collaboration with relevant state and non-governmental organizations, has organized training sessions and awareness-raising events on women's rights and gender equality for secondary

school students, college and university students, and members of trade unions in Baku city and regions. Furthermore, collaborative efforts have been undertaken to enhance education and awareness on these important topics.

The Ombudsman Office has continued to run a course on "Introduction to Gender" at Baku State University, as well as a lecture series on "Introduction to Gender" that has been improved and translated into English under the general editorship of the Ombudsman, and made publicly available to all, including teaching staff and students.

The Ombudsman Office has continued cooperation with relevant state institutions, CSOs, and international organizations towards effective protection of women's rights. Furthermore, experience exchange was conducted in the field of protection of women's rights and promotion of gender equality, and joint cooperation perspectives have been discussed.

The staff of the headquarters office (in Baku) and regional centers have been engaged in numerous projects supported by international organizations aimed at increasing professional capacity and strengthening efforts against discrimination. They have also engaged in positive experience exchanges.

Protection of child rights. Activities for the effective protection and promotion of children's rights have been continued.

Complaints about the violation of the children's rights received by the Ombudsman were about non-payment of child support (alimony), failure to provide access to communication with the child, non-execution of court decisions regarding custody and guardianship, as well as protection of children from violence, provision of education, social security, organization of medical examinations and treatment, assessment of disabilities, and other related issues. The complaints have been investigated, and necessary measures have been taken to ensure child rights protection.

(App. No. 39-23): *Applicant A. appealed to the Ombudsman regarding the non-enforcement of the court decision in a civil case regarding alimony payments to support the child until reaching the age of majority. After an inquiry sent to the General Department for Execution of the Ministry of Justice regarding this complaint, as a result of measures taken during the execution process at the Garadagh District Execution Department based on the relevant execution document by Imishli District Court, the complainant was provided full payment of the child support debt.*

(App. No. 9204-23): *Applicant B. applied to the Ombudsman and stated that the interrogation of the adolescent girl, identified as the victim in the case pending at the Lankaran Court of Grave Crimes, in the presence of the accused persons during the trial will increase her psychological tension, and asked for help in the interrogation of the victim in online format. The Lankaran Court of Grave Crimes was requested regarding the application, and considering Article 123-2.3 of the Criminal Procedure Code, the child was provided to testify in online format without attending the courtroom.*

(App. No. 13421-23): *Applicant J. complained to the Ombudsman, requesting assistance for a home-based education for his child. After an inquiry sent to the Ministry of Science and Education regarding this complaint, the applicant's child's documents were submitted to the psychological-medical-pedagogical commission, and based on the*

results of the medical examination, it was determined that the child met the requirements of existing legislation concerning home study continuing education. Subsequently, an appropriate decision was made in this regard.

(App. No. 13624-23): *Applicant Ch. filed a complaint with the Ombudsman, requesting assistance for the admission of his child to the 1st grade.*

Following an inquiry to the Ministry of Science and Education, it was found that the applicant's child was admitted to the 1st grade of the respective school for the 2022-2023 academic year, but the child did not attend classes. However, considering the child's eligibility to receive education in the 1st grade for the next academic year, he was admitted to the rural full secondary school.

(App. No. 11544-23): *Applicant D. applied to the Ombudsman, asking for help in entering the appropriate referral into the E-system for the assessment of his child's disability status.*

Following an inquiry to the TABIB, the applicant was provided a referral for the medical examination and treatment of the applicant's child at the Salyan Interdistrict Psychiatric Hospital.

(App. No. 3842-23): *Applicant E. appealed to the Ombudsman, reporting that a person who committed sexual assault against his 16-year-old child has repeatedly threatened her to keep the incident hidden.*

Following an inquiry to the Salyan District Prosecutor's Office regarding this issue, it was revealed that, after the investigation carried out by the Investigation Unit of the Salyan District Police Department, based on the collected evidence, the initiation of criminal proceedings was denied according to Article 39.1.2 of the Criminal Procedure Code. However, upon review of the materials at the district prosecutor's office, it was determined that the specific details provided in the applicant's complaint and the important aspects related to the incident were not thoroughly investigated. Therefore, the decision to refuse the initiation of criminal proceedings was repealed, and the case was returned to the police department's investigation unit for further investigation.

(App. No. 5108-23): *Applicant F. applied to the Ombudsman, saying that his child has been subjected to continuous insults and harassment by a classmate at the school.*

After an inquiry sent to the Ministry of Science and Education regarding this case, the allegations in the complaint were confirmed, and the parent of the harassing child was invited to the school and informed about the situation. Continuous psychological sessions were conducted by the school psychologist to improve the child's behavior, and in addition, the child was transferred to another school.

When deemed necessary, the staff of the Ombudsman Office and regional centers conducted on-site investigations into allegations indicated in several applications, and necessary measures have been implemented.

(App. No. 4024-23): *Applicant L. applied to the Ombudsman, reporting that his underage child was not treated well by the police officers who did not consider his age during the investigation carried out based on his neighbor's complaint, and that the applicant was dissatisfied with this.*

The Ombudsman has communicated with relevant state authorities; the reported issues were raised, and appropriate measures were taken regarding the matter.

The Ombudsman expediently monitored information about child rights violations circulated in the media and social accounts, along with incoming complaints, addressed requests to the relevant state authorities, and took appropriate measures.

The Ministry of Science and Education of Azerbaijan, Sabunchu District Police Department, and Sabunchu District Executive Authority have been requested with relevant inquiries regarding the investigation into the involvement of an underage girl, a resident of Sabunchu district in Baku, into marriage after coercion, published in the media (7852-23) and ensuring the minor's rights. The necessary measures have been taken in this regard.

The Ministry of Internal Affairs was requested regarding the video footage disseminated in the media and social networks depicting a minor assaulted by teenagers (11706-23), and urgent measures have been taken.

The information spread in the media about the social vulnerability of 4-month-old and 3-year-old children in Ganja city has been investigated and monitored within the Ombudsman's mandate, and appropriate measures have been taken regarding the issue.

In order to investigate the situation of ensuring the rights of the child resident of the Children's Home No. 3, who was placed in the Republican Psychiatric Hospital of the Ministry of Health, the facility was monitored, and the child was privately interviewed. The issues regarding detention conditions, allegations of mistreatment, organization of medical and psychological services, as well as nutrition-related matters, have been investigated on-site, and recommendations have been provided for the protection of the child's rights.

As a result of the analysis of applications and investigations, several proposals have been put forward for the more reliable protection of children's rights.

To address the issues related to the execution of court decisions on alimony demands, the Ombudsman emphasizes the relevance of creating an Alimony Fund as a solution.

It is essential to establish clear rules regarding the treatment of accused, victimized, and witness minors during juvenile justice proceedings and to conduct awareness raising activities for professionals working in this field.

In the annual reports, the Ombudsman proposed improving the existing inclusive education legal framework to ensure equality in children's access to education. It is noteworthy that the Cabinet of Ministers, by its decision dated 11 February 2023, has approved the "Regulation on Organizing Inclusive Education."

The Ombudsman's NPG has conducted numerous monitoring visits to child institutions based in various cities and regions, such as Baku, Sumgayit, Ganja, Goranboy, Tovuz, Guba, Siyazan, Sheki, Zagatala, Balakan, Mingachevir, Salyan, Neftchala, Lankaran, Lerik, and others, without prior notification. The detention conditions in these facilities were investigated. The resident children were privately interviewed, and necessary measures were taken to resolve existing shortcomings.

The Ombudsman's representatives have met with repatriates who were brought from Syria and placed in social service institutions under the MLSPP. They have inquired about their psychological condition and the situation with ensuring their rights. Furthermore, the representatives were informed about the measures taken for their social rehabilitation and reintegration into society.

The Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC Committee) welcomed the establishment of the Child Rights Protection Unit within the Ombudsman Office in 2021 in its Concluding Observations on the combined fifth and sixth periodic reports of Azerbaijan in relation to the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), adopted on 3 February 2023. Furthermore, it was recommended to strengthen the mandate to address complaints from or on behalf of children in a child-friendly manner. So, following amendments to the Constitutional Law on the Ombudsman, granting the Ombudsman the authority for monitoring, and promoting the

implementation of the CRC through an independent monitoring mechanism is a significant step towards aligning the existing legal framework with relevant international standards.

The Ombudsman has prepared proposals to the bill of the new law "On Children's Rights" and draft laws on other related normative legal acts, prepared on the basis of the Cabinet of Minister's Decision No. 524s dated 24 June 2023 regarding the "Implementation of Presidential Decree No. 3914 dated 9 June 2023, "On Amendments to the "Activity Plan for 2020-2025 for the Implementation of the Strategy for Children" of the Azerbaijan Republic," and submitted them to the relevant institution.

The Ombudsman has taken initiatives to meet with children and protect the rights of children from various categories. In connection with the 100th anniversary of the Great Leader Heydar Aliyev, on the Ombudsman's initiative, city-tours to historical-cultural monuments, recreational and public catering facilities in the capital city for two juveniles under rehabilitation, in collaboration with the Penitentiary Service of the Ministry of Justice, as well as meetings with the Ombudsman, were organized.

Based on the Ombudsman's motion, in 2023, one juvenile offender was granted amnesty.

The Ombudsman conducted a visit to a shelter for women and children within the "Clean World" Women's Support Public Association in connection with the 1 June - International Day for Protection of Children and got acquainted with the work of the facility. She had a meeting with women and children residing there to assess the situation regarding the protection of their rights.

In collaboration with the "Zafar" (Victory) Martyr' Families Support Public Union, the Ombudsman organized an event for the children of war martyrs held in Lankaran city to ensure the effective use of leisure time. In addition, she held meetings with martyr families and their children living in Lankaran, Masalli, Lerik, and Astara, as well.

The Ombudsman participated in an event on the topic "Heydar Aliyev and children's rights," dedicated to the 100th anniversary of the National Leader Heydar Aliyev at secondary school No. 239 in Baku. During the event, the Ombudsman met with children and the teaching staff, as well as discussed, the topic by exchanging views and proposing recommendations.

The Ombudsman has continued educational activities in the field of child rights protection. In order to implement the relevant subparagraph regarding "strengthening the scope of educational activities about the negative consequences of all kinds of violence against children by involving the media" in the "NAP for 2020-2025 to Implement the Child Strategy," approved by the Presidential Order of 27 November 2020, the Ombudsman Office jointly with the Ministry of Science and Education held a series of training sessions on "Protection of Children from Violence" for teachers, psychologists, and students in general secondary schools located across the country. In general, over 2000 people, including 390 in Baku and 1670 in the regions, have benefited from these training sessions.

Habitually, in 2023 as well, the Ombudsman declared the period between 20 October and 20 November the "Child Rights Month-long campaign" in the country, on the occasion of the anniversary of the adoption of the CRC. During this month-long campaign, in total, 104 institutions, including 26 central executive authorities, public legal entities, non-profit organizations, and 77 local executive authorities, including the Ombudsman of the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic (NAR) have been addressed with letters to conduct related events. Furthermore, the CSOs have been also urged to join in and participate in various activities during the campaign. Within the framework of this month, the Ombudsman Office and relevant institutions have launched a series of activities.

The central executive authorities have organized more than 1300 awareness-raising activities covering Baku and regions. In addition, exhibitions, various competitions, sports competitions, excursions, and tree planting campaigns have been organized, and educational posts have been disseminated on institutions' social media accounts, and television programs.

State institutions have held "Open Door" days. As a result of raids, inspections, and observations, various minors committed legal violations, and those exposed to legal misconduct, including truant school-aged children, have been identified. Necessary medical services have been provided to children in need of medical examinations. Also, mobile medical services, social services and rehabilitation measures for children and their parents, have been carried out in children's homes and shelters. Social recovery and rehabilitation work has been conducted with juvenile offenders, minors engaged in illegal actions, and those who have been exposed to such violations, along with other measures.

During this month, local executive authorities, CSOs, and other relevant organizations have also implemented a series of continuous measures.

The Ombudsman Office has organized more than 40 legal awareness-raising activities during the month-long campaign in a total of 20 cities and regions, including Baku, Sumgayit, Ganja, and Mingachevir cities, as well as Guba, Gusar, Siyazan, Khizi, Khachmaz, Shabran, Sheki, Gabala, Tovuz, Goygol, Samukh, Lenkaran, Masalli, Jalilabad, Astara, and Salyan districts. These events were conducted in various institutions and facilities with the participation of children, parents, and professionals working with children. As well, trainings held in Baku and Sumgayit, have been attended by over 400 participants, including nearly 3000 people from other regions.

In order to increase awareness in this field, the Ombudsman Office has prepared an educational tool entitled "Protection of Children's Rights in the Activities of the Ombudsman." The tool provides information about the legal foundations, mandate, directions for the Ombudsman's activities in protecting children's rights, the mandate to monitor and promote the implementation of the CRC, and other relevant information.

The staff of the Ombudsman Office conducted monitoring visits to children's institutions located in the NAR for the first time, and awareness talks were held in the course of the meetings.

During the monitoring visits conducted with the participation of the staff members of the Ombudsman Office in NAR, at the Child Rehabilitation Center of the State Medical-Social Expertise and Rehabilitation Agency under the MLSPP of the Autonomous Republic and the Nakhchivan Regional Information Center for Persons with Limited Physical Abilities, conditions created for children with disabilities up to the age of 18, services provided for their rehabilitation and development of individual skills were observed. The staff of the Ombudsman Office engaged in discussions with institution personnel as well as with children and parents.

In addition, monitoring and awareness talks were conducted at the Special Primary School for Visually Impaired Children under the Ministry of Education of the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic, as well as at the Full Secondary Boarding School in Ordubad city named after M. Fuzuli.

As part of the trip, the Regime Unit for Minors within the Mixed-Type Regime Correctional Institution of the Penitentiary Service of the Ministry of Justice of the NAR was monitored. The existing conditions were inspected. During the visit, no detained person was found in this unit.

During the monitoring visits, recommendations were provided regarding documentation processing, storage of certain food items, provision of medical services, increasing children's vocational skills, appropriate arrangement of bedrooms according to children's age groups, lighting in rooms according to standards, heating equipment in dormitories, and provision of clothing, footwear, and soft equipment for children, and so on. Furthermore, educational publications were presented to the institutions.

Along with activities carried out during the "Child Rights Month-long campaign," within the framework of the campaign declared by the Ombudsman, the Ombudsman Office regularly organized awareness raising activities on the protection of children's rights. These events were organized for children and people working with them.

Child drawing competition was held on the topic "Heydar Aliyev and Human Rights in Azerbaijan," held on the occasion of 10 December – International Human Rights Day, and within the framework of the 100th anniversary of the birth of the Great Leader Heydar Aliyev. The students at secondary schools, vocational schools, as well as non-formal education schools, children's homes, and boarding schools from 21 cities and regions of the country, along with Baku, participated in the competition. Winners from among the 227 participating children were rewarded with diplomas and gifts.

The Ombudsman continued to collaborate with international organizations in the field of child rights protection. Within the framework of the Action Plan signed between the Ombudsman and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), activities were carried out in various directions, including monitoring the situation of child rights within the NPM mandate, protecting the rights of migrant children, and others.

Protection of the rights of the elderly. Within the frame of the Ombudsman's activities, measures were continued in the direction of supporting the participation of the elderly in social, economic, political, and cultural life, preventing the possibility of discrimination, and considering their needs and interests.

Provision of social services at home (mobile social services) to the elderly, recalculation of pensions, provision of sanatorium-resort trips, placement in a social care facility, financial assistance, as well as food assistance and other such issues that were reflected in the appeals received at the Ombudsman's address were investigated and in cases where violations of law were observed, necessary measures were taken to ensure them.

(App. No. 1935-23): Applicant N. applied to the Ombudsman, stated that s/he lives alone, is unable to take care of himself/herself, and needs social services, and asked for assistance in organizing social service at home (mobile social service). After the investigation of the application, it was revealed that the applicant was lonely and his/her household conditions were neglected, and s/he was provided with social services at home (mobile social service).

(App. No. 4085-23): Applicant B. applied to the Ombudsman, stated that s/he is elderly, suffers from Parkinson's disease, and asked for help in organizing his/her medical examination and treatment at home. After an inquiry to TABIB regarding the issue, he was referred to the Republican Clinical Hospital, named after Academician M.A. Mirgasimov, for the determination of his disability degree based on the diagnosis of "atherosclerotic parkinsonism."

With the initiative and support of the Ombudsman, cultural and mass events were organized for the residents of the social service facility for the elderly to provide more effective cultural recreation for them. Also, in connection with the opening of the theater season, it was possible to watch performances free of charge at the Shusha State Musical Drama Theater, later at the Azerbaijan State Academic National Drama Theater and Azerbaijan State Musical Theater, which was highly valued by the elderly.

On the Ombudsman's initiative, the staff members of the Ombudsman Office paid visits to the social service institution for the elderly of the Social Services Agency under the MLSPP on significant days. Within the frames of the Human Rights Month-long campaign, they met with the elderly people, took an interest in their concerns, and put forward recommendations to the administration of the institution regarding the effective provision of the rights of the elderly.

During the monitoring conducted to that social service institution for the elderly, without prior notice, the accessibility of the conditions created for the elderly, access to nutrition, social-household and medical services, as well as the efficient organization of leisure time, were investigated, and their living areas were inspected. Thus,

although it was observed that many of the deficiencies identified in previous monitoring and visits found their solution, the existence of certain problems remains relevant. So, before that, it was discovered that there is a lack of personnel providing services to the elderly in the facility, and that there are vacancies in the position of social worker according to the staffing table.

The issue was raised before the management of the institution and the workforce was attracted to many vacant places, and the problem related to caring for the elderly both during the day and at night was eliminated. However, according to the institution's staffing table, nine jobs in the Department of Social Service Organization, as well as one psychologist and two doctor-therapist positions, remain vacant. For this reason, it has been observed that measures aimed at the social-psychological rehabilitation of the elderly, as well as medical examinations, are carried out rarely. It was determined that the general condition in that institution was satisfactory, but there are no alarm buttons in the rooms with bed patients, some of the doors of the rooms are malfunctioning, the artificial lighting in some rooms does not comply with generally accepted technical norms, the equipment needs to be updated, and the institution needs major repair.

During a visit to the Goygol district Psycho-neurological Social Service Institution No. 3 of the Social Services Agency under the MLSPP, it was determined that 10 out of the 122 registered residents were elderly people, as well as that 6 of the 103 registered residents of the Psycho-Neurological Social Service Institution No. 4 in Ganja were found to be elderly people as well.

During the visits to both institutions, several shortcomings were revealed, including the fact that several positions necessary for providing high-quality social and medical services to residents according to the profile of the institutions are vacant, and the issue was raised before the relevant ministry regarding its solution.

In general, appropriate appeals were made to the relevant state institutions with the aim of preventing situations that worsen the living standards of the elderly, complicate their social-psychological status, and lead to their isolation from society, and to increase the level of social service provision to the elderly in need.

Protection of the rights of persons with disabilities. The relevant reforms have been expanded in the direction of creating legal, economic, and social conditions for persons with disabilities in our country following the provisions of the CRPD, at the same time considering the recommendations of the CRPD Committee.

It should be noted that the proposal reflected in the previous annual reports regarding the establishment of the Ombudsman as a national human rights institution performing the functions of an independent monitoring mechanism, which is intended to be established following the requirements of that Convention, was taken into account. Thus, empowering the Ombudsman to perform the functions of an independent monitoring mechanism for monitoring and promoting the implementation of the CRPD in the country according to the amendment to the Constitutional Law on the Ombudsman, is an important step in terms of adapting the current activity to modern challenges, increasing efficiency in the protection of the rights of persons with disabilities, and applying progressive international practice in our country.

The Ombudsman paid attention to the elimination of all forms of discrimination due to disability, the creation of relevant conditions for the rehabilitation, participation in public life, and social integration of PWDs, their active involvement in the process of preparation and implementation of state programs in this field, and the full and equal implementation of the rights and freedoms of persons from this group of population.

The complaints addressed to the Ombudsman from PWDs were kept under the focus of attention, and different measures were carried out to efficiently ensure the rights of these people. Thus, after the appeals of the Ombudsman to the relevant state institutions, measures were taken regarding the objective assessment of disability. At the same time, these persons were sent to relevant medical and rehabilitation facilities, their examination and treatment were organized, and those who needed them were provided with necessary medicaments, as well as auxiliary technical means.

(App. No. 5944-23): Applicant A. (5944-23) applied to the Ombudsman and asked for assistance in providing his/her child with limited physical capacities with a rehabilitation vehicle (wheelchair).

After an inquiry was addressed to the MLSPP of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the applicant's child with limited physical capacity was provided with a wheelchair for indoor use.

For the purpose of checking the refusal answers given to formalized referrals by medical advisory commissions operating under medical institutions for the appropriate assessment of disability, on the basis of complaints, applications were submitted by the Ombudsman at different times to the MLSPP of the Republic of Azerbaijan, as well as to the State Medical-Social Expertise and Rehabilitation Agency under this ministry.

(App. No. 5944-23): Applicant M. applied to the Ombudsman, stated that his appeal regarding the determination of his child's disability was unsuccessful, and asked for help in assessing his/her disability.

After an inquiry made to the State Medical-Social Expertise and Rehabilitation Agency under the MLSPP, the disability status of the applicant's child was re-examined and evaluated based on the relevant decision of the Medical and Social Expert Commission (MSEC), and a decision was made to assign disability for a period of 2 years with 70 percent impairment of the body's functions due to general reasons.

(App. No. 375-23): Applicant C. applied to the Ombudsman and stated that the next time the referral was formalized by the medical institution and included in the registry of MSEC, but a decision was made to refuse to assign disability to him, s/he asked to assist in the re-evaluation of disability.

In the response letter with regard the complaint given by the State Medical-Social Expertise and Rehabilitation Agency under the MLSPP, it was stated that the disability status of the applicant was evaluated according to the referral of the Shamkir District Central Hospital, and it was impossible to determine disability due to incomplete referral form, and that during the examination of the objective condition, based on the diagnosis mentioned in the document, the submitted medical documents (epicrisis, medical examinations) and the results of the objective examinations, a decision was made to determine disability for a period of 1 year with a 35 percent impairment of the body's functions due to a general illness.

(App. No. 3324-23): Applicant H. applied to the Ombudsman and stated that the decision was made by the MSEC to refuse the referral formalized several times in order to determine the disability of his/her child and asked for assistance in protection of the right to social provision.

After the Ombudsman's inquiry to the State Medical-Social Expertise and Rehabilitation Agency under the MLSPP, the applicant's child's disability status was evaluated based on the relevant decision of MSEC, and the decision was issued about determination of a disability for a period of 1 year with a 35 percent impairment of the body's functions due to a general cause.

(App. No. 4221-23): Applicant A. applied via the Ombudsman's Call Center, stating that the official referral regarding his/her child suffering from autism was not considered, and his/her appeals in this regard were unsuccessful and asked for assistance.

It was stated in the response to the Ombudsman's letter with regard the complaint to the State Medical-Social Expertise and Rehabilitation Agency under the MLSPP that the disability status of the applicant's child

was evaluated based on the referral of the Psycho-neurological Rehabilitation Center, and a decision was made about 70 percent impairment of body functions due to general causes.

Ensuring the accessibility of infrastructure facilities for PWDs remains relevant. Despite the implementation of certain works in the mentioned field, it is still possible to come across significant deficiencies in creating appropriate favorable conditions for PWDs life activities.

The creation of conditions according to the criteria of “universal design” for free access and exit of wheelchairs to residential houses, public transport vehicles, and necessary medical, social, and educational facilities, both in Baku city and in the country regions, including renovation of roads and sidewalks, as well as the installation of ramps, special escalators, elevators, and other similar equipment according to current standards, assumes significance.

In order to effectively ensure the rights of people with hearing loss and speech impairment, it is appropriate to officially accept sign language as a language of communication, to include it in relevant educational programs, and to increase attention to the implementation of personnel training in the specialty of sign language interpreter.

There is a need to increase attention to the protection of the rights of children suffering from autism spectrum disorders (ASD), to adopt a law on state care for such persons, and to prepare and adopt an appropriate state program on prevention and treatment, including rehabilitation measures.

According to Article 24 of the CRPD, States Parties, with a view to realizing and recognizing the right of PWDs to education without discrimination and based on equal opportunity, shall ensure an inclusive education system at all levels and lifelong learning. From this point of view, as a continuation of the "education for all" goal, it is important to involve PWDs in joint education and create ample opportunities for more effective provision of their right to education.

In the regions of our country, the lack of special and general-purpose state rehabilitation and development centers for pre-school and secondary education of PWDs under the age of 18, also the lack of qualified and professional personnel, creates difficulties in the organization of training and rehabilitation work.

Strengthening information, conducting professional personnel training, introducing assistive technologies into the education system, promoting rules of conduct, and studying international experience in rehabilitation assume high necessity in order to solve the social and psychological problems of PWDs.

Within the framework of the activities of the Ombudsman's NPM, several monitoring was carried out in education and healthcare facilities, penitentiary and social service institutions by the staff of the Ombudsman Office and Regional Centers during the year. Issues of ensuring the living conditions, social problems, health, and other rights of PWDs were taken into account, and related proposals and recommendations were made. Necessary measures have been taken to educate such persons, eliminate any discrimination, inhumane treatment, and other violations of the law against them.

In the events organized with the initiative and participation of the Ombudsman in cooperation with state institutions, CSOs and international organizations to protect and promote PWDs' rights, discussions were held on the work done and tasks ahead in the direction of ensuring accessibility to various services for vulnerable groups of the population, including PWDs.

Continuous meetings were held with the members of the Working Group of the Committee for the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities of the ENNHRI, and the activities of the Ombudsman in this field were reflected in joint bulletins reflecting the carried-out work.

Protection of the rights of persons kept in places of detention and convicts. In order to adapt penitentiary institutions to modern standards, measures were continued based on the recommendations aimed at improving detention conditions and medical-sanitary services, as well as ensuring human rights in these institutions.

Taking into account the proposals put forward by the Ombudsman in previous years with regard to the construction of new penitentiary institutions that meet modern standards, a new modern penitentiary complex for convicts serving sentences of imprisonment for a certain period of time or life imprisonment, as well as accused persons, has been put into exploitation in Umbaki settlement of Baku city.

Applications and complaints addressed to the Ombudsman and her Call Center by detainees in prisons, convicts, their family members, and defenders, including requests for meetings, telephone conversations, medical assistance, and other such issues, were investigated. During the visits, necessary measures were taken to ensure the rights of detainees.

(App. No. 3659-23): *Applicant A. applied to the Ombudsman's Call Center and stated that the meeting and telephone conversation with her husband, who is kept in the Baku Pre-trial Detention Facility of the Penitentiary Service of the Ministry of Justice, was not provided, and asked for appropriate assistance.*

After an inquiry to that Service regarding the complaint, the applicant's husband was provided with a phone call.

(App. No. 3180/4-23): *Applicant A. applied to the Ombudsman's Call Center and stated that she was informed that her child, who is serving a sentence in the Prison of the Penitentiary Service, will be transferred to the Penitentiary Institution No. 15, but that her child has not contacted and she has no information about his current place, asked for assistance in taking appropriate measures according to the law.*

In the response to an inquiry to the Penitentiary Service regarding the complaint, it was stated that the applicant's child was transferred to Penitentiary Institution No. 15 after the end of the prison regime, as well as a short-term meeting with his mother and a telephone conversation was provided.

(App. No. 9151/2-23): *Applicant S. applied to the Ombudsman's Call Center and stating that she brought a gift to her son, who is detained in the Baku Pre-trial Detention Facility, but was not allowed to meet him, requested appropriate assistance. As a result of the measures taken, the meeting with the applicant's child was ensured.*

The health condition of the persons detained in places of detention and convicts was taken into consideration, requests for medical examination, outpatient or inpatient treatment were provided.

(App. No. 2962/4-23): *Applicant H. appealed to the Ombudsman and stated that there were health problems with his child, who was detained in the Baku Pre-Trial Detention Facility, requested appropriate assistance.*

After an inquiry with regard this complaint addressed to the Main Medical Department of the Ministry of Justice, the applicant's child was subjected to repeated clinical, instrumental and laboratory examinations by the doctors of the medical-sanitary department of the institution where he was detained, and according to his subjective complaints, outpatient treatment was prescribed to him.

(App. No. 11314-23): Applicant S. applied to the Ombudsman's Call Center and stated that her son, who is serving a sentence in Penitentiary Institution No. 10 of the Penitentiary Service, is an oncological patient, and that he was sent to the Penitentiary Service's Treatment Facility due to his health but was returned without complete treatment, requested undertaking of necessary measures.

After an inquiry addressed to the Main Medical Department of the Ministry of Justice, an endoscopic polypectomy surgical operation was performed on the applicant's child at the National Oncology Center.

(App. No. 13053-23): Applicant K. applied to the Ombudsman, stated that his father, who was serving his sentence in Penitentiary Institution No. 13 of the Penitentiary Service, was transferred to the Treatment Facility of that Service due to an intervertebral disc herniation, and his request for surgery was not considered, requested appropriate assistance.

After an inquiry made to the Chief Medical Department of the Ministry of Justice, the applicant's father underwent an MRI examination at the Educational-Surgical Clinic of the Azerbaijan Medical University, relevant surgery was performed to eliminate the identified intervertebral disc herniation.

(App. No. 631/2-23): Applicant Z. applied to the Ombudsman and stated that her husband imprisoned in the Baku Pre-Trial Detention Facility of the Penitentiary Service, has poor vision, and suffers from it, requested assistance in organizing his examination and treatment at the Department of Ophthalmology of the Educational-Surgical Clinic of the Azerbaijan Medical University.

After the intervention of the Ombudsman, the husband of the applicant was examined by a doctor of his choice in the relevant clinic, "Oculus Uterque Complicated Cataract. Macular edema" was determined, and outpatient treatment was prescribed.

As it can be seen, the issue of providing medical assistance to convicts and accused persons has been positively resolved after the intervention of the Ombudsman in a few cases. Studies show that problems in this area still remain. Therefore, it is necessary to pay more attention to the implementation and provision of the right to health protection of persons detained in relevant institutions.

Examination and treatment of prisoners with disabilities serving sentences in penitentiary institutions, documents on disability, prostheses, as well as provision of pension rights have always been under the focus of the Ombudsman's attention. During the year, a number of PWDs were provided with orthopedic shoes and socks, leg prostheses and wheelchairs based on their requests. In addition, there were also complaints regarding the determination of the convicts' disability degree, as well as about the failure to formalize the referral by the medical institution, and the issues mentioned were resolved after appeals to the relevant authorities.

(App. No. 9982/2-23): Applicant K. applied to the Ombudsman's Call Center and stated that the referral for the next assessment of his disability by the Penitentiary Service's Treatment Facility was not properly prepared and re-sent, requested relevant assistance.

After an inquiry addressed to the Main Medical Department of the Ministry of Justice in connection with the next assessment of disability, the applicant was transferred to the Treatment Facility and involved in medical measures, and the opinion of the doctor-advisory commission of that institution about the results of the examinations and the severity of the disease was included in the electronic database of the Medical-Social Expertise and Rehabilitation Agency under the MLSPP.

(App. No. 9986-23): *Applicant K. applied to the Ombudsman, stated that despite the formalization of the referral for the assessment of the disability status, there was no result, and requested appropriate assistance.*

After an inquiry addressed to the State Medical-Social Expertise and Rehabilitation Agency under the MLSPP regarding the complaint, the disability status of the applicant was evaluated based on the referral of the General Medical Department and due to a general disease – being a visually impaired person, a decision was made to assign him permanent disability due to 50 percent impairment of the body's functions.

It should be noted that, in many cases, improper preparation of the referral by medical institutions also creates difficulties in issuing a decision regarding disability designation. Such cases lead to the violation of the right to social security of those convicts.

According to Article 79 of the Code of Execution of Punishment, convicts can be kept in ordinary or improved conditions depending on the type of regime within a penitentiary institution. According to Article 91 of the Code, persons sentenced to imprisonment for a certain period of time and life imprisonment are provided with the necessary material and living conditions in accordance with sanitary and hygiene rules in penal institutions. In penitentiary institutions, educational institutions and prisons, the norm of living space for each prisoner cannot be less than four square meters, and in treatment institutions, it cannot be five square meters.

Issues related to the improvement of convicts' detention conditions in penitentiary institutions were constantly under the focus of attention of the Ombudsman, appeals were made to the relevant state bodies regarding a number of issues reflected in the complaints and solutions were found.

(App. No. 6071/6-23): *Applicant A. applied to the Ombudsman's Call Center and stated that the cell in which her brother was detained in the Baku Pre-trial Detention Facility was changed and transferred to the same cell as those accused of committing a particularly serious crime, that his brother suffers from asthma, and that the air in that cell has a negative effect on him, requested for help.*

After an inquiry addressed to the Penitentiary Service, the cell where the applicant's brother was kept was changed and transferred to another cell.

(App. No. 869/2-23): *Applicant A. applied to the Ombudsman, stated that he was dissatisfied with the detention conditions in the Prison of the Penitentiary Service, where he was serving his sentence, and asked for help in returning him to the cell where he was previously detained.*

After inquiring the Penitentiary Service of the Ministry of Justice regarding the complaint, the applicant's place was changed to the cell where he was kept before.

With the participation of the Ombudsman and staff of the Ombudsman Office, a series of educational events were held in penitentiary institutions in order to more effectively ensure the rights of convicts and instill in them the spirit of respect for the law, extensive information was provided and questions were answered regarding the provisions of national, regional and international documents in the field of human rights, as well as the "Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners".

In addition to the abovementioned, the situation of female convicts is one of the priority areas of the Ombudsman's activity. The ombudsman and the staff members of the Ombudsman Office explain their rights, the requirements of the amnesty statute and other regulatory legal acts to convicted women and women detained in

the places of arrest in their meetings, as well as during regular visits, they are recommended to return to their families and engage in useful work after completing the sentence.

It should also be noted that on the eve of holidays, meetings are held with female convicts, and holiday gifts are presented to babies kept with their mothers.

The situation of juvenile convicts has been the focus of attention.

During the enlightening activities carried out in the Correctional Facility of the Penitentiary Service, juvenile convicts serving sentences there were informed about international and domestic legislation, including rights and duties, legal protection mechanisms, and preventive measures. Recommendations were put forward before the administration of the institution regarding the nutrition regime, the improvement of the level of psychological assistance and the provided medical services, secondary and vocational education, as well as the organization of sports and health work and leisure time.

Employment of convicts in penitentiary institutions is one of the most important elements of their correction process.

In 2023, considering the Ombudsman's suggestions with regard to the provision of convicts' labor rights, the number of convicts involved in socially useful labor increased by 2.7% and with that, 4,802 people were employed, and at the same time, 40 new jobs were created in penitentiary institutions.

The introduction of the institution of conditionally early release from punishment and the replacement of the unserved part of the sentence with a lighter type of punishment is also a manifestation of the successful development of the humanism policy of the Great Leader Heydar Aliyev, which creates a wide opportunity to accelerate the process of correction of criminals and their social adaptation by demonstrating the humanism of the criminal law policy.

Taking into account the proposals of the Ombudsman in 2023, as in previous years, on issues related to conditional early release from punishment, replacing the unserved part of the sentence with a lighter type of punishment, changing the type of penal institution and exemption from serving the sentence due to illness, 4204 convicts have been released from the sentence, 72 people were transferred to station-type penitentiary institutions, 5 people were released due to serious illness based on the reference of the Special Medical Expert Commission.

In addition to the above, in 2023, alternative measures to detention were applied, and restraint measures were replaced with other ones (restraint measures) for more than 1,500 arrested persons or released from prison on other grounds provided by the legislation. Taking into account the amnesty requests of convicts and their family members, the Ombudsman regularly made requests to the Pardon Issues Commission under the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, and at the same time participated in the meetings of that Commission.

By the Decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan "On pardoning a number of convicted persons on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the National Leader of the Azerbaijani people Heydar Aliyev" dated May 8, 2023, considering the suggestions of the Ombudsman, 801 persons sentenced to imprisonment were pardoned.

A total of 12 amnesty acts were adopted in our country within a short period of time, 69 amnesty decrees and orders were signed, as a result, thousands of convicts were released from the unserved part of their sentences.

During the term in office of the Ombudsman, a total of 864 convicts were pardoned at his request, and in 2023, 59 convicts were pardoned.

CHAPTER II

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

Cooperation of the Ombudsman with international and regional organizations, member institutions, and with colleagues from foreign countries was successfully continued in 2023.

Granting new powers to the Ombudsman regarding the implementation of the functions of the independent monitoring mechanism monitoring and promoting the implementation of the CRPD and the CRC, ensuring the right to equality and preventing discrimination under the amendment to the Constitutional Law on the Ombudsman is of great importance in terms of ensuring the recommendations adopted across the country in the field of implementation of relevant international conventions.

The election of the Ombudsman as a full member of the ICIC in 2023 is one of the next achievements in the field of international cooperation. This organization acts as a global network connecting ombudsmen operating in the field of the right of access to information worldwide and assumes great importance in terms of exchanging knowledge and experience between member institutions.

One of the main activities of the Ombudsman within the framework of international cooperation relations was the exchange of existing positive experiences in the field of human rights protection, as well as informing international and regional organizations operating in the field of human rights and ombudsmen and NHRIs of other countries about the facts of violations of international law against Azerbaijan.

At the same time, immediate reactions were given to biased calls directed against our country, appeals were made to international and regional institutions regarding violations of international law and international humanitarian law (IHL) norms by Armenia.

The Ombudsman's response to the 2022 report of "Human Rights Watch", international non-governmental organization, regarding the inclusion of groundless accusations about Azerbaijan was brought to the attention of that organization, as well as the local and international community.

In her reaction response, the Ombudsman noted that the report prepared by the international NGO was biased, that the current events were not assessed correctly, that no attitude was expressed to the war crimes committed by Armenia, and that double standards were allowed.

The Ombudsman reacted to the groundless statements of representatives of the UN, the CoE and other organizations regarding the claims that the Khankendi-Lachin road was closed. Thus, in those reactions, biased approaches were refuted with facts, emphasizing that this road was open for humanitarian purposes, and it was noted that such statements created an obstacle to the establishment of peace between Azerbaijan and Armenia, as well as in the region.

On 27 January 2023, the Ombudsman issued a statement regarding the fact that, as a result of a terrorist attack on the Embassy of the Republic of Azerbaijan in the Islamic Republic of Iran staff members of our Embassy were killed and injured, it was stated that this attack grossly violated the requirements of international conventions on diplomatic relations.

The Ombudsman addressed appeals to international organizations regarding the implementation of the ecological terror policy, the destruction of flora and fauna, the pollution of water sources, the illegal exploitation and looting of natural resources as a result of Armenia's military aggression on the territories of Azerbaijan, during the nearly 30-year occupation period, as well as the information about the losses caused by the mines planted by Armenia in the territories of Azerbaijan during the occupation and the subsequent period, the exploitation of the Metsamor

Nuclear Power Station, which poses a serious threat to the ecological security of the region, and the pollution of Okchuchay river with chemical waste was brought to attention.

As it is known, the Ombudsman of Azerbaijan has been carrying out extensive activities in the direction of informing the international community about the crimes committed by Armenia against Azerbaijan since the Second Karabakh War, as well as preparing reports on this topic and addressing them to international organizations in charge of human rights.

In 2023, as a continuation of this activity, the Ombudsman prepared three extensive reports containing the facts of crimes committed by Armenia against Azerbaijanis and violations of international law and presented them to the attention of the local community and relevant international organizations.

A special report of the Ombudsman was prepared on the mass burial sites found in Edilli village of Khojavend district considering the facts of the discovery of mass graves, which are evidence of crimes committed by Armenia against Azerbaijanis, as well as IHL violations, and was presented to the local community and international community.

The results of an independent on-site investigation on the inhumane burial of human remains confirmed to belong to Azerbaijanis, numerous photo evidence was included, at the same time, the information related to the requirements of international law in this field were reflected in that report. In the end, a call was addressed to the world community to display sharp position regarding clarifying the fate of our missing compatriots, returning of those who survived to Azerbaijan, and providing the information about the mass burial places of the murdered, as well as providing accurate maps of mined areas and taking legal responsibility measures related to the military and political leadership of Armenia.

The Ombudsman's report on the use of children by Armenia in military operations, military groups and hate politics in general has been brought to the attention of relevant international organizations and the country's public. In the mentioned report, there is ample space for materials that include photos and videos of the activities carried out by the military groups operating in Armenia in the direction of teaching the children how to handle weapons, overcome difficult obstacles, demining areas, and other similar skills by recruiting those children into their ranks. In the document, at the same time, facts were presented, including disrespectful approaches to human rights, such as instilling hatred against Azerbaijan in children from a young age, the relevant norms of international law violated by Armenia were mentioned comprehensively and a call was made to the world community, including relevant international organizations, to prevent these acts.

The Report on Missing Persons, one of the most serious humanitarian consequences of the First Karabakh war, was presented to the local and international community on August 30 - the International Day of Missing Persons. The Report contains information about the meetings held with the family members of several missing persons, as well as the information obtained during these meetings, the facts of the discovery of the inhumane burial of the remains of the missing persons in the mass graves found in the liberated areas, analysis of the issue within the framework of international law, steps taken in this direction within the mandate of the Ombudsman, and the call was made to the world community to clarify the fate of those compatriots.

The issue of clarifying the fate of missing Azerbaijanis was regularly raised by the Ombudsman at international events and foreign visits.

The Ombudsman received the delegation of the International Commission on Missing Persons (ICMP), which operates in the direction of resolving issues related to persons who have disappeared as a result of military conflicts, human rights violations, natural disasters, illegal migration and other reasons. In the course of the meeting the Ombudsman specifically noted the fact that nearly four thousand Azerbaijanis have been considered missing persons since the First Karabakh war, Armenia has not yet provided information about their future fate, and therefore is responsible for the violations of IHL.

On the initiative of the Ombudsman, a hybrid format conference was organized in Guba city on March 31 - Day of Genocide of Azerbaijanis, the reports on the topic of experts specialized in this field, representatives of Human Rights and Equality Institution of Türkiye (TIHEK), and representatives of Necmeddin Erbakan University of the Republic of Türkiye were heard. The Guba Genocide Memorial Complex was visited as part of the event.

The Ombudsman has regularly published reactions to the fact that Armenia's mine terrorism has caused numerous casualties in our liberated lands, hindered construction works and the return of former IDPs to their native lands, and calls have been continuously made for the handover of accurate mine maps to our country.

On 4 April – International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action, the Ombudsman addressed the world community, condemned the fact that Armenia mined by sabotage- diversion groups the territories of Azerbaijan during the occupation period, as well as after liberation from the occupation, and called for solidarity in the fight against mine terrorism for the sake of ensuring the rights to life and health protection.

The Ombudsman has joined the second international humanitarian demining conference on the topic “Combating the Mines Threat - the Path to Reaching Sustainable Development” that was held in Aghdam with the joint organization of the Mine Action Agency of the Republic of Azerbaijan (ANAMA) and the UN, as well as the event devoted to 25th anniversary of ANAMA.

The next important issue that was constantly brought to the attention of international organizations by the Ombudsman was related to the inhumane burial of human remains belonging to Azerbaijanis in the mass graves found in the territories liberated from the occupation of Armenia and their murdering being subjected to torture, as well as to the facts confirming the policy genocide of Armenia.

The Ombudsman addressed separate appeals to international organizations regarding founding mass graves in Gubadli and Zangilan districts, in the Erghi plain area of Aghdam district, near Shusha prison.

The Ombudsman, who published an appeal on the 30th anniversary of the Bashlibel Massacre, emphasized that this cruel act against peaceful Azerbaijanis was committed based on acute ethnic hatred. In the appeal, it was stated that after the liberation of Kalbajar district, the burial places of those killed during that tragedy were revealed, but the fate of the villagers who were taken as hostages still remained unknown as missing persons, the international community has been requested to bring Armenia, which grossly violates fundamental human rights by committing such acts, to international legal responsibility.

The Ombudsman kept under the focus of her attention the issue with regard to the capture by Armenia of two soldiers of the Azerbaijan Army - Agshin Babirov and Huseyn Akhundov, distribution of photo-video materials which include cases of torture and inhuman treatment of H. Akhundov on social network pages in Armenia, later on charging them with unjustified arrest warrants, regarding this topic, contact was continuously established with the ICRC and other relevant institutions, and calls were made regarding the provision of their rights and their immediate release. The Ombudsman made a media statement and assessed the life sentence of H. Akhundov as a violation of human rights. After those military servicemen were returned to the country, the Ombudsman had a meeting with them, received information about the treatment of them during the time they were detained in Armenia, and learned about their concerns.

An open reaction (attitude) to the public was also published regarding untrue opinions about the activities of the Ombudsman reflected in the 2022 Report on Azerbaijan issued by the US State Department, the visits and measures taken in the direction of protecting the rights of detained persons were brought into consideration based on the facts. Thus, it was noted that close to 250 institutions were continuously monitored by the Ombudsman and the members of her NPG, hundreds of detained persons were received in an individual manner and their appeals were heard, and educational events addressed to them were held. It was also brought to attention that the Ombudsman's Call Center operates 24/7 and accessibility is ensured, applications are accepted and

investigated without any discrimination, civil society is also involved in preventive visits and the Ombudsman continuously encourages this cooperation.

It should be noted to the point that when the Ombudsman received the representatives of the Office of International Religious Freedom of the US State Department, she provided them with information about the directions of activities, she noted that appeals addressed to the Ombudsman from all population groups are treated with sensitivity without any discrimination. It was also brought to the attention of the guests that the Ombudsman pays attention to the education of the population in the regions and closely cooperates with civil society institutions.

Armenia's provocations and armed attacks, which damage peacebuilding in the region, were continuously commented on by the Ombudsman, and international partners were regularly informed about these cases.

On June 15, the Ombudsman issued an appeal with prompt response to the armed provocation at the border-crossing point of Lachin, it was stated in the appeal that the shelling of that point, which was exploited for humanitarian purposes, posed a serious threat to people's lives and health, and it once again proved that Armenia is not interested in the peace process.

Manifestations of Azerbaijan-phobia policy in Armenia and other foreign countries, the use of hate speech against Azerbaijanis in the speeches and addresses of officials, as well as in social networks are among the issues that the Ombudsman constantly keeps under the focus of her attention.

The Ombudsman displayed a sharp position about the burning of the National Flag of the Republic of Azerbaijan during the Opening Ceremony of the European Weightlifting Championship held in Armenia, as well as calling on the International Weightlifting Federation and the International Olympic Committee to take decisive measures against the organizing state for this act of hate-motivated vandalism.

The Ombudsman issued a statement of objection to the fact of opening of the monument in Armenia with the participation of state officials with the aim to perpetuate the memory of the members of the "Nemesis" organization, which committed terrorist acts against Azerbaijani-Turkish statesmen at the beginning of the 20th century, it was demanded to take a strict response against such actions that promote hate and terror policy.

The Ombudsman has also reacted to the organization of an attack on the administrative building of the Embassy of the Republic of Azerbaijan in Lebanon by approximately 50 persons of Armenian origin scanning radical calls that were an indicator of sharp hate propaganda against Azerbaijanis promoted by Armenia, assessed this act as a provocation aimed at the life and health of Azerbaijani diplomats, and stated that such attacks on our diplomatic missions in Lebanon and in several other countries caused serious concern.

Considering the extremely dangerous nature of the hate policy at a time when there is a historical opportunity to end the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia and to open a new page of peace between the two countries, to restore the violated rights of people and to prevent the recurrence of such situations in the future, regular monitoring was carried out on social networks and calls were addressed to relevant international institutions to make efforts to prevent these manifestations.

In 2023, after the negotiations with the end of the anti-terrorist measures implemented by Azerbaijan, several steps have been taken regarding the integration of persons of Armenian origin living in the territory of the Republic. To ensure accessibility for residents of Armenian origin living in the territory of Karabakh, open appeals were published by the Ombudsman, and the methods of applying to the institution were once again brought to attention.

On 17 November 2023, the Ombudsman commented on the decision on the temporary measures taken by the International Court of Justice regarding the application of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD) by Armenia against Azerbaijan.

In that decision, the Ombudsman noted that most of the claims submitted by Armenia were rejected by the Court, thereby denying the groundless claims against our country on the legal level, as well as practical measures were undertaken by the government in Azerbaijan, that has deep roots of tolerance, for the reintegration of the habitants of Armenian origin of Karabakh, the Ombudsman has also emphasized that she takes into account the protection of the rights and freedoms of those persons based on national documents and international instruments.

The Ombudsman also participated in the international conference “Neocolonialism: violation of human rights and injustice” organized by the Baku Initiative Group. Delivering a speech at this international conference, the Ombudsman noted that the policy of neo-colonialism implemented in Africa, the Middle and the Far East resulted in the violation of numerous fundamental rights of millions of peaceful people, also drew attention to the war crimes committed by Armenia against Azerbaijan, acts of genocide, and the results of the occupation policy continued for nearly 30 years.

The Ombudsman made a statement to the media about the fact that the employee of the Azerbaijan State Information Agency (AZERTAG) was deported from the French colony of New Caledonia as a persona non-grata and stated that the behavior of the New Caledonian police against that journalist was contrary to the norms and principles of international law, and, in particular, grossly violated the freedom of opinion and expression.

Cooperation was continued within the framework of the “Support for the implementation of partnership on displacement in Azerbaijan (MOBILAZE-2)” project for 2021-2024. Within the framework of this project, the Ombudsman visited the Republic of Austria to participate in the 8th Vienna Migration Conference at the invitation of the International Center for the Development of Migration Policy (ICMPD). Within the framework of the visit, during a bilateral meeting with the ICMPD Director General, information was given about the activities carried out in the direction of protecting the rights of migrants, including visits to places of detention of illegal migrants, and discussions were held on further development of cooperation.

In 2023, the Ombudsman received the extraordinary and plenipotentiary ambassadors of the Arab Republic of Egypt, Great Britain, the Kingdom of Sweden, and the Russian Federation in our country, the head of the EU representation in Azerbaijan, exchanged views on the protection and promotion of human rights, their violations caused by Armenia’s policy of occupation and provocations.

At the “Kashmir Solidarity Day” event organized by the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan in our country, the Ombudsman noted that the developing cooperation between the two countries in various fields also includes the protection of human rights and freedoms.

Within the framework of the joint cooperation of the Ombudsman Office and the ICRC, round tables and seminars were held, the Ombudsman and the head of the ICRC country’s representation delivered speeches at these events.

The events included topics related to the norms of IHL, demining standards, and support for the mine victims.

The next such seminar was held in Nakhchivan city with the participation of staff members of relevant state bodies, international experts, and media representatives. Reports on the topic “Practical aspects of the protection of the rights of persons belonging to a special category within the IHL framework” were presented.

The Ombudsman received the delegation that visited our country under the leadership of the President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. In the course of that meeting attended by representatives of the Western Azerbaijan Community and witnesses of the Khojaly Genocide, the Ombudsman touched on the steps to be taken

to ensure sustainable peace in the region, the facts of Armenia's failure to fulfill its obligations in this field, the deportation of our compatriots, and the issues related to the Azerbaijanis who went missing as a result of the First and Second Karabakh wars.

In connection with the 75th anniversary of Azerbaijanis deportation from Armenia, the Ombudsman has also participated in the international symposium held in Ankara, organized by the Committee on Equality of Opportunity for Women and Men of the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye and the Türkiye-Azerbaijan Friendship, Cooperation and Solidarity Foundation.

In that symposium dedicated to the psychological effects of the problem of forced migration, especially on women, the Ombudsman reported facts such as deportation, ethnic cleansing, genocide policy against Azerbaijanis by Armenia, destruction of historical, religious, and cultural monuments and changing of toponyms in order to erase the traces of Azerbaijanis from the lands where they historically lived.

It was stated that all these actions were based on ethnic hatred, and a video clip developed by the Ombudsman institution regarding hate crimes and hate speech against Azerbaijanis was shown.

Cooperation with ombudspersons and national human rights institutions of other countries. During the international conference on "The Future of Human Rights in the 21st Century" held in Ankara to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the Ombudsman Institute of the Republic of Türkiye, the Ombudsman, who was among the nearly 70 ombudsmen and human rights defenders from various countries, drew attention to the close collaboration with the Turkish Ombudsman Institution. Additionally, detailed information was provided about the policy of ethnic cleansing and occupation, as well as the war crimes against Azerbaijan committed by Armenia.

Within the framework of the same conference, the Ombudsman held a meeting with the Human Rights Commissioner of Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine. The Ukrainian Ombudsman expressed gratitude for the humanitarian support Azerbaijan has provided to the Ukrainian people and discussed ways to cooperate effectively in the defense of human rights.

Within the frame of the activities directed towards international cooperation, the Ombudsman has addressed letters to ombudsmen and NHRIs of foreign countries on various topics.

In connection with the terrorist act committed against the Embassy of the Republic of Azerbaijan in the Islamic Republic of Iran, a letter was addressed to General Inspection Organization of Iran requesting urgent measures to bring the perpetrators to justice. The GIO's administration was urged to promptly take the necessary actions within the scope of its authority to prosecute those who organized and carried out the attack.

In a letter addressed to Swedish Equality Ombudsman, concerns were expressed about an incident involving the burning of the Holy Quran, as well as the growing intolerance and Islamophobia towards Muslims in Europe. The letter called for necessary steps to ensure that those responsible for such acts are held accountable and that similar incidents do not recur.

In early 2023, in connection with a devastating earthquake in the Republic of Türkiye that caused tremendous destruction and resulted in the loss of over fifty thousand lives, the Ombudsman sent condolence letters to Türkiye's Chief Ombudsman (KDK) and the head of the Turkish Human Rights and Equality Institution (TIHEK). During a visit to the Turkish Embassy in our country, the Ombudsman wrote heartfelt words in a book of mourning dedicated to the earthquake victims. In a meeting with the Republic of Türkiye's Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Ambassador in our country, the Ombudsman expressed deep sorrow over the significant loss of lives and informed that necessary supplies and financial support for those affected by the earthquake had been sent by the Ombudsman institution.

The Ombudsman also participated in an international conference in Samarkand, the Republic of Uzbekistan, on the topic “Effective Protection of Human Rights and Freedoms” held at the invitation of the Authorized Person of the Oliy Majlis for Human Rights (Ombudsman) of the Republic of Uzbekistan. Conference participants were briefed in detail about the activities of the Ombudsman of Azerbaijan in protecting the rights of vulnerable population groups, research activities during the war and post-war period, environmental crimes committed by Armenia, and the looting of resources of Azerbaijan.

The Ombudsman of Azerbaijan also participated in the international conference held in Rabat, on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the Ombudsman Institute of the Kingdom of Morocco. During this visit, a meeting was held with the President of the National Human Rights Council (NHRC) of Morocco, where the Ombudsman discussed expanding access to redress mechanisms and strengthening cooperation within the framework of the international organizations to which he is a member, aiming to ensure accessibility. The Ombudsman also delivered a speech at a commemoration event organized by the Embassy of the Republic of Azerbaijan in Morocco, in connection with the 31st anniversary of the Khojaly Genocide. She highlighted this tragedy as one of the most horrific crimes against civilians in the last century, stressing the importance of a legal and political assessment of this act of genocide.

Furthermore, during an international conference of the Association of Ombudsmen and National Human Rights Institutions of Turkic States organized by the Ombudsman Institution of the Republic of Hungary in Budapest, the Ombudsman reported on the activities conducted under the NPM mandate, noting that the annual reports reflecting activities in this field contained over two hundred suggestions and recommendations.

During the visit, the Ombudsman held meetings with the President of the Constitutional Court of Hungary, the Director General of the Penitentiary Service, the leader of the Hungarian-Azerbaijani Parliamentary Friendship Group in the Hungarian Parliament, and the State Secretary for Security Policy at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. The Ombudsman also visited a regional detention center with colleagues from other countries, the Field Office of the Hungarian Ombudsman in Debrecen, and a state border crossing point, where she was briefed on the conditions created there.

The Ombudsman participated in the international conference on “Constitutional Justice: Dignity, Freedom, and Justice for All” held in Astana on the occasion of the 28th anniversary of the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Kazakhstan. During the event, the Ombudsman spoke about reforms aimed at ensuring human rights in our country, the remedies established, and highlighted the importance of cooperation between ombudsman institutions and constitutional courts. She also mentioned that, during the term of office, she had addressed more than forty inquiries to the Constitutional Court, illustrating this with examples from national practice.

At the international conference held in Kazan, Tatarstan Republic of the Russian Federation, on the theme “Effective Practices of Ombudsmen: National Characteristics and Universal Approaches” the Ombudsman made a presentation on the topic “The Role of the Ombudsman in Ensuring Social Rights”. The Ombudsman pointed out the measures aimed at strengthening the social protection of the population, participation in improving legislation, and the preparation of state programmes and national action plans and also provided detailed information on the annual reports containing numerous suggestions and recommendations in this area, as well as on the activities related to the execution of the “First State Program of the Great Return” to the territories of the Republic of Azerbaijan liberated from occupation.

The Ombudsman of Azerbaijan participated in an international conference dedicated to the 25th anniversary of the Office of the People’s Advocate in the Republic of Moldova, focusing on “Human Rights Protection and Promotion in the Context of New Challenges in Modern Societies” where she delivered a speech on “Human Rights and Equality Education and Promotion as a Tool Against Disinformation and Propaganda”. The Ombudsman highlighted the defense of rights of various population groups and informed about the activities on human rights and freedoms, noting the serious negative consequences of Armenia’s long-standing policy of hatred against our country.

During the visit to the Republic of Moldova, the Ombudsman met with the heads of the Parliament and Constitutional Court of this country. The meetings discussed the friendship ties between the two countries, and the Ombudsman brought attention to the war crimes committed by Armenia.

The Ombudsman participated in the 7th international scientific-practical conference held in Moscow at the invitation of the Human Rights Commissioner of the Russian Federation, attended by ombudsmen from 47 countries. The conference focused on “Problems of Human Rights Protection: Sharing Positive Experiences of Ombudsmen’s Powers”. In his speech at the international conference, the Ombudsman presented information about her activities during the war and post-war periods, noting that recent wars and terrorist acts around the world have led to violations of fundamental human rights. She highlighted the severe consequences of wars, including the issue of missing persons, specifically mentioning that no information has been provided about the fate of missing Azerbaijanis, and addressed the problem of hundreds of people falling victim to mine explosions following the Second Karabakh War.

Participation of staff members of the Ombudsman’s Office in international events and training sessions. The staff of the Ombudsman Office have participated in the following events, delivered presentations on relevant topics, and engaged in the exchange of practices across various fields:

- The 10th meeting of the Subcommittee on Justice, Freedom, Security, Human Rights, and Democracy under the Azerbaijan-European Union Cooperation Committee held in Brussels;
- The training on “IHL and the Promotion of Mental Health in Armed Conflicts” conducted by the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF) in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany;
- An awareness-raising event on “De-mining and Its Impact on the Return of Azerbaijani Formerly Displaced Persons to Their Native Towns and Villages” as part of the “Mine-Free South Caucasus” regional campaign organized by “Links Europe” and the “Azerbaijan Campaign Against Mines” Public Association;
- Joint seminars with the ICRC on “National Implementation of IHL” and “International Mine Action Standards (IMAS). Support for Mine Victims”;
- A training as part of the “Migration School-5” project, jointly organized by the Representation of the IOM in the Republic of Azerbaijan and the State Migration Service;
- A conference in Manila organized by the International Conference of Information Commissioners and the government of the Philippines on “Building an Information Bridge between Nations: The Role of Access to Information in Protecting Democracy, Inclusivity, and Development”;
- The Steering Committee meeting of the project “Promoting Media Professionalism and Freedom of Information in Azerbaijan” implemented by the Council of Europe;
- A global conference on “The Importance of Online Space for Accessing Information” held on 28 September – the International Day for Universal Access to Information, jointly organized by UNESCO, the Law Faculty of Oxford University, the Bonavero Institute of Human Rights, and the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office of the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland;
- An international conference on “Cooperation for Equality and Inclusivity”, jointly organized by the International Confederation of Trade Unions and the Confederation of Trade Unions of Azerbaijan;
- An international round table on the implementation of the “Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration”, organized in Tashkent by the International Organization for Migration and the National Human Rights Centre of the Republic of Uzbekistan;

- An international conference on “Implementation of International Legal Norms of Human Rights into National Legislation”, held in Astana by the Human Rights Commissioner of Kazakhstan, in connection with the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Cooperation with the United Nations: The Ombudsman Office has continued to strengthen its cooperative relationships in accordance with the memorandum signed with the UN’s Country Representation. In 2023, the 75th anniversary of the adoption of the UDHR, a fundamental document in the field of human rights, was prominently commemorated by institutions in charge with human rights. The Ombudsman of Azerbaijan joined this campaign and conducted several events in collaboration with the UN representation in our country.

The Ombudsman participated in the UN’s “Human Rights – 75” campaign, emphasizing the importance of protecting the rights of individuals affected by armed conflict and disabilities, and the overall defense of equality and vulnerable groups regardless of their social status or physical health. In a video message related to this campaign, the Ombudsman outlined commitments to various initiatives targeting vulnerable population groups, ensuring the safe return of former displaced persons to their native lands, clarifying the fate of nearly four thousand compatriots missing due to the First and Second Karabakh Wars, providing accurate mine maps, and expanding international cooperation for the reintegration of ethnic Armenian residents of Karabakh.

The document of commitment and the video message presented by the Azerbaijani Ombudsman were published on the UNHCHR official website.

During the UNDP “16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence” campaign, the Ombudsman also released a video message, noting that violence affecting people’s lives, dignity, morals, future, as well as societal development and progress, represents a critical and urgent global issue today.

The Ombudsman, in collaboration with the UN representation in Azerbaijan and the Bar Association, organized the “Human Rights – 75” Baku Conference: Promoting Universality and Indivisibility to Address Global and National Challenges. The conference was attended by representatives from the National Assembly of Azerbaijan, state agencies, international partners, and civil society institutions, where various topics were discussed, and the UNHCHR video message was displayed.

On December 10 – International Human Rights Day, an event attended by the UN Resident Coordinator highlighted the role of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in the development and promotion of human rights and freedoms.

The Ombudsman met with Bik Lum, the newly accredited representative of the UNHCR in Azerbaijan, discussing the protection of the rights of displaced persons, refugees, and asylum seekers. The meeting highlighted the actions taken to ensure the safe return of former displaced persons to their homelands and the importance of international organizations’ support in this area.

During a meeting with Vladimir Shkolnikov, the chief advisor on human rights for the South Caucasus division of the UNHCHR, the Ombudsman emphasized the importance of international cooperation in the field of human rights defense. The discussion raised issues related to Armenia’s provocations, mine terrorism, and the fate of our missing compatriots, and explored perspectives for further collaboration.

The Ombudsman also welcomed Aleks Haykens, the UNICEF Country Representative. The meeting highlighted the importance of cooperation between the two organizations, discussed the activities carried out in accordance with the signed Action Plan, and talked about the Ombudsman’s initiatives under the NPM framework, including visits to child institutions and the protection of migrant children’s rights. The meeting also addressed issues related to the provision of rights for vulnerable groups, including children, within the context of the return process to the

territories liberated after the Second Karabakh War. The significance of educating children on mine safety and the impact of climate change on them was also discussed.

The Head of the Ombudsman's Office participated in the High-Level Regional Dialogue on "The Right to a Clean, Healthy, and Sustainable Environment" under the slogan "Human Rights – 75", organized by the UNHCHR and the UN Environment Programme for Europe and Central Asia. During his speech, he drew attention to the consequences of the policy of ecoterrorism continued by Armenia during and after the occupation period.

A meeting was held at the Ombudsman's Office with the WHO Regional Advisor, the project on the coordination and transformation of mental health services in the post-conflict period was among the topics of discussion. The meeting highlighted the organization of free medical-psychological assistance campaigns for families of the martyred, war veterans, and civilians affected during military operations, initiated by the Ombudsman. It was also noted that continuous educational events are being conducted by the Ombudsman's regional centers.

The Ombudsman Office, in collaboration with UNICEF and the State Migration Service of the Republic of Azerbaijan, organized a two-day training session focusing on the protection of children's rights within the context of migration. The Ombudsman opened the session with a speech about the measures implemented to effectively protect the rights of children involved in the migration process, and about the training organized for employees of relevant state agencies. Experts from UNICEF, the UNHCR, the IOM, and the ICRC were as trainers.

During 2023, the Ombudsman Office responded to inquiries from various special rapporteurs of the UN addressing different areas. As part of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process, a document detailing the implementation of recommendations pertaining to Azerbaijan was prepared and submitted to the UN. It is noteworthy that during the review of Azerbaijan's fourth periodic report within the UPR process, the Ombudsman's suggestions for more effective protection of the rights of PWDs and the development of entrepreneurship in the country were reflected in the presentations of interested parties.

In response to an inquiry from the UN Human Rights Committee, the Ombudsman Office prepared a document reflecting the implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which was then submitted to the relevant committee.

Cooperation with the Council of Europe: The Ombudsman welcomed the co-rapporteurs of the PACE Monitoring Committee, providing detailed information about the directions of her activities, including unannounced visits in places where that individuals cannot leave at their own will.

During the visit of the COE Commissioner for Human Rights to our country, the Ombudsman engaged in discussions related to human rights collaborations, highlighted the expansion of the powers of the Ombudsman of Azerbaijan, as well as activities carried out during the war and post-war periods, human rights violations committed by Armenia, and the devastation caused by landmines. Additionally, the Ombudsman raised the issue of the unresolved fate of Azerbaijanis missing since the First Karabakh War, conveyed the demands of their families to the Commissioner, and requested assistance within the scope of the Commissioner's powers. Clarifications were also provided to enable ethnic Armenian residents of Karabakh to submit applications to the Ombudsman.

In a meeting with a delegation led by the head of the CoE Directorate of Human Rights and Rule of Law at the Ombudsman Office, it was reported that individuals approaching the Ombudsman Office and regional centers are received, and applications are accepted through a 24-hour Call Center, electronic submission forms, and social networks. Furthermore, it was noted that regular visits are conducted under the NPM mandate, monitoring of the implementation of recommendations is carried out, inquiries are investigated promptly, and the cooperation with lawyers in this field is also emphasized.

During a meeting with the members of the CoE Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, it was brought to the attention that people of various ethnicities in Azerbaijan

live in an environment of tolerance and multiculturalism, without any discrimination, rights related to language, religion, and culture of national minorities are ensured. The Ombudsman provided information about the activities in combating discrimination and the legislative changes made to improve practices in this area.

Since 2023, the Ombudsman Office has initiated a new project to promote equality in Azerbaijan with the support of the CoE and the EU. This project is significant in terms of implementing international standards and foreign practices to effectively execute the Ombudsman's new mandate in promoting the right to equality and preventing discrimination.

CSOs have also been involved in the implementation process.

Cooperation with the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI): The Ombudsman of Azerbaijan participated in the Annual Meeting held in Geneva, which was attended by leaders and representatives of nearly 200 NHRIs worldwide, as well as experts and representatives from various UN agencies. This event also commemorated the 75th anniversary of the UDHR and the 30th anniversary of the Paris Principles relating to the Status of NHRIs. The event facilitated exchanges on the practice of the national preventive mechanism, during which the Ombudsman of Azerbaijan and her NPM discussed their inspections, innovations applied within this framework, and efforts made towards the reintegration of convicted persons into society. Discussions took place within a group representing various countries.

During the event, the Strategic Plan for 2023-2027 of the Global Alliance was discussed and adopted.

During her trip, the Ombudsman held meetings with the leadership of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, GANHRI, its Sub-Committee on Accreditation, and the European Network of National Human Rights Institutions. Discussions were focused on implementing changes to the Constitution in line with the Paris Principles and recommendations from the Sub-Committee on Accreditation. These meetings presented an opportunity to share comprehensive reports, statements, and submissions reflecting the Ombudsman's activities during and post the Second Karabakh War with relevant officials.

The Ombudsman participated in the 14th Meeting of National Human Rights Institutions in Copenhagen, organized by GANHRI, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Ukrainian Ombudsman Institute, and the Danish Institute for Human Rights. The meeting, dedicated to the role of national institutions in preventing torture and other ill-treatment, highlighted the activities carried out under the national preventive mechanism mandate. The Ombudsman noted the expansion of his mandate through amendments to the Constitutional Law, the establishment of an independent monitoring function, and addressed Armenia's violations of international law norms and principles, as well as the mine clearance and reconstruction efforts in the liberated territories. She also discussed the discovery of mass graves during these operations, reporting these findings to international bodies and the media.

Cooperation with the European Network of National Human Rights Institutions (ENNHRI): The Ombudsman participated in the ENNHRI's meeting in Geneva and represented the Ombudsman Institution at the ENNHRI's 10th anniversary conference in Brussels. Additionally, in 2023, the Ombudsman addressed queries related to the Rule of Law, the execution of the Committee of Ministers' recommendations, and other various topics, submitting responses to ENNHRI.

Cooperation with the Association of Ombudsmen and NHRIs of Turkic States (TURKOMB): In 2023, the Ombudsman of Azerbaijan participated in TURKOMB's Annual Meeting held in Istanbul, which was also attended by representatives from Turkey, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Northern Cyprus. The Ombudsman proposed several initiatives to enhance cooperation within TURKOMB, addressing regional environmental issues and expressing concerns about the extended operation of the outdated Metsamor Nuclear Power Plant in Armenia, urging member organizations to take immediate action to prevent potential ecological disasters.

Cooperation with the Ombudsmen Association of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OICOA): During the 2023 General Assembly held in Istanbul, Turkey, the Ombudsman discussed the military aggression, policy of genocide, war crimes, and current mine issues that Azerbaijan faces, including information about nearly four thousand missing compatriots. The Ombudsman also spoke about the Khojaly Genocide, one of the most brutal crimes committed by Armenia against the Azerbaijani people, urging OICOA members to recognize and condemn this grave tragedy as a gross violation of international human rights norms and principles. During this meeting, elections were held, and the Azerbaijani Ombudsman was re-elected as a member of the Association's Board of Directors.

Cooperation with the Independent Permanent Human Rights Commission of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC IPHRC): The cooperation with OIC IPHRC has successfully continued in 2023 based on the memorandum signed during the Baku International Conference dedicated to the 20th anniversary of the Ombudsman institution. The Ombudsman participated in the thematic debate on "Business and Human Rights: Normative Base and Application of Rules for OIC Countries" held during the 21st Session in Jeddah. The Ombudsman discussed the application of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, the activities of the Ombudsman institution in this field, and the efforts towards preparing a National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights in Azerbaijan. She highlighted the total destruction of infrastructure by Armenia during the occupation, severe damage to the ecosystem, and landmines, which have made business activities untenable and also informed participants about the extensive reconstruction and demining currently being undertaken by Azerbaijan in those territories.

During the 21st Session of the OIC IPHRC on Human Rights, the head of the Ombudsman Office presented research on "The Rights and Freedoms of Internally Displaced Persons" which highlighted the issue of forced displacement in OIC countries. The research provided recommendations and detailed the violated rights and freedoms of IDPs from Azerbaijan, the efforts made for their return, and the existing challenges.

From September 2-6, 2023, a delegation led by the chair of the OIC's Human Rights Commission visited Azerbaijan to investigate the destruction of religious and cultural monuments during the occupation and the targeting of civilians by Armenia using rockets during the Second Karabakh War. The delegation conducted a fact-finding mission in Aghdam, Fuzuli, and Ganja, examining the destruction of Azerbaijani graveyards, the mining of areas, and the desecration of mosques in the liberated regions of Aghdam and Fuzuli.

The delegation visited the Karakhanbeyli cemeteries, where graves had been destroyed during the occupation, and the Merdinli Mosque in Fuzuli subjected to acts of vandalism. They were also briefed on the extensive reconstruction and construction works in Fuzuli, including the Fuzuli International Airport, and were informed about the construction of other airports in the liberated areas. Members of the delegation met with former internally displaced persons who had returned to their native lands under the "Great Return" program and settled in government-built apartments in Fuzuli city. They conducted interviews with these individuals and visited the newly opened Mirza Ulugbek Secondary School No. 1.

In Aghdam, the delegation continued their on-site investigations at the Qiyasli and Karagachi cemeteries and the Aghdam Martyrs' Lane, receiving information about acts of vandalism committed there. They were also briefed on the destruction and looting of civilian infrastructure and historical-cultural monuments in the city of Aghdam, including the extensive mining. The delegation visited the Aghdam Juma Mosque and newly constructed facilities in the area.

The delegation from the OIC IPHRC has got familiarized on-site with the incidents of Ganja, Azerbaijan's second largest city, being repeatedly targeted by Armenia's armed forces using banned rockets during the Second Karabakh War. The delegation visited the Victory Park area and provided detailed information to its members about civilian casualties resulting from the targeting of residential buildings and other infrastructure. Meetings

were also held with residents affected by these attacks. Additionally, a review was conducted of the “Imamzade” Pilgrimage Complex, a religious monument that sustained damage from the rocket strikes.

Following the on-site investigations, the delegation held meetings at several state institutions, including the Ombudsman’s Office, where they gathered comprehensive information about the consequences of Armenia’s aggressive and occupying policies towards Azerbaijan, including issues of missing persons and the mining of territories.

A report is being prepared by OIC IPHRC to present the findings of the visit to the international community.

In collaboration with the Asian Ombudsmen Association (AOA), the 17th Annual Meeting of the AOA was held in Kazan, the Republic of Tatarstan, the Russian Federation. During the meeting, elections were conducted, and the Azerbaijani Ombudsman was re-elected as the AOA Vice-President. In her speech, the Ombudsman emphasized the significance of projects implemented by the AOA, the close cooperation of the Azerbaijani Ombudsman Institution with this Association, and the importance of sharing good practices in the field of human rights protection across Asia.

The collaboration with the European Ombudsman Institute was highlighted during a visit to Ankara, the Republic of Türkiye, on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the Turkish Ombudsman Institution. The meeting with the Secretary General of the EOI included discussions on recent developments within the Ombudsman’s Office, such as the establishment of units dealing with children’s rights, disabilities, and the right to access information. Additionally, the numerous violations of international law experienced by Azerbaijan and the many crimes committed by Armenia were thoroughly presented to the Secretary General, along with reports and other materials related to the Ombudsman’s investigative activities.

CHAPTER III

LEGAL EDUCATION, SCIENTIFIC-ANALYTICAL ACTIVITY AND COOPERATION WITH CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS

Legal education in the field of human rights. In order to develop the legal thinking and legal culture in the society, the Ombudsman ensured organization of legal enlightening events on various topics that served to increase the level of awareness of the population about human rights, and at the same time, at the same time, participation of staff members of the institution as speakers and trainers in similar events held by other institutions.

In connection with the declaration of 2023 as the “Year of Heydar Aliyev” by the relevant Decree of the country President, educational events on such topics as “Heydar Aliyev and legal state building”, “Heydar Aliyev and the development of human rights in independent Azerbaijan”, “National leader Heydar Aliyev is the founder of reforms in the field of human rights and modern national human rights protection mechanisms”, “Heydar Aliyev and women’s rights in Azerbaijan”, “Heydar Aliyev and children’s rights”, “Heydar Aliyev and multicultural values in Azerbaijan”, “Heydar Aliyev and our glorious history of victory”, “Heydar Aliyev and the ideology of Azerbaijanism”, as well as other relevant topics, were held by the Ombudsman Office and regional centers with the participation of staff members of state bodies, law-enforcement, local executive and local self-government bodies and public representatives. In addition, journalistic writing, and children’s drawing contests, traditionally announced by the Ombudsman every year on the occasion of December 10 - International Human Rights Day, are dedicated to the topic “National Leader Heydar Aliyev and human rights in Azerbaijan”.

The speeches of the Ombudsman Office staff members, who participated in the conferences organized by the General Prosecutor’s Office of the Republic of Azerbaijan in Barda and Goychay districts, on the topics “Heydar Aliyev and the value given to human rights”, “Heydar Aliyev and human rights reforms in Azerbaijan” were dedicated to the large-scale reforms implemented by the National Leader on the effective provision of human rights in our country and the successes achieved as a result.

The Ombudsman Office’s staff member delivered a speech on the topic “Heydar Aliyev and legal state-building” at the event held at the Border Control of the State Border Service (SBS) of the Republic of Azerbaijan jointly organized by the Office of the Ombudsman and the SBS of the Republic of Azerbaijan and spoke about the progressive steps taken in the direction of legal state building and development of human rights in our country after the return to power for the second time at the insistence of the people.

The reforms carried out in the field of the formation of the legislative framework and institutional mechanisms for human rights in our country under the leadership of the outstanding public-political and statesman Heydar Aliyev, the approval of the first state program, the establishment of the Ombudsman institution and other achievements were brought to attention and extensive discussions were held in the course of the scientific-practical conferences held in the Police Academy of the MIA of the Republic of Azerbaijan, as well as in the Center for Legal Expertise and Legislative Initiatives at the Institute of Law and Human Rights in connection with the 100th anniversary of the Great Leader.

In 2023, in connection with June 18 - Human Rights Day in the Republic of Azerbaijan, May 18 - June 18 “Human Rights Month-long Campaign”, and in connection with the anniversary of the adoption of the UN CRC, October 20 - 20 In November, “Child Rights Month-long Campaign” was announced traditionally by the Ombudsman, and legal awareness events devoted to various topical issues of human rights were held in Baku and districts.

Relevant state institutions, departments, enterprises and organizations, civil society institutions, including NGOs and media representatives also actively participated in that process.

On the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the UDHR and June 18 - Human Rights Day, which is celebrated annually at the national level, the free legal aid campaign announced by the Office of the Ombudsman together with the

UN representation in Azerbaijan and the Bar Association was held. Within the framework of the campaign, free legal services were provided to the families of martyrs, war participants, PWDs and other citizens in the regional centers of the Ombudsman, covering Baku city and regions as well as.

According to the 2023 Action Plan of the Ombudsman's Joint Working Group in the field of human rights in cooperation with the UN Representation and agencies in Azerbaijan, the actions of the campaign organized with the participation of the regional centers of the Ombudsman have been useful in terms of protecting the rights of socially vulnerable groups of the population and their legal education.

In the educational meeting held with the UNEC professors and students, as well as in the educational events dedicated to June 12 - World Day Against Child Labor together with the Republican Children's Library named after Firidun Bey Kocharli, the participants were informed in detail about the large-scale activities carried out in the direction of effective protection of human rights and freedoms, protection of children's rights and legitimate interests, including the work done by the Ombudsman.

Lectures on "International legal standards of human rights", "International control over compliance with international labor law standards and social security rights" were delivered to the audience of the following professional development and retraining courses organized for staff and activists of trade unions at the Academy of Labor and Social Relations of Azerbaijan with the Office of the Ombudsman.

Lecture on topics dedicated to fight against corruption, protection of human rights in police activities, requirements of national and international normative legal acts in this field were delivered to the administrative staff of a number of district (city) police departments and stations with the joint participation of the subject teacher within the frames of the ongoing effective cooperation between the Ombudsman Office and the Police Academy in the direction of human rights education.

The participants of the round table organized at the Police Academy on the topic "Actual problems of ensuring human rights in the modern era" were provided with information about the activity of the Ombudsman as an NPM, the work done in this field, the visits, legal analysis, and relevant reports.

In the lectures given to the audience of the Academy of Justice, detailed information was given about national and international protection mechanisms of human rights, issues of implementation of international legislative acts in this field and the basis of their application, activities of the Ombudsman as an NPM, regular visits to institutions in the country which persons cannot leave of their own will, ensuring the rights of persons detained in relevant institutions, detention conditions and treatment issues, as well as the put forward recommendations and their implementation status.

Enlightening events were held on the topics of "State guarantee of human rights and freedoms" at the Vocational-Labor Rehabilitation Center of PWDs of the Social Services Agency under the MLSP, and on the topic "Protection of children's rights and prevention of child labor" at the Children's Rehabilitation Center No. 2 of the State Medical-Social Expertise and Rehabilitation Agency; in the course of the events the participants were informed about the issues of protection of human rights and freedoms, including children's rights, which are reflected in the Constitution of our country, the international agreements it supports and the national legislative acts, as well as the multilateral activities carried out in this field.

In accordance with the cooperation between the Ombudsman Office and higher education facilities in 2023, 69 students and postgraduates studying in their respective specialties from Khazar University, the Academy of Public Administration under the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Baku State University (BSU), Azerbaijan University of Languages, Western Caspian University, Baku Eurasian University, as well as the students, as well as BSU Law Faculty graduate students specializing in "Human Rights" and "Medical Law" underwent industrial and scientific-research experience at the Ombudsman Office. Relevant conditions were created for interns to acquire knowledge and skills in human rights field, and at the same time, they were provided with the opportunity to

benefit from necessary legal literature in the Human Rights Library of the Ombudsman Office for writing graduation theses and master's theses.

It should be noted to the point that, in the defense process held with the participation of the Ombudsman, who chaired the specialized Scientific Council created for the defense of master's theses in the "Human Rights" specialization at the Faculty of Law of BSU, the dissertation works dedicated to the current topics carried out in the Azerbaijani and English languages under the guidance of the professors and teachers at the UNESCO Chair on Human Rights and Information Law of the Faculty of Law of BSU were positively evaluated and there was stated the necessity to expand cooperation in order to continue scientific research on the protection of human rights.

An educational event was organized by a number of high schools of Nardaran-Bilgah, Mashtagha, Pirshagi-Kurdakhani, Zabrat, Balakhani, Ramana, Sabunchu, Bakikhanov settlements of Sabunchu district of Baku city within the frames of the "Do not keep silent, make your voice heard!" project implemented at the initiative of the Sabunchu District Executive Authority, with the support the Ombudsman, the Ministry of Science and Education, and the State Committee for Family, Women and Children Affairs.

The Ombudsman participated in the final stage of the "Young Legal Defenders" Staged Trial Competition project, which was jointly implemented by the European Lawyer Students Association - Baku Public Union (ELSA Azerbaijan) and the Baku City Education Department and delivering a speech at the end of the Competition, she stated that staged court proceedings are an important platform for young lawyers who want to gain experience, this competition assumed great importance in terms of imparting legal knowledge to students who want to become lawyers, teenagers and young people correctly understand their rights, and properly define the forms of legal protection.

According to the Action Plan for the SDGs, approved by the decision of the 13th meeting of the National Coordinating Council for Sustainable Development of the Republic of Azerbaijan on March 6, 2023, in accordance with the commitments arising from the UN "Transforming our world: 2030 Agenda for sustainable development", educational activities were carried out in Baku city and regions on the topics of healthy lifestyle, health protection, promotion of the rights to live in a healthy environment, strengthening of the socio-legal fight against drug addiction among children and youth, as well as other harmful habits.

In the educational events held by the Ombudsman's regional centers in connection with the International Day of Education on January 24, the participants were informed about the importance of ensuring inclusive and quality education for everyone, which is one of the SDGs, in human development, and about the activity of the Ombudsman on the protection of the right to education.

In the next educational events in Masalli district and Lankaran city regarding the protection of the right to access information organized by the Office of the Ombudsman in order to promote the 16th Goal of the SDGs about peace, justice and efficient institutions, held with the participation of representatives of local executive power and law enforcement agencies, education departments and other state institutions that are information holders, the history of the right of access to information, the existing international legal acts in this field, the implementation of the Ombudsman's function of monitoring the performance of the duties arising from the requirements of the Law "On Access to Information" of the state bodies, local self-government bodies and officials who are information holders were informed, as well as the presentation and a video clip on the topic were displayed.

A round table "Benefits of early detection" was held under the slogan "Autism is possible!" within the framework of the "International Autism Awareness Month", on the initiative of the Ombudsman, together with the Azerbaijan Autism Association, during the event the information was provided about the booklet, published on the initiative of the Ombudsman, contains useful information on the benefits of early detection, risk factors, early diagnostic symptoms of autism, initial steps and rules to be followed for the rehabilitation of children suffering from ASDs,

recommendations for parents, emphasizing that autism is not a disease, but a difference, and presented to the participants.

The Ombudsman who participated as an honored guest in the 5th anniversary ceremony of the "Different Individuals" International Congress dedicated to people with special needs, noted in her speech the importance of educational measures related to social and legal protection, rehabilitation, social inclusion of children with autism spectrum disorder, increasing public awareness in this area.

In the course of the legal education events organized by the regional centers of the Ombudsman on the topics of "Public awareness about autism" and "Benefits of early detection" with the participation of representatives of the general public, including staff members of state bodies, parents of children with autism spectrum disorders, students and active young people, the participants were given detailed information about the work carried out in the direction of protecting the rights of people with ASD along with the protection of the rights of other vulnerable groups of the population.

On the initiative of the Ombudsman, 17 educational books, leaflets and booklets were published in the Azerbaijani and English languages in 2023. In general, during the activity of the Ombudsman institution, 243 materials were prepared and presented to a wide audience. E-versions of the books have been sent to libraries and other information resources across the country.

Books, booklets, leaflets, posters, and CDs were presented by the Human Rights Library of the Ombudsman's Office to state bodies, libraries, educational institutions, penitentiary institutions, and correctional facilities, as well as to guests during various meetings and events, as well as during foreign visits by the Ombudsman and the staff members of the Ombudsman Office.

An exhibition titled "Silent Truths" covering the topics of genocide, deportation, and ethnic cleansing was opened within the frames of the international conference on "Legal aspects of the crimes of ethnic cleansing and genocide: in the context of historical facts" held in the Heydar Aliyev Center in Guba with the joint organization of the Office of the Ombudsman, the Community of West Azerbaijan and the Executive Power of Guba District, dedicated to March 31 - the Genocide Day of Azerbaijanis.

Books rich in facts reflecting the activities of National Leader Heydar Aliyev, President Ilham Aliyev and First Vice-President Mehriban Aliyeva for the welfare of Azerbaijanis who were victims of genocide, deportation, and ethnic cleansing policies were displayed at the exhibition, as well as these and other historical facts, which include decrees, orders, decisions and instructions signed by the heads of state of former Tsarist Russia and the USSR in 1905, 1918-1920, 1948-1953 and 1988-1991 years.

Copies of the documents that Azerbaijanis addressed to various state institutions and international organizations in order to ensure their violated rights after being deported from West Azerbaijan were also displayed at the exhibition where there were presented archival documents containing the originals of various documents and photos confirming that the West Azerbaijanis, who were repeatedly subjected to genocide and deportation in the territory of the state called Armenia today, were born, lived, received secondary and higher education in Iravan, Zangezur, Goycha, Darelayaz, Zangibasar, Vedibasar, received various state awards, and worked in state structures.

In the exhibition "National Leader Heydar Aliyev – 100" opened within the scientific-practical conference on "National Leader Heydar Aliyev and the development of human rights in independent Azerbaijan" organized by the Ombudsman, publications containing the multidirectional legacy of the Great Leader were displayed.

As a continuation of the traditional experience at the 9th Baku International Book Fair at the Baku Expo Center by the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Publications of the Ombudsman institution in various languages, including reports on the activities of the Ombudsman during the war and post-war period, were displayed, and presentations of newly printed reports and books were held.

Within the framework of the international conference on the 75th anniversary of the UDHR, a large-scaled exhibition of the institution's publications was launched and educational publications on various topics were presented to the conference participants.

Scientific-analytical activity. With the aim to protect human and civil rights and freedoms more reliably, several measures targeted at the improvement of normative legal acts were realized, suggestions and recommendations were put forward.

The mandate of the Ombudsman has been expanded by the Constitutional Law dated 9 June 2023 No. 900-VIKQD on Amendments to the Constitutional Law on the Ombudsman, the powers of the Ombudsman to fulfill the functions of an independent mechanism for the implementation of the CRPD and the CRC, the promotion and monitoring of the provision of the right to equality and the prevention of discrimination has been established, as well as the mandate to cooperate with local, regional and international organizations, human rights institutions of foreign countries, to conclude agreements for this purpose and to be represented in international institutions according to the directions of activity has been officially determined.

The comments and suggestions are prepared regarding to the drafts of the proposed relevant additions and changes to the Code of Execution of Sentences, the Migration Code, the Code of Administrative Offenses, to the laws "On Sanitary and Epidemiological Safety", "On State of Emergency and Socially Emergency Environment", "On Ensuring the Rights and Freedoms of Persons Detained in Prisons", "On the Rights of Persons with Disabilities", "On Mediation", "On the Police" and "On Information, Informatization and Information Protection", also to "Regulation of the Garrison and Guard Services of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Azerbaijan", as well as relevant normative-legal acts approved by a number of Presidential decrees ("List of officials authorized to draw up protocols on cases of administrative errors considered by district (city) courts", "Regulation on the Centralized electronic information system of the MLSPP", etc.), to the normative-legal acts approved by some decisions of the Cabinet of Ministers (the "Sample Charter on open and closed special educational institutions", "Internal disciplinary rules of detention centers for irregular migrants", etc.), at the same time, to Part II of the draft Law "On Amendments to the Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan "On the Constitutional Court" and submitted to the relevant state institutions.

In order to improve the legislation, drafts of a number of normative legal acts prepared by the Office of the Milli Majlis of the Republic of Azerbaijan and sent by the Ministry of Justice within the framework of the implementation of the corresponding letter of the Cabinet of Ministers were reviewed, relevant opinions and suggestions were prepared; these normative legal acts' drafts include Civil Procedure Code, national laws "On Social Benefits", "On Courts and Judges", "On Civil Service", "On Service in Bodies of Emergency Situations", "Regulation on service in migration authorities", "Regulation on Service in Customs Authorities", "Regulation on service in state tax authorities", "Regulation on serving in internal affairs bodies of the Republic of Azerbaijan", approved by the relevant laws of Azerbaijan, at the same time, the Presidential decrees No. 72 dated 27 December 2013 "On determining the amount of social benefits for women with more than five children" and No. 387 dated 10 December 2018 "On ensuring the activities of the Sustainable and Operative Social Security Agency", as well as the "Rule for determining and paying the amount of the monthly additional fee to the civil servant in the state bodies for the length of service in the civil service" approved by Decree No. 665 dated January 28, 2002.

Opinions and proposals were prepared on relevant draft laws prepared by the Office of the Milli Majlis of the Republic of Azerbaijan, including draft laws on amendments to the Criminal Code, Criminal-Procedural Code, Administrative Procedure Code, Penalty Execution Code, as well as the Law "On Service in Prosecutor's Offices".

Opinions and suggestions on the Draft Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan on amending the Cabinet of Ministers' Decision No. 14 dated 28 January 2016 "On the approval of the Rules for the compulsory treatment of drug addicts serving sentences in penitentiary institutions", as well as were prepared and answered accordingly, as well as on the adaptation of normative legal acts and acts of a normative nature of

the central executive authorities to the Law No. 618-VIQD "On Amendments to the Code of Execution of Sentences of the Republic of Azerbaijan" dated November 5, 2022, were prepared and answered accordingly.

Proposals have been made to adapt the "Internal Disciplinary Rules of Penitentiary Institutions" approved by the Decision No. 7-N dated December 29, 2011, of the Collegium of the MJ and "Instructions on organizing the registration of persons arrested and convicted in penitentiary institutions" approved by Resolution No. 7-N dated 30 June 2015, to the Law No. 618-VIQD "On Amendments to the Code of Execution of Sentences of the Republic of Azerbaijan" dated 5 November 2022, also to make necessary changes to those normative legal acts to provide for video meetings, as well as telephone conversations in the Law "On Ensuring the Rights and Freedoms of Persons Detained in Places of Arrest" and the "Internal Disciplinary Rules of Detention Centers" approved by Cabinet of Ministers' Decision No. 63 of 26 February 2014, with the purpose to avoid discrimination.

Regarding the implementation of Clause 1.1 of the Cabinet of Ministers' Order No. 82s dated 24 January 2023, "On ensuring the implementation of the Decree No. 1960 dated 11 January 2023, of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan on amending the Presidential Decree No. 625 dated 8 May 2012, On the Implementation of the Law No. 693-VIQ dated 16 December 2022 "On Political Parties" and the implementation of the Law No. 46-IVQD "On Amendments to the Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan "On Political Parties" dated 20 April 2012, a relevant reference was drawn up and addressed to the request for the submission of proposals to adapt the decisions of the Cabinet of Ministers to that Law.

The opinions and suggestions were prepared with regard to adapt the Cabinet of Ministers' decisions regarding the implementation of part 1 of the Order No. 164s of the Cabinet of Ministers dated 17 February 2023, to the Law No. 776-VIQD dated 27 December 2022, "On Making amendments to the Labor Code", the Family Code, the Criminal Code, the Criminal-Procedural Code", the national laws "On Children's Rights", "On Lawyers and Advocacy", "On Education", "On Social Service", "On State Dactyloscopy and Genome Registration in the Republic of Azerbaijan" and "On General Education".

Opinions and proposals have been prepared with regard the implementation of the Decree No. 378s of the Cabinet of Ministers dated 2 May 2023 "On ensuring the implementation of the Presidential Decree No. 3855, 19 dated April 2023, "On the Implementation of Law No. 821-VIQ dated 24 February 2023, "On Approving Protocol No. 16 of the Convention on the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms".

Opinions and proposals were prepared with regard to the Presidential Decree on amending the "List of officials authorized to draw up protocols on cases of administrative errors heard by district (city) courts" approved by Presidential Decree No. 1361 dated 3 May 2017, as well as to drafts of the constitutional law, law, decree and decision prepared in connection with the implementation of part 1 of the Cabinet of Ministers' Decree No. 838s, dated 19 October 2023, sent from the Ministry of Justice to the Ombudsman for being agreed upon.

It was proposed to make an addendum to the Law "On the Rights of Persons with Disabilities" (regarding the implementation of the functions of the independent monitoring mechanism for monitoring and promoting the implementation of the CRPD").

In addition to the above, it is appropriate to take into consideration the suggestions reflected in the previous annual reports of the Ombudsman regarding the ratification of some conventions signed by our country.

According to Article 13.2.8 of the Constitutional Law on Ombudsman and Article 32 of the Law "On the Constitutional Court", the Ombudsman addressed the Constitutional Court with relevant requests.

Thus, requests have been sent to the Constitutional Court to verify the compliance of Article 2.1 of the "Rules for Perpetuating the Martyr's Name and Applying Benefits to Martyr's Families" to Article 1 of the Law No. 697 dated 3 September 1993 "On Perpetuating the Martyr's Name and Benefits to Martyr's Families" (Definition of Martyr and Martyr's Family), and to Parts I, III-V of Article 25 (Right to Equality), to Part VII of Article 29 (Property Rights),

to parts I-III of Article 38 (Right to Social Security), to parts I-II of Article 71 (Guarantees for rights and freedoms of man and citizen), and parts I and V of Article 149 (Normative legal acts) of the Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan, as well as of the paragraph "f" of Article 47 of the Labor Code ,approved by the Law No. 618-IQ dated 1 February 1999, to Parts I, III, IV and V of Article 25 (Right to Equality), to Parts IV, VI and VIII of Article 35 (Right to Labor), to parts I, II, V, and VI of Article 71 (Guarantees for rights and freedoms of man and citizen), to parts I and III of Article 149 (Normative legal acts) of the Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan, also of the Clause 4.1.6 ("IDP" status and issuance of a certificate confirming it) of the "Rules on Issuing IDPs (persons displaced within the country) in the Republic of Azerbaijan with the Status of "internally displaced persons" and Certificates Confirming IDPs" registered at the Ministry of Justice on 5 June 2013, and approved by Decision No. 1 of the State Committee for Refugees and IDPs of the Republic of Azerbaijan dated May 23, 2013, to parts I, III, IV of Article 25 (Right to Equality), and to parts I, III, VI of Article 149 (Normative legal acts) of the Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

During the period of activity, out of 44 requests addressed to the Constitutional Court by the Ombudsman, decisions and resolutions were adopted by the Plenum of the Court on 26 requests, as well as resolutions were adopted by the Chamber.

Public relations and cooperation with non-governmental organizations. Various measures were implemented in the field of human rights protection within the framework of cooperation with civil society organizations, including NGOs, various communities, the media, and the public, fruitful discussions devoted to more reliable protection and efficient provision of human rights were carried out, relations were further expanded.

On the initiative of the Ombudsman, with the participation of CSOs, educational activities on combating domestic violence and discrimination, child labor and bullying, as well as other similar topics, were continued.

In addition to various state bodies and their local structural divisions, higher, secondary and general educational institutions, the cooperation with CSOs, including public associations such as the Constitutional Research Foundation, the Society of Women with Disabilities, International Human Rights and Media Center, "Zirva" Reform Support Center, Baku Non-Governmental Organizations Resource and Training Center, as well as "Modern Development and Family", "Social Assistance to Hearing and Speech Impaired Persons", "Social Research Center and European Lawyer Students Association - Baku (ELSA)", West Azerbaijan Community, Azerbaijan Autism Association and other NGOs, was continued.

In 2023, cooperation with several higher education institutions, including the Academy of Public Administration under the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Baku State University, Azerbaijan State Economic University (UNEC), Police and Justice Academies, Azerbaijan University of Languages, Western Caspian University, Baku Eurasia University, Khazar University has been continued.

A meeting was held at the Azerbaijan Academy of Labor and Social Relations for staff and activists of trade unions.

Public associations such as the National Confederation of Entrepreneurs (Employers) Organizations of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Association for the Development of Women's Entrepreneurship in Azerbaijan, the Confederation of Azerbaijan Trade Unions, the Bar Association, and the Azerbaijan National NGOs Forum have gathered at a conference jointly organized by the Ombudsman and the Prosecutor General's Office, discussions and exchange of opinions were held.

Close cooperation with CSOs was continued within the framework of the month-long campaigns traditionally announced by the Ombudsman.

During 2023, within the volunteer's program frameworks a number of young people participated closely in the activities of the Ombudsman Office and expanded their knowledge and experience in order to increase the

awareness, to form their management skills, as well as to familiarize themselves with the activities of the Ombudsman.

In addition to the abovementioned, the Ombudsman regularly met with persons with war-related disabilities, war veterans and families of martyrs, as well as family members of hostages and missing citizens, listened to their appeals, and gave recommendations, undertook necessary measures to solve their problems.

Cooperation with media. To organize the Ombudsman's relations with the general public more closely and efficiently, great importance was attached to communication through media and social networks, and cooperation with media subjects was significantly expanded.

"Telegram" and "WhatsApp" channels have also been added to the social network accounts to provide information about the activities of the Ombudsman to the public. Thus, the multifaceted activity of the Ombudsman was regularly covered both on the official website and social network accounts of the institution ("Facebook", "X", "Instagram", "YouTube", "Telegram", "WhatsApp") and the media.

Press releases were prepared to inform the public about the extensive activities of the Ombudsman, who regularly gave video interviews to local and international television and radio channels and news agencies, including the many events she participated in, as well as they were translated into English and Russian languages, then, disseminated.

It should be noted to the point that the Communication Strategy of the Office of the Ombudsman for 2024-2026 has been developed and relevant goals for the following years have been determined. In general, the strategy of the Ombudsman Office in the relevant field, including the control of the implementation of the social media policy, is carried out by the Working Group established in the Office.

The Ombudsman's statements, reactions, positions, as well as appeals on January 20 Tragedy, Khojaly Genocide and March 31 - Day of Genocide of Azerbaijanis, including other human rights issues, were covered on television channels, as well as broadcast in local and foreign electronic and print media.

The participation of media subjects was ensured in the events organized by the Office of the Ombudsman. During the "Human Rights Month-long Campaign" and "Children's Rights Month-long Campaign" traditionally announced by the institution, as well as within the framework of legal awareness activities, a series of events held with the participation of representatives of the central and local executive authorities, CSOs are available on the institution's official website and social network platforms, as well as covered in the press.

The presentation ceremony of the publications of the Ombudsman Office at the IX Baku International Book Fair was broadcast live on the institution's "Facebook" account, and at the same time, it was presented to the public through video clips on television channels.

The Ombudsman's articles devoted to the 100th anniversary of Heydar Aliyev, the National Leader of the Azerbaijani people, entitled "Heydar Aliyev is the founder of reforms in the field of legal state-building and human rights in our country", an article dedicated to June 18 – Human Rights Day in Azerbaijan and entitled "25 years have passed since the approval of the first State Program on the protection of human rights", also article entitled "Protection of children's rights in the activities of the Ombudsman" dedicated to the World Children's Day, and the article entitled "Migration and human rights: Global trends and national challenges" dedicated to 18 December - the International Day of Migrants, were published in newspapers.

The information related to the on-site investigations conducted by the delegation of the OIC Independent Permanent Human Rights Commission (IPHRC), which visited our country at the invitation of the Ombudsman and carried out fact-finding missions in Fuzuli, Aghdam districts and Ganja city, was also widely covered on television

channels through direct links and video clips, as well as in the media and on the organization's social network accounts.

Interviews were given to the representatives of the media subjects regarding the visit of the delegation of the OIC IPHRC, the objectives of the mission, and their questions were answered.

After the Second Karabakh War, the main part of the Ombudsman's activity was the dissemination of facts to the world community about the provocations that resulted in the violation by Armenia of international legal norms, including human rights, and the propagation of hatred against Azerbaijan on ethnic grounds through the media and social networks. Thus, in the post-war period, the international community was repeatedly called on the necessity to ensure lasting peace in the region, the results of mine terrorism carried out by Armenia, the discovery of mass graves in our territories liberated from occupation, as well as appeals and statements about the provocations that took place in these territories have been brought to the attention of the international community, also the immediate response was provided through the Ombudsman's social network accounts.

With the purpose to ensure transparency and accountability regarding the operation of the Ombudsman's Call Center on the social network platforms of the Ombudsman Office, monthly statistical information on the subject of complaints, the category to which the applicants belong, and the state bodies complained about has been provided, broadcast on social network accounts was carried out.

A staff member of the Ombudsman Office also participated in the trips and events organized for staff in charge with public relations to improve the communication work in the state bodies of the Republic of Azerbaijan and exchange experience in this field.

Within the framework of the visit to the Republic of Türkiye the Azerbaijani delegation held meetings at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of National Defense, as well as the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, the "Anadolu" Agency, the of Radio and Television Supreme Council, the Istanbul Branch of the Directorate of Communications of the Presidential Administration of Türkiye, the "TRT World" television channel and a number of other institutions. During the meetings, presentations on the activity of governmental bodies of the Republic of Türkiye in the field of communication, work with social media, media literacy, television monitoring system, professional international journalism, flexible adaptation to the changing international and regional political agenda and future goals were heard and detailed discussions were held.

In 2023, 6,353 pieces of information about the Ombudsman were published online in local and foreign media, 209 information was published in newspapers, 204 video materials broadcast on television channels were registered, 300 press releases were published in Azerbaijani and English languages. The posts were placed on the Ombudsman's social network pages, including 468 on the "Facebook" page, 414 on the "Instagram" page, 268 on the "X" social network page, 35 on the "YouTube" channel, 231 on the "Telegram" channel, and 100 on the "WhatsApp" channel.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND PROPOSALS

With the purpose of the effective protection of human rights and freedoms the Ombudsman *offers the following*:

- development and adoption of the National Action Program in the field of human rights for the next years with the purpose increasing the efficiency of the protection of human and civil rights and freedoms, protecting the rights of various groups of the population, developing of legal culture in the society, ensuring continuity of measures in the direction of improving the normative-legal framework, legal protection system and administration, as well as further developing of international cooperation in accordance with modern challenges, requirements of the new era and current priorities, also taking into account the recommendations of international organizations;

-Provision of a new version of Article 2.2.2 (If a person who has reached the age of 16 does not have a birth certificate, the information stated in the certificate is obtained from the relevant executive authority upon request)) of the Regulation on the implementation of the Law "On the ID card of a citizen of the Republic of Azerbaijan" in order to ensure the rights of adult citizens who cannot obtain an identity card due to absence of a birth certificate or who cannot obtain a birth certificate again due to absence of an ID card;

-Make additions and changes to the Decree of the Cabinet of Ministers dated 9 April 2003, No. 55s and, as a result, solving the problem of registration of citizens, taking into consideration the risky situations that arise after the registration of citizens of the Republic of Azerbaijan without a place of residence at the address of the relevant authority issuing the ID card of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and conditionally indicating that address in the "place of residence" section of the ID card when personalizing an ID card for them;

-In order to adapt the provisions of Article 5, Clause 1 of the Part I of the Law "On Citizenship of the Republic of Azerbaijan" to Part I of Article 53 of the Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan, considering at the same time that it contradicts Article 8 of this Law, to remove of the words "provided that the citizen of the Republic of Azerbaijan is registered at the place of residence in the Republic of Azerbaijan until the date of entry into force of this Law" from Clause 1 of the Part I of Article 5 of that Law;

- Inclusion of the imperative norm in the Criminal Procedure Code to transfer the same criminal case under investigation to the proceedings of another investigator in cases of rejection of the initiation of a criminal case, the decision to suspend the proceedings in a criminal case being canceled twice by the prosecutor, senior prosecutor or the court (based on a complaint) due to the groundlessness and illegality, at the same time increasing attention to the issue of responsibility related to these cases;

- Issuance of new version of Article 228.2 ("Interrogation of a minor witness is carried out with the participation of a psychologist, and if necessary, a teacher, another qualified specialist and his legal representative.") of the Criminal Procedure Code for the purpose of reliable protection of children's rights;

- Removal of the words "under 16 years of age and with signs of mental weakness" from Article 432.5 ("The investigator must ensure the participation of a teacher or psychologist in conducting investigative actions involving a minor under 16 years of age and with signs of mental weakness.") of the Criminal Procedure Code for the effective protection of children's rights;

-Elimination of the restriction of the institution of representation in criminal and civil trials (proceedings);

-Changing the provision "unreasonably registered in the real estate state register" in Article 178.5 of the Civil Code, in accordance with the principle of inviolability of property, and at the same time for the purpose of reliable protection of property rights, since it fails to comply with the requirements of Articles 6.1.4, 6.2, 178 and 139-1 of that Code;

- creation of a mechanism with the aim to more reliably protect and prevent illegal interferences in the private life of citizens, protect of their honor and dignity, and the prevent violations, as well as systematic organization of the fight against the dissemination of information, including audio or video materials, that damage business reputation, in media subjects;
- Alignment of Article 10.11 of the Civil Procedure Code (Court acts are announced publicly in all cases) and Article 350.1 of that Code (Resolution is announced only for closed court session participants);;
- taking into account that not informing the person about the restriction imposed on the person's exit from the country, informing the person about this information only when changing the ID card (civil passport) or crossing the border leads to the limitation of rights, Incorporation into the legislation of the provisions on the obligation to send a notification to those citizens from the moment the information about the citizens whose right to leave and enter the country is restricted in the "Entry-Exit and Registration" interdepartmental automated information-search system;
- In order to increase the flexibility and effectiveness of the execution of court decisions, increasing attention to the organization of coordination between executive institutions and relevant state bodies, as well as to the administrative and judicial control of the execution of court decisions;
- Replacing the words "from 5 years" with the words "from 3 years" in clause 5 of Article 45 (term of employment contract) of the Labor Code;
- Revision of the norms of business trip expenses to foreign countries approved by the decision No. 14 of the Cabinet of Ministers dated 25 January 2008;
- when increasing the minimum amount of a labor pension, increasing all pension amounts set before that increase in proportion to the corresponding increase or by a certain amount;
- increasing the amount of monthly and annual income of individuals in the main workplace defined by Article 102.1.6 of the Tax Code in connection with any salaried work and its tax-exempted part in order to strengthen the social protection of the population;
- in order to strengthen the social protection of the population increasing the amount of taxable monthly income of natural persons determined by Article 101 of the Tax Code;
- the application of the paragraph 1.3 of the "Rule for the use of funds transferred to the account of the State Customs Committee" approved by Resolution No. 437 of the Cabinet of Ministers dated 17 October 2017, to retired persons in the period from January 1, 2019 to July 1, 2022;
- taking into consideration that the failure to determine the time limit for conducting the examination of the family's financial conditions has led to procrastination and complaints, making additions and changes related to the determination of the examination period for the "Rules for applying for the receipt of addressed state social assistance, its appointment, granting and refusal to grant" approved by Resolution No. 37 of the Cabinet of Ministers dated 5 February 2016.
- increasing the amount (volume) of food products in the minimum consumption basket, taking into account the real needs of the population, especially low-income families and vulnerable groups;
- in order to strengthen the social protection of children of the appropriate age applying the allowance for caring for a child up to 3 years old to persons who are not engaged in labor activity;

- increasing the amount of allowance given to guardians (guardians) of children who have lost their parents and are deprived of parental care;
- implementation of all medical services and diseases at the expense of compulsory health insurance in order to effectively ensure the right to health protection;
- Exclusion of "Medical Health Certificate" medical services (other medical certificates, pre-employment examination, examination for admission to educational institutions (over 18 years old), insurance-related examination (over 18 years old), other examinations for administrative purposes (over 18 years old), during re-application within 1 month (over 18 years old)) from the list of paid medical services not included in the Service Envelope and inclusion to the Service Envelope provided within the framework of compulsory medical insurance;
- creation of a single medical e-database in the field of mandatory medical insurance application aiming at increasing the efficiency in order to ensure operational efficiency and coordination, as well as awareness of medical services provided in all medical institutions and accessibility to those services, regardless of subordination
- strengthening of medical and preventive control of children's healthy physical and mental development, their health status, at the same time, facilitating the regular use of appropriate medical and rehabilitation services for persons with limited health capacities under the age of 18;
- replacement of medicaments and other means provided by the state budget with better quality ones and expansion of the list according to real needs, taking into consideration the current situation of our citizens suffering from hepatitis, diabetes, hemophilia, thalassemia and other diseases, especially from low-income families and vulnerable groups of the population;
- establishment of a relevant department in specialized medical institutions for the purpose of organizing the treatment of minors suffering from drug addiction;
- in order to ensure the improvement of the quality of services provided to children in relevant boarding houses increasing the number of "nurse", "night-shift nurse-maid" and "psychologist" positions in "Exemplary positions of managers, administrative-household, teaching assistants and service personnel of boarding-type special general education schools for children with mental and physical disabilities" approved by Resolution No. 6 of the Cabinet of Ministers dated 9 January 1992;
- in order to increase efficiency in the field of ensuring children's right to health protection in nurseries, kindergartens and boarding houses, adaptation to modern standards of "Nutrition norms for children in orphanages, kindergartens and children's homes" (Appendix No. 3) approved by Resolution No. 103 of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan dated March 9, 1994, "On the implementation of food norms of citizens in educational institutions, hospitals and other public institutions of the social sphere"
- in order to increase the attention to food safety and ration in pre-school, secondary and higher education institutions, strengthen control over the sale of food products that are prohibited for minors or considered inappropriate taking into account its special importance for human life or health, carrying out regular planned and ad-hoc monitoring jointly with the Ministry of Science and Education, the Antimonopoly and Consumer Market Control State Service under the Ministry of Economy, the Food Safety Agency;
- providing the textbooks envisaged in the educational programs in secondary schools complete with other study and auxiliary materials to the students at the state expense or integrating those materials into the textbooks as in previous years by making necessary changes in the teaching methodology taking into account that the auxiliary materials necessary for teaching, including workbooks, are obtained at the parents' personal expense, that this situation causes dissatisfaction of parents (especially when there are two or more children in the family), especially

low-income families, at the same time, it is impossible for children to fully understand the curriculum without those aids;

- preparation of the state program for the education of PWDs, textbooks and study materials and acceleration of the provision of such materials to PWDs, taking into account that other students, except for elementary school students, are not provided with appropriate teaching materials in special boarding schools;

- redevelopment and approval of the statutes regulating the activities of general education boarding schools in accordance with the requirements of the national legislation, including the international agreements to which our country is a party, as well as modern challenges;

- in order to ensure the right of children to live in a healthy, safe and developing environment in appropriate children's institutions increasing the number of "night nanny" and "psychologist" positions in the "Exemplary staff of administrative staff, administrative-household, teaching-assistant and service staff of general-purpose boarding-type general education schools, integrated-training type boarding-type general education schools, boarding-type sanatoria general education schools, boarding-type lyceums and boarding-type gymnasiums" approved by Resolution No. 157 of the Cabinet of Ministers dated 23 June 2006;

- increasing the number of psychologists in secondary schools according to the number of students, as well as attracting professional and specialized psychologists;

- in order to organize psychological work with children in general educational institutions in an efficient manner, increasing the number of "psychologist" positions determined by Resolution No. 70 of the Cabinet of Ministers dated 27 February 2020 "On determining the number of psychologist positions in general educational institutions";

- in order to further increase state support for children's development, to ensure the development of children in early childhood, to increase the efficiency of social services provided to children and support for the correct formation of childhood, to prevent children from being exposed to health and social risks in the future, adding the positions "child psychologist" and "early development specialist" to the "Sample staff of Public Kindergartens Funded from the Budget" (Appendix No. 1) and "Sample staff of Orphanage-Kindergartens" (Appendix No. 2) approved by Resolution No. 61, dated 29 May 1996 of the Cabinet of Ministers "On the Exemplary Status of Pre-School Educational Institutions Funded from the Budget";

- continuation of activities on reconstruction or overhaul of schools, kindergartens and nurseries that are still in a state of emergency in the regions, providing them with modern equipment;

- reorganization of the living conditions in the Guba Special Vocational School, which is in a state of emergency, in order to adapt it to the requirements established by the national legislation, including the "Model Charter on open and closed-type special educational institutions" approved by the Resolution No. 65 of the Cabinet of Ministers dated 13 May 2003;

- increasing the number of state-ordered places in state higher and secondary specialized educational institutions;

- continuation of the works in the direction of building new student dormitories according to the need;

- Cancellation of the Decision of the Presidium of the High Attestation Commission under the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan dated 19 May 2000, "On the inadvisability of awarding scientific degrees to persons working in the civil service and special types of civil service" in order to ensure the right to education and freedom of creativity, as well as scientific and creative activities, established in the Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan, as well as defined by the national laws "On Civil Service" and "On Education";

- speeding up the determination of the rule of management of the multi-apartment building according to Article 141-1.1 of the Housing Code and provided for in paragraph 1.3 of Presidential Decree No. 1531 dated 14 July 2017, "On the implementation of the Law No. 739-VQD dated 13 June 2017 "On Making Amendments to the Housing Code of the Republic of Azerbaijan" and on the implementation of the Law "On the Approval, Entry into Force of the Housing Code of the Republic of Azerbaijan and Related Legal Regulation Issues";
- Inventory and state registration of houses illegally built since the middle of the last century on land occupied by various persons in Baku city, its surrounding settlements and villages, including areas belonging to joint farms (sovkhozes), as well as of houses built on plots of land allocated by municipalities for private house construction, at the same time, giving addresses to real estate and transport infrastructure facilities in those areas and new housing estates;
- allocation of necessary financial resources for the purpose of continuing measures to eliminate the consequences of damage to individual residential houses and apartments as a result of rocket fire by the armed forces of Armenia, a number of residential areas of the republic, especially densely populated places of the civil population, including city and district centers;
- Aiming at improvement of the living conditions of IDPs currently living in dormitories and dilapidated buildings, their temporary relocation to service apartments handed over by former IDPs who were relocated to territories liberated from occupation;
- organization of the Azerbaijani language courses at the state budget expense for the children of migrants in the territory of the Republic of Azerbaijan;
- recruiting of persons detained in detention centers for irregular migrants in order to reduce the risks of their desocialization;
- providing psychological and other necessary support to families returning to the Republic of Azerbaijan, especially children, within the framework of readmission agreements;
- considering that the protection of the rights of a child, including the restoration of violated children's rights and freedoms, as well as prevention of delinquencies in this area are among of the main areas of the Ombudsman's activity, ensuring the representation of the Ombudsman in the Working Group established according to clause 1.7 of the "Rules for repatriation and rehabilitation of minor citizens of the Republic of Azerbaijan living in difficult living conditions in a foreign country" approved by the Presidential Decree dated 28 October 2023, and for this purpose making a corresponding addition to paragraph 1.6 of those Rules;
- Making additions and changes to the legislation on granting the status of martyrs to military personnel who died or were declared dead while participating in peacekeeping operations conducted outside its territory as part of the peacekeeping contingent of the Republic of Azerbaijan;
- increasing the amount of the "Pension of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan to war veterans" in order to strengthen the social protection of war veterans;
- In order to specify the word "combatants" in Article 102.2.5 of the Tax Code of the Republic of Azerbaijan, replacing that word with the words "persons who granted the title of veteran of war in accordance with the law";
- In accordance with Article 102.2.5 of the Tax Code of the Republic of Azerbaijan (widows (husbands) and children of fallen or later deceased fighters (except for those who received the status of martyr)), adding the words "and children" after the words "widows (husbands) of fallen or later deceased fighters" that are given in paragraph 1.5 of the "List of documents for determining the right to tax benefits of natural persons when calculating the tax withheld from wages" approved by decision No. 4 of the Cabinet of Ministers dated 4 January 2001;

- *increasing the allowances paid to military personnel (except for temporary active military personnel);*
- *adjusting the amount of monthly cash compensation paid to them for food to the monthly cost of food products in the minimum consumption basket for the country in order to strengthen the social protection of military personnel;*
- *increasing the amount of monetary support paid to military personnel for military ranks;*
- *increasing the amount of money paid to military personnel for temporary housing rent;*
- *Increasing the amount of insurance provided for military personnel under Article 4.1 of the Law No. 296-IQ "On State Compulsory Personal Insurance of Military Personnel" dated 20 May 1997;*
- *Application of the Presidential Decree No. 569 "On measures to strengthen the social protection of the military personnel of the Azerbaijan Army" dated 28 December 2011, to all military personnel of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Azerbaijan (except for the military personnel of the fixed-term active military service);*
- *Preparation of rules for personnel officers who have not completed their service in the period provided for in the legislation, the expenses incurred by the state for their education are calculated according to the relevant period and they are paid to the state;*
- *Expansion of measures in order to further strengthen legal education and training, as well as the psychological state of personnel and service in accordance with military regulations in the Armed Forces of the Republic of Azerbaijan;*
- *Increasing the number of admissions to the Faculty of Military Medicine of the Azerbaijan Medical University in order to ensure that the Armed Forces of the Republic of Azerbaijan are equipped with professional personnel with higher medical education and qualified personnel in required fields;*
- *giving a short-term 10-day leave once to regular military servicemen according to Article 11 of the Law "On the Status of Military Servicemen", 2 times with a duration of 10 days each;*
- *development and adoption of the law "On alternative service";*
- *allocating financial resources for the purpose of adapting social infrastructure objects to be accessible to PWDs, and at the same time providing support for the purchase of accessible public transport vehicles for such persons;*
- *making changes in the penal-executive legislation and other legislative acts that allow convicts between the ages of 18-24 who do not pose a particular public threat and have committed less serious crimes to serve their sentences in a different regime and the establishment of a special penitentiary for serving the sentence of such convicts;*
- *creation of a relevant mechanism, including internet platforms, in order to ensure the right of convicted persons to study, to continue their secondary or higher education, to increase their knowledge and skills;*
- *in order to effectively ensure the right to health protection of arrested persons, persons serving a sentence of deprivation of liberty for a certain period of time and imprisonment for life in cases when carrying out the examination and treatment of such persons in the institutions of the Penitentiary Service of the Ministry of Justice is impossible, making relevant additions and changes to Article 15-2 of the Law "On Medical Insurance" with regard to rendering of those medical services in other medical institutions at the expense of compulsory medical insurance;*

- taking into account the importance of protecting information security, purchasing software licenses intended for government structures.

In addition to the abovementioned, in order to increase the efficiency of the activities carried out by the institution in the field of protection of human and civil rights and freedoms, as well as prevention of human rights violations in the cases determined by the Constitutional Law on the Ombudsman, the Ombudsman *draws attention* to the necessity of solving the following issues:

- taking into account the international experience, the organization of a structural unit on "Business and human rights" in the Ombudsman Office;

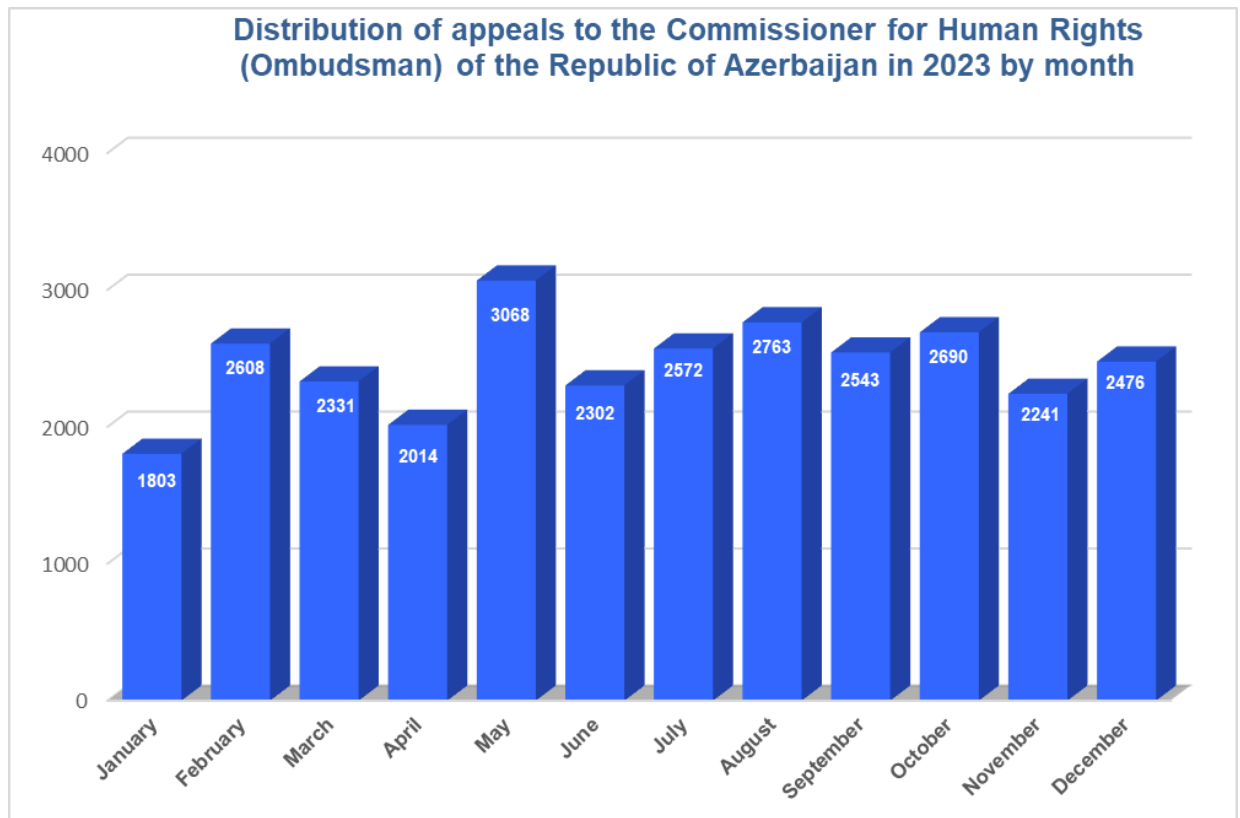
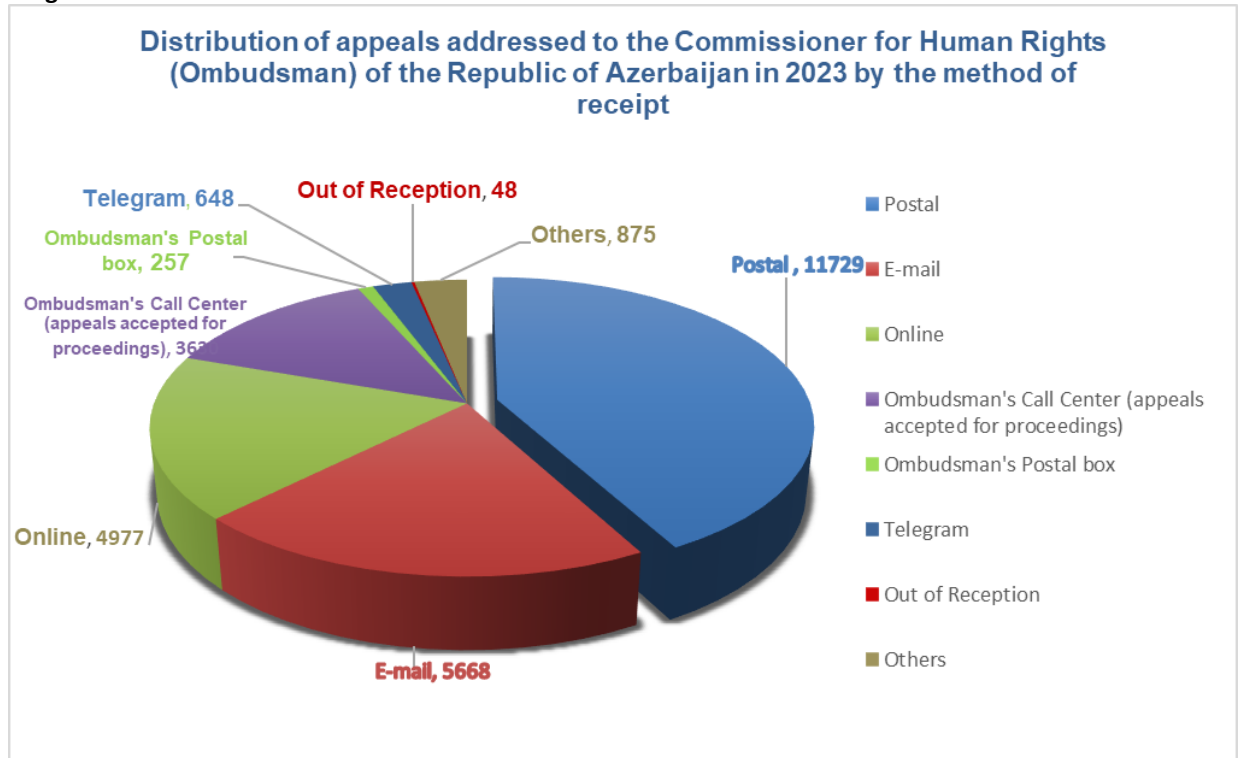
- Providing financial support to strengthen the material base of the Ombudsman's Office and regional centers;

- Organization of "Ombudsman Hour" (or one-hour program called "My Rights and Duties") on Azerbaijan Television or Public Television and allocation of appropriate financial resources for this purpose.

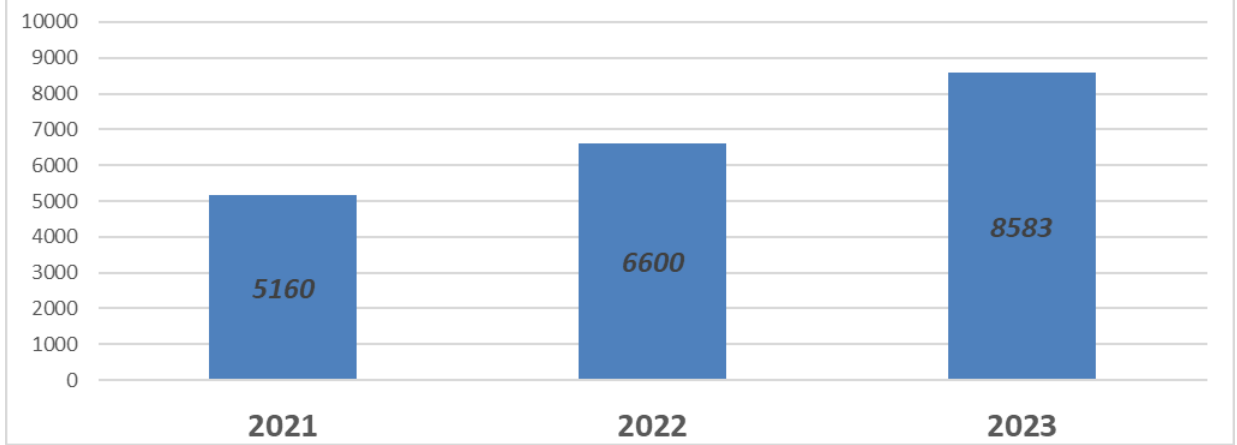
CONTENTS

FOREWORD.....	3
Chapter I. PROTECTION OF HUMAN AND CITIZENS' RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS.....	6
1.1. Protection of civil and political rights.....	6
• Right to liberty.....	6
• Implementation of NPM functions.....	9
• Protection of the right of access to information.....	13
• Judicial Guarantees for Rights and Freedoms.....	15
• Right to Legal Aid.....	21
• Protection of the Rights and Freedoms of Participants in Pre-Trial Criminal Proceedings.....	21
1.2. Protection of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.....	23
• Right to Labor.....	23
• Right to Social Security.....	25
• Right to Health.....	30
• Right to Education.....	32
• Right to Housing.....	36
• Business and Human Rights (B+HR).....	37
1.3. Protection of the Rights of Population Groups.....	38
• Protection of the Rights of Refugees, IDPs, and Migrants.....	38
• Protection of the Rights of Martyr Families and War Veterans.....	41
• Protection of the Rights of Military Servicemen.....	43
• Protection of Women's Rights and Ensuring Gender Equality.....	45
• Protection of Child Rights.....	46
• Protection of the Rights of the Elderly.....	51
• Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.....	52
• Protection of the Rights of Persons Kept in Places of Detention and Convicts.....	55
Chapter II. INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION.....	59
• Cooperation with ombudspersons and NHRIs of other countries.....	64
• Participation of the Staff of the Ombudsman Institution in international events and training sessions.....	66
• Cooperation with the United Nations.....	67
• Cooperation with the Council of Europe.....	68
• Cooperation with the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI).....	69
• Cooperation with the European Network of National Human Rights Institutions (ENNHRI).....	69
• Cooperation with the Association of Ombudsmen and NHRIs of Turkic States.....	69
• Cooperation with the Ombudsman Association of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC OA).....	70
• Cooperation with the Independent Permanent Human Rights Commission of the OIC (OIC IPHRC).....	70
• Cooperation with the Asian Ombudsman Association (AOA).....	71
• Cooperation with the European Ombudsman Institute (EOI).....	71
Chapter III. Legal Education, Scientific-Analytical Work and Cooperation with the Civil Society Organizations.....	72
• Awareness activities in the field of human rights.....	72
• Scientific-Analytical Work.....	76
• Public Relations and Cooperation with Civil Society Organizations.....	78
• Cooperation with Media.....	79
Recommendations and Proposals.....	81
CONTENTS.....	88
DIAGRAMS.....	89

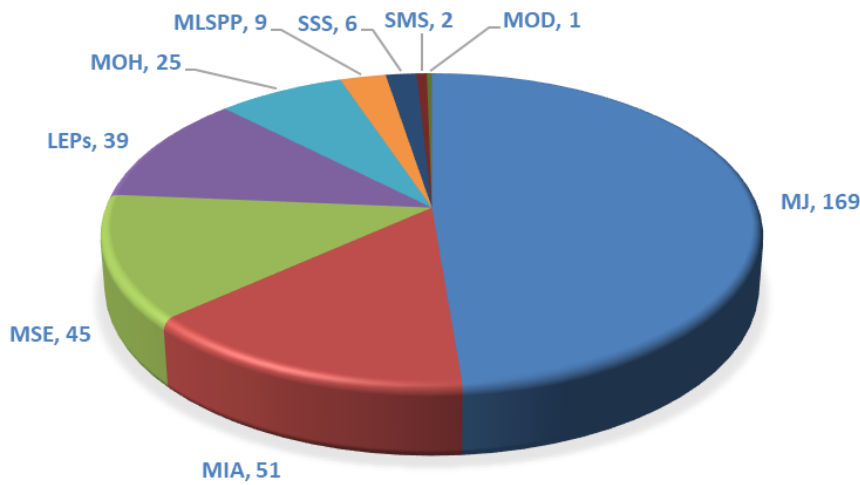
Diagrams



All Appeals addressed to the Commissioner for Human Rights (Ombudsman) of the Republic of Azerbaijan in 2021-2023, accepted for proceedings and answered verbally



Visits by the Ombudsman and her National Preventive Group (NPG) in 2023 to institutions under the jurisdiction of relevant state bodies that detained persons cannot leave of their own will



State bodies	Number
Ministry of Justice Penitentiary Service (MJ)	169
Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA)	51
Ministry of Science and Education (MSE)	45
Local Executive Powers (LEPs)	39
Ministry of Health (MOH)	25
Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of Population (MLSP)	9
State Security Service (SSS)	6
State Migration Service (SMS)	2
Ministry of Defense (MOD)	1

Visits by the Ombudsman and her National Preventive Group (NPG) to institutions which detained persons cannot leave at their own will

