

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

November 8, 2017

The Honorable Rex W. Tillerson
Secretary of State
United States Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Tillerson:

We write to share our concerns about press reports that Azerbaijani authorities have detained dozens of gay and transgender persons simply because they are gay or transgender. We urge you to investigate these reports and, if they are credible, to publicly condemn these actions in the strongest terms and to push for perpetrators to be held accountable.

Several recent news reports indicate that Azerbaijani authorities in the capital city of Baku conducted a series of raids at the end of September, detaining more than 50 gay and transgender persons. In one story, a lawyer helping the victims is quoted as saying the police “targeted homosexuals in general” and “[t]he detained were subjected to inhuman treatment and torture...[t]heir heads were shaved, some were electroshocked.” Reports since September suggest that authorities may have released some of the detained persons.

If these stories are accurate, they sound similar to reports earlier this year that authorities in Chechnya detained and abused dozens of men due to their actual or suspected sexual orientation. We understand the State Department has now confirmed that you conveyed your concerns to your Russian counterpart and urged his government to hold to account those who perpetrated abuses against gay men in Chechnya.

Azerbaijan, located between Russia and Iran, is in an increasingly important region in terms of geopolitics as well as energy supplies. The Azerbaijani government has worked with the United States on counter-terror efforts and is a member of NATO’s Partnership for Peace program. This cooperation is important, but it must not cause us to remain silent in the face of human rights violations. Indeed, U.S. foreign policy must promote both our values and our interests and any notion that the two are mutually exclusive is a false choice.

In the same spirit with which you investigated the similar allegations in Chechnya, we now urge you to investigate reports that Azerbaijani authorities have rounded up and detained LGBT individuals. Should these allegations prove credible, we urge you to push the Azerbaijani government to hold the perpetrators accountable.

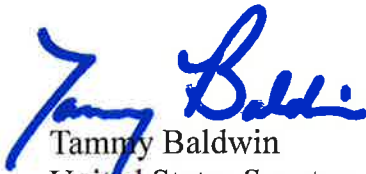
Sincerely,



Ron Wyden
United States Senator



Pat Toomey
United States Senator



Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator



Thom Tillis
United States Senator



Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator



Marco Rubio
United States Senator



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



Susan M. Collins
United States Senator