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Thursday 29 June 2023, by [AGHAYEV Ismi](#) (Date first published: 26 June 2023).

Three feminist activists and one journalist were detained by security at the US Embassy in Baku and handed over to police after holding and live-streaming a peaceful protest against police brutality in Gadabay.

The activists were attending an early Independence Day event at the US Embassy on 23 June.

During the reception, Gulnara Mehdiyeva, Sanubar Heydarova, and Narmin Shahmarzade removed their scarves to reveal black hands drawn on their necks.

They stood next to Azerbaijani MPs and other officials while describing recent events in Gadabay and criticising 'representatives of the government and the opposition of Azerbaijan' who were gathered at the event.

Ulvi Hasanli, the founder and director of the independent media outlet *Abzas*, filmed and [live-streamed](#) the protest.

'All human rights are not protected in Azerbaijan, on the contrary, all human rights and rights are suppressed', said Sanubar Heydarova. 'In a civil manner, we wanted to draw attention to the human rights violations happening right here in Azerbaijan, especially the ongoing repression of the Gadabay people by the government against the fulfilment of their demands.'

The village of Soyudlu, in Gadabay District, has been locked down since 21 June, with entry and exit forbidden to all except for residents of the village. This followed protests by local people against pollution by a goldmine in the region.

Shahmarzade told *OC Media* that embassy security guards approached the activists as they were speaking and demanded that they leave the premises. According to the activists and at least one eyewitness, they were then detained by US Embassy security in the entrance of the embassy until police arrived.

The activists were handed over to the police, as was Hasanli, but released shortly after being interviewed at a police station.

Speaking to *OC Media*, Hasanli stated that he was treated roughly by embassy security guards.

'Five or six embassy guards twisted my arms and handed me over to [the] police', said Hasanli.

'I did not expect such violent behaviour on the territory of the embassy', said Hasanli. 'This is interference with my journalistic activity. The embassy of a country that talks about democracy and human rights, and freedom of the press should not have behaved like this, it was a very shameful

act.'

[Footage](#) from outside the embassy shows Hasanli being taken to a police van by four police officers.

After the embassy staff ejected the activists and journalist from the premises, at least ten Azerbaijani political and cultural figures left the event in protest.

'The removal of journalists and activists by the guards of the embassy and their handing over to the police was, to put it mildly, just shameful', [wrote](#) writer Zumrud Yaghmur. 'As soon as I heard the news, I followed [them].'

Afiaddin Mammadov, a member of local pro-democracy group, the Democracy 1918 Movement, was also among those to leave the event in protest.

Mammadov confirmed to *OC Media* that embassy staff physically removed *Abzas* founder Ulvi Hasanli while ordering others to follow.

'The feminists were protesting in a civilised way', he added.

'Ulvi Hasanli was filming their protest as a journalist. The security service of the embassy approached him and demanded he stop the live broadcast. After Ulvi stopped the broadcast, the guards took Ulvi's arms. They grabbed him and took him to the entrance gate of the embassy.'

'Ulvi Hasanli and the feminist activists were held at the embassy entrance until the police officers of the 21st police station arrived. After the police officers arrived, the embassy staff handed over Ulvi and the feminists to the police officers personally', he said.

A spokesperson for the US Embassy neither confirmed nor denied that the activists and journalist were physically removed from the event and handed to police.

The spokesperson told *OC Media* that only portions of the event were open to the media and on the record.

'Much of the night was a chance to network, share the diversity of the United States, and celebrate the official event', they said.

'The US Embassy supports fundamental freedoms, including the right to protest and freedom of speech.'

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