

Ms. Sabina Aliyeva
Commissioner for Human Rights (Ombudsman) of the Republic of Azerbaijan
Uzeyir Hajibeyli Street 80, Government House, Gate II
AZ1000 Baku
Azerbaijan

7 July 2026

Dear Commissioner Aliyeva,

As the wife of Ruben Vardanyan, I am addressing you in this public letter, and as a woman appealing to another woman entrusted with a human rights mandate.

This appeal follows from your engagement with Ruben, your expressed willingness to assist in relation to a possible humanitarian visit, and your important mandate as the Commissioner for Human Rights of Azerbaijan.

You may have seen my public statement of 15 June 2026, in which I spoke about my intention to organize an international women's humanitarian delegation to Baku. Respectfully, I would now like to renew that request and ask for your personal engagement in helping make this visit possible under the auspices of your office.

My plan is to visit Baku in September 2026 as part of this delegation. My hope would be to meet with you officially, to visit all Armenian detainees held at the Umbaki Penitentiary Complex, and to deliver letters, photographs, drawings and permitted personal belongings from their loved ones.

Its aim would be to restore, even in a limited way, a human connection between the detainees and their families, and to provide an opportunity to discuss practical questions: channels for family contact, correspondence, conditions of detention, and the possibility of regular and independent monitoring.

A number of prominent international women have expressed a genuine willingness to join this delegation. At the same time, several of them, as well as their families, have raised understandable questions about safety, ability to enter Azerbaijan, access arrangements, and safe departure after the visit.

A visit organized under the protection of the Commissioner for Human Rights, with your personal support and clear safety assurances for the delegation, would make a decisive difference. It would give comfort and confidence to the women considering participation. This would also demonstrate, in a concrete and visible way, the role your office can play even in the most sensitive circumstances, showing that human dignity, family contact, and the basic rights of persons in detention can be protected even where painful disagreements remain unresolved.

Human rights institutions exist for precisely this purpose: to keep open a space for humanity when political and historical wounds are still painful. Conflict leaves suffering on all sides. Mothers lose sons, wives lose husbands, and children grow up without fathers. In the end, conflicts pass, but people remain, families remain, and neighbours must find a way to live beside one another with dignity. Women often carry the deepest human consequences of conflict, and for that reason they can sometimes open a humanitarian space where formal politics cannot.

Above all, I am writing to you, asking for your understanding and empathy beyond any differences of nationality, faith, or politics that may separate us.

Mercy also has, I believe, a special place in the protection of human dignity. The ability to allow humanitarian contact, to protect family bonds, and to make humane gestures in difficult circumstances is one of the clearest signs of responsible public leadership.

At any time, convenient for you, I would welcome the opportunity to speak with you. We are ready to share the possible composition of the delegation, the list of items we would hope to deliver, and any practical details your office may require.

My hope is that you read this letter with an understanding of the sincerity of my intentions, as a genuine appeal made with respect for your office and with the hope that, even in a difficult and painful situation, a humane step is still possible.

With hope,
Veronika Zonabend