

Who is Vicken?

Vicken Euljekjian is a 44-year-old Christian Armenian and a descendant of survivors of the Armenian Genocide of 1915. He is a citizen of Lebanon and Armenia. In 2020, he relocated to Nagorno-Karabakh to establish a business and build a new life there with his family. Vicken is a devout Christian and has a tattoo of a cross on his hand, which was burnt and obliterated by the Azerbaijani forces while being illegally held in their custody¹.

Vicken's Current Location and Detention Details

On November 10, 2020, the day after the 2020 ceasefire agreement between Azerbaijan and Armenia, Vicken was captured by Azerbaijani Special Forces while he was collecting his personal belongings to evacuate from Shushi, Nagorno-Karabakh, which they had overtaken. He was neither a fighter nor a combatant. He was an Armenian civilian who was kidnapped and unlawfully transferred to prison in Baku, where he was held incommunicado for nearly seven months.²

On June 14, 2021, Vicken was illegally tried by the Baku Military Court, found guilty, and sentenced to 20 years in prison in a sham trial. He was not allowed any independent legal representation, investigation, or defence. Vicken was wrongfully charged and tried on fabricated charges of participating as a mercenary in a military conflict, terrorism, and crossing the state border with violence or threats of violence.

Vicken was not allowed to communicate with family or counsel³. Today, Vicken is serving an illegal sentence of 20 years in prison in Azerbaijan.

The charges against Vicken were politically and ethnically motivated, without any substantive evidence presented during the trial. The court disregarded the defence's call for acquittal, and Vicken was sentenced to 20 years. He remains detained in Baku, presumably in Gobustan Prison, which is notorious for its inhumane conditions and high suicide rates among inmates.⁴

¹ CFTJ, *Individual Complaint to the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention: Request for Allegation Letter on the Case of Vicken Euljekjian* (14 June 2024), 10 <<https://www.cftjustice.org/request-for-allegation-letter-on-the-case-of-vicken-euljekjian/>> accessed January 24, 2025.

² *ibid.*

³ CFTJ, *Individual Complaint to the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention: Request for Allegation Letter on the Case of Vicken Euljekjian* (14 June 2024), 16 <<https://www.cftjustice.org/request-for-allegation-letter-on-the-case-of-vicken-euljekjian/>> accessed January 24, 2025.

⁴ Penal Reform International, *Life Imprisonment and Conditions of Serving the Sentence in the South Caucasus Countries* (2009) 62 <https://www.upr-info.org/sites/default/files/country-document/2023-11/ADC_Memorial_UPR44_AZE_E_Main.pdf> accessed 24 January 2025; Anti-Discrimination Centre Memorial Brussels, *Submission to the Human Rights Council for the 44th Session of the Universal Periodic Review (Fourth Cycle, Nov. 2023): Republic of Azerbaijan - Discrimination of Ethnic Minorities* (2023) 3 <https://www.upr-info.org/sites/default/files/country-document/2023-11/ADC_Memorial_UPR44_AZE_E_Main.pdf> accessed 24 January 2025; Institute for War and Peace Reporting, *Azerbaijan: Spotlight on Horror Jail* (2007) <<https://iwpr.net/global-voices/azerbaijan-spotlight-horror-jail>> accessed 24 January 2025.

Reasons for Persecution

Vicken was targeted due to his Armenian ethnicity and Christian faith. According to his family, Vicken has a cross tattoo on his hand, symbolizing his devotion to Christianity. According to the CFTJ's evidence, during a televised interrogation following his detention, his family observed visible burns on his hand, which they believe were deliberately inflicted to disfigure or erase his cross tattoo.

This incident strongly suggests that Vicken was subjected to religiously motivated violence, aligning with broader patterns of religious persecution documented by the CFTJ. In one parallel testimony, an Armenian POW recalled: *"In KGB, they saw my cross tattoo and wanted to peel it off my skin. I said, 'Better kill me than touch my cross.'"*⁵ These acts demonstrate the systematic targeting of Armenian Christians in Azerbaijani custody.

Reports of Torture and Neglect in Azerbaijan's Prisons

According to evidence collected by the CFTJ, Vicken has been subjected to systematic torture and inhumane treatment during his detention, including physical and psychological abuse and medical neglect:

- He was severely beaten until he lost consciousness during his initial detention. He was blindfolded, subjected to mock executions, and tortured for prolonged periods.⁶
- Vicken suffers from a digestive disorder, which has been left untreated. He was denied access to medical care, proper food, and essential medications for months, resulting in significant weight loss and ongoing physical pain.⁷
- Vicken's mental health has deteriorated due to constant physical and psychological abuse. According to the evidence obtained by the CFTJ, during his last phone call with his family on January 9, 2025, he again expressed suicidal thoughts and revealed that he had informed the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) of his intention to take his own life. Despite this, no intervention has been made to address his deteriorating condition.

Additionally, Vicken's communication with his family is closely monitored by Azerbaijani authorities, and he is not allowed to freely speak with them in a language they understand.

Pattern of Ethnic and Religious Persecution

Vicken's case is emblematic of Azerbaijan's systematic targeting of Armenian Christians. As documented by numerous CFTJ fact-finding activities, religious persecution is a recurring theme in the testimonies of Armenian detainees, many of whom were coerced to renounce

⁵ CFTJ, *Amplifying the Voices of Victims of War Crimes* (11 March 2024), 12 <<https://www.cftjustice.org/amplifying-the-voices-of-victims-of-war-crimes/>> accessed 26 January 2025.

⁶ CFTJ, *Individual Complaint to the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention: Request for Allegation Letter on the Case of Vicken Euljekjian* (14 June 2024), 7-12 <<https://www.cftjustice.org/request-for-allegation-letter-on-the-case-of-vicken-euljekjian/>> accessed January 24, 2025.

⁷ *Ibid.*

their faith or threatened with violence over their religious symbols. These actions reflect a broader pattern of discrimination and violence against Armenians by Azerbaijani authorities.

The Azerbaijani government's actions towards Vicken reflect a broader genocidal policy against Armenians:

- Azerbaijan has a history of detaining Armenians without evidence, often under fabricated charges.
- Testimonies collected by CFTJ reveal a pattern of targeting Armenians for their ethnicity and faith, including threats to deface or destroy Christian symbols such as crosses, and the Bible.

Appeal

Vicken Euljekjian's ongoing detention under fabricated charges and the inhumane conditions he faces represent an urgent humanitarian and human rights concern. His case demonstrates Azerbaijan's systematic targeting of Armenian Christians and its broader campaign of ethnoreligious persecution.

In June 2024, CFTJ submitted the first individual complaint, a request for an allegation letter under urgent procedure regarding the case of Vicken Euljekjian, to the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention.⁸ However, no response has been received as of yet.

By including Vicken in the Religious Prisoners of Conscience Project, the USCIRF can amplify his plight, draw attention to Azerbaijan's ongoing human rights abuses, and advocate for accountability and justice. CFTJ respectfully urges the RPOC Project to recognize Vicken's case as emblematic of the broader violations faced by Armenian Christians in Azerbaijani captivity and to press for his immediate release.

⁸ CFTJ, *Individual Complaint to the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention: Request for Allegation Letter on the Case of Vicken Euljekjian* (14 June 2024) <<https://www.cftjustice.org/request-for-allegation-letter-on-the-case-of-vicken-euljekjian/>> accessed January 24, 2025.