



# UNITED NATIONS NATIONS UNIES

21<sup>st</sup> Century

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Programme : EPISODE 60  
Duration : 10'25"  
Producer : Francis Mead

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## Azerbaijan: Home Alone, Home Unsafe

Azerbaijan, the small country just north of Iran, is booming because of its huge oil and gas reserves. But some citizens have discovered there's a downside to the country's breakneck economic growth. Amid these changes, a group of women activists are determined to ensure fair treatment for all.

### VIDEO

CITY SHOTS  
OIL INDUSTRY  
BUILDINGS, STORES ETC

HOME VIDEO, DOOR, BASHING  
NOISE

HOME VIDEO – POLICE AND  
WORKERS AROUND BUILDING

### AUDIO

#### NARRATION:

Boom town – this is Baku, Azerbaijan's capital on the Caspian sea. Vast oil reserves are fuelling massive construction and a drastic reduction in poverty – good news for some, but for others it's brought terror right into the home. (16.47')

#### NURIYA: (in Russian)

"Don't do it. I am standing here. Scum!  
Don't do this. Stop!" (04.61')

#### NARRATION:

This is eviction, Baku style. A group of police officers and city workers surround a building, and smash their way into an

apartment owned by Nuriya Khalikova. She captures what happens on her small camera. (13.22')

NURIYA: (in Russian)

"I will put you in prison, or I will throw myself out of the window. Stop!" (05.43')

HOME VIDEO – WORKERS IN APARTMENT

NARRATION:

But it's no use - within minutes, the men have forced their way in. Feeling ill, Nuriya lies on a couch but continues to film. (10.17')

NURIYA (RUSSIAN):

"Who are you and why are you here, wandering in my apartment?" (04.75')

WORKMEN HAMMERING AT ANOTHER DOOR

NARRATION:

No one answers Nuriya's questions. This is a scene that's being repeated right across Azerbaijan. On one side, developers, with the power of new money and in many cases the authorities behind them, are sweeping away old and often unsanitary housing. On the other, many communities argue they are being forced out of their homes without regard to the law. (30.65')

RUBBLE AREA- DESTROYED HOUSES ETC

HOME VIDEO – HYSTERICAL WOMAN SCREAMING AND THROWING THINGS

On the day of her eviction, Nuriya – a librarian who lives on her own - is removed and held at a police station for nine hours before being allowed to return to her

building. She starts filming again as her neighbour discovers the stairs to her apartment have been destroyed. (15.87')

RENA ON CAMERA

RENA: (In English)

"We have a huge problem in Azerbaijan, related to the property rights." (03.31')

RENA AND COLLEAGUE IN OFFICE

NARRATION:

Rena Safaralieva works for Transparency International, a group that promotes the rule of law and monitors corruption worldwide. (07.37')

RENA ON CAMERA

RENA: (In English)

CITY SHOTS

"It suffices just to look out of the window to see how Baku is booming. We have a construction boom, and we had and still have lots of old houses without proper sanitation facilities which have to be demolished. So I'm not against this tendency as such but the way the issue is handled leaves much more to be desired." (21.00')

RENA ON CAMERA

NARRATION:

RUBBLE SITE

For Nuriya the issue came to a head when the city authorities decided to create new park in the centre of Baku – and her former home lay right in its path. The authorities say they offered residents generous financial compensation and spacious apartments to move in to. (16.27')

MORE SHOTS OF DESTROYED BUILDINGS ETC  
NURIYA TALKING TO PEOPLE

But Nuriya and several hundred residents refused the offer, complaining compensation was way below market rates, and that alternative apartments were in terrible condition or too far away. (10.89')

RUBBLE SITE

RENA: (In English)  
“In Nuriya’s case...for about a year she lived in a state of suspense and fear and all she heard was based on rumours. This is not a good way to proceed.” (12.24')

CITY SHOTS  
NURIYA FILMING

NARRATION:  
We made repeated requests to city officials to comment on Nuriya’s situation without success. In the meantime her film drew the attention of activists who quickly picked up on her case, They argue that women like her need greater power to defend their rights and increased representation in government – currently only 11 percent of members of parliament are women. (22.67')

NURIYA IN RENA’S OFFICE  
CONSTRUCTION WORKS

Nuriya herself had challenged her impending eviction in court, but to no avail, as she explains to Rena Safaraliev. The authorities, she says, didn’t wait for a legal decision – they simply started tearing her building down, starting with the roof. (15.71')

NURIYA and RENA: (in Russian)

RENA WRITING NOTES

RENA: “It means that they evicted you without a court ruling.”

N: “Yes, without a court decision just by breaking-in.” (10.43’)

NURIYA ON SITE OF FORMER HOME

NARRATION:

Today Nuriya returns to the site of her former home – this is all that remains. (4.87’)

NURIYA ON CAMERA

NURIYA: (in Russian)

“I feel bitterness, I want to cry. I’m a law-abiding citizen. I always loved my country, and I love it now, but you can’t treat people like this.” (09.82’)

NURIYA WITH EX NEIGHBOUR

NARRATION:

Nuriya spots an ex-neighbour. (02.04’)

NURIYA WITH GROUP OF EX-NEIGHBOURS

NURIYA and NEIGHBOUR: (in Russian)

N. “For a long time we were afraid of everything, we were scared and we were crying.”

N: “We are still trembling.” (05.83’)

WOMEN’S PARLIAMENT

NARRATION:

These residents’ homes are next in line for demolition. (03.32’)

NARRATION:

Some residents are planning to respond to their eviction by taking the case to the European Court of Human Rights – which

has been available to Azeri citizens since 2002. And in the longer-term Transparency International's Rena Safaralieva and a group of female activists led by this campaigner are pushing for further human rights reforms - to protect people like Nuriya. Together they have created a women's parliament. (24.51')

SHAHLA ON CAMERA

SHAHLA: (In English)

"No matter how many difficulties and problems we have at the moment, I believe in the future of Azerbaijan because I believe in the people of Azerbaijan."  
(07.17')

WOMEN IN MEETING

NARRATION:

Shahla Ismail is the founder of Azerbaijan's women's parliament. It's an initiative which is being nurtured and monitored by the United Nations Democracy Fund. The goal is to empower women by giving them a greater say over their own lives. To achieve this, they are aiming to increase women's meagre representation in government.  
(19.69')

SHAHLA ON CAMERA

SHAHLA: (In English)

WOMEN LISTENING

"A lot of people believe that this sort of democracy and you know development will come from abroad – especially from the West. And this is not the feeling which I share. Support should be there. Without

support we will not manage. But after all this is the people of any country which should make difference.” (18.67’)

NARRATION:

MATERNITY SCHOOL

In addition to taking on cases like the evictions in Baku , the activists also plan to ensure that better health services are provided for women – like this maternity school that Shahla has set up. (11.89’)

SHAHLA : (In English)

SHAHLA ON CAMERA

“Nobody’s going to make a revolution for us... It might take a year. It might take ten years, but anyway this is something which should come form us – and this is in our hands.” (12.83’)

NARRATION:

WORKMEN DEMOLISHING  
HOUSE

But in the immediate future, Nuriya discovers that for some women, things seem to be going from bad to worse. As we continue waking with her through her old district we come across workmen demolishing yet another house (13.42’)

NURIYA: (in Russian)

NURIYA ON CAMERA

“Look, they recognized me. They say hello to me. These are the marauders that were at work in my neighborhood They are now asking how I am getting on. How would you think I am getting on?” (09.37’)

WOMAN WALKING INTO  
HOUSE

NARRATION:

Then a woman in the next entrance beckons us to come inside – she leads us to a doorway on the landing. This room - right next to her own apartment – was occupied by a neighbour who moved out.

INSIDE WOMAN'S HOUSE  
SHOWS DEVASTATED FLOOR

The building is literally being torn down around her. The woman and 35 families have lodged an appeal against the demolitions and she says she's determined to stay put until the court decision. This despite the fact that the workmen she says have threatened her. (33.31')

WOMAN ON CAMERA

WOMAN IN HOUSE: (in Russian/Azeri)

"They said we would be buried under the bulldozers – that when they started to bulldoze us, we should be quick to get out of here, one by one." (07.73')

NURIYA GETS COUNSELLING

NARRATION:

In the same block, even as these demolitions go ahead, a women's crisis centre is still operating, to provide counselling for the local residents. A year living in fear has left its mark on Nuriya. (12.78')

NURIYA ON CAMERA

NURIYA: (in Russian)

"You can't imagine what kind of psychological trauma this is. I can't even explain how I survived it. ...If only it was possible to remove that part of my brain."

(11.97')

STILLS: DESTRUCTION OF  
CENTRE

NARRATION:

A few weeks after we filmed this, in another blow to Nuriya, the women's crisis centre was itself demolished, seemingly leaving her with little help and no hope. But Rena Safaralieva does not think her efforts have been in vain. (14.63')

PROFILE OF NURIYA ON SITE  
  
RENA ON CAMERA

RENA: (In English)

"Her courage will help other people ...we should awareness of the government that these things are not to be tolerated and the government should design clear signals to handle situations like that." (16.03')

PRESIDENT ALIYEV, UN G  
ASSEMBLY

NARRATION:

And she sees encouraging signs that the government is responding. Earlier this year, Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev, announced reforms and pledged a new drive against injustice and corruption. What's more, Nuriya's film, with the support from activists, has helped draw international attention to the situation in Baku. After the destruction of the women's crisis centre, the spokesperson for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights called on the Azerbaijani authorities to investigate forced evictions in Baku and, if necessary, provide adequate compensation and restitution. (36.96')

HOME VIDEO

GENEVA PALAIS WILSON

NURIYA IN NEW APARTMENT

Nuriya herself has now found an apartment to live in – after borrowing heavily she was able to buy one in the city. A survivor, she is now intent on moving on with her life.

(12.72')

NURIYA IN SUPERMARKET

NURIYA: (in Russian)

“I want to live in peace - to have a normal life. I don't want to worry about the roof being demolished over my head. I just want to live in peace.” (10.46')