

# URGENT ACTION

## LENGTHY JAIL SENTENCES FOR PROMINENT DEFENDERS

**Azerbaijani human rights defender Leyla Yunus and her husband Arif Yunus have been sentenced to eight-and-a-half and seven years in prison, respectively, on 13 August. Arif Yunus's health has deteriorated and he fainted in the courtroom. Azerbaijani authorities continued to restrict access to the courtroom for international observers and journalists.**

The Grave Crimes Court in Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan, sentenced Azerbaijani prisoners of conscience **Leyla Yunus** and **Arif Yunus** to eight-and-a-half and seven years of imprisonment, respectively, on 13 August. Both were convicted for "fraud" and other crimes related to their NGO work. Leyla Yunus is the director of the Institute of Peace and Democracy and before her arrest had been documenting the treatment of political prisoners in Azerbaijan by the authorities. Her husband, Arif Yunus, is a historian and political activist. A charge of treason, purportedly for spying for Armenia, is also pending against the couple, but it has been sent to a separate court for consideration.

International observers and journalists were refused entry to the court and only a handful of diplomats were allowed to attend.

Leyla Yunus and Arif Yunus suffer from serious health problems and their health has deteriorated further during detention and pre-trial proceedings. During the court hearing on 13 August Arif Yunus lost consciousness. A previous court hearing on 3 August had to be postponed until 5 August after Arif Yunus fainted as a result of high blood pressure. He suffered two strokes in April 2014 and his family fears that he may not survive another stroke. Leyla Yunus has been diagnosed with diabetes and hepatitis C and has reduced vision in her left eye. She has not received adequate medical care in prison and the authorities have refused to transfer her to a hospital. She has reported being threatened, harassed and ill-treated after asking for medical care.

Arif Yunus and Leyla Yunus have been detained since the summer of 2014 on trumped-up criminal charges, including a charge of treason and charges related to financial irregularities. Amnesty International believes the charges against the couple were clearly fabricated in retaliation to their legitimate human rights work and criticism of the Azerbaijani government.

### **Please write immediately in Azerbaijani, English or your own language:**

- Calling on the authorities to immediately and unconditionally release Arif Yunus and Leyla Yunus as they are prisoners of conscience, imprisoned solely for their legitimate human rights work and criticism of the government;
- Urging the authorities to ensure that Arif Yunus and Leyla Yunus urgently receive all necessary medical treatment, and, pending their release, are transferred to hospital if required;
- Insisting on full respect for, and protection of, the right to freedom of expression in Azerbaijan.

### **PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 24 SEPTEMBER 2015 TO:**

#### President

Ilham Aliyev  
19 Istiqlaliyyat Street  
Baku AZ1066, Azerbaijan  
Fax: + 994 12 492 0625  
Email: office@pa.gov.az

**Salutation: Dear President Aliyev**

#### Prosecutor General

Zakir Qaralov  
7 Rafibeyli Street  
Baku AZ1001, Azerbaijan  
Email: info@prosecutor.gov.az

**Salutation: Dear Prosecutor General**

**Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please insert local diplomatic addresses below:**

Name Address 1 Address 2 Address 3 Fax Fax number Email Email address Salutation Salutation

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the sixth update of UA 182/14. Further information:

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur55/2228/2015/en/>

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### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Leyla Yunus is the President of the Azerbaijani NGO, the Institute for Peace and Democracy. She was arrested on 30 July 2014 on charges of treason (purportedly spying for Armenia), tax evasion, forgery, fraud, and illegal business in relation to a grant received by her NGO which she had been prevented by the authorities from registering. Her husband, Arif Yunus, was arrested on 5 August. Arif Yunus is also facing criminal charges of treason, tax evasion and fraud in connection to his involvement in the activities of the Institute for Peace and Democracy.

Amnesty International has longstanding concerns about the Azerbaijani authorities' failure to respect their international obligations to protect the rights to freedoms of expression, association and assembly. Dissenting voices in the country frequently face trumped-up criminal charges, physical assault, harassment, blackmail and other reprisals from the authorities and groups associated with them. Law-enforcement officials regularly use torture and other ill-treatment against detained civil society activists, with impunity.

Amnesty International has recognized at least 20 people as prisoners of conscience in Azerbaijan, jailed solely for peacefully exercising their right to freedom of expression. For more information, see *Azerbaijan: the Repression Games: The voices you won't hear at the first European Games* (<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur55/1732/2015/en/>), *Azerbaijan: Guilty of Defending Rights: Azerbaijan's human rights defenders and activists behind bars* (<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur55/1077/2015/en/>) and *Behind bars: Silencing dissent in Azerbaijan* (<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/EUR55/004/2014/en>).

Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan, hosted the inaugural European Games in June 2015. The 2015 European Games was the first major multi-sport event for Europe and involved around 6,000 European athletes. Representatives of Amnesty International, as well as several other international human rights organizations and international media, were barred from entering Azerbaijan ahead of the launch of the European Games.

Shortly before her arrest, on 25 July 2014, Leyla Yunus organized a press conference at which she called for an international boycott of the European Games because of Azerbaijan's dire human rights record.

Name: Arif Yunus (m), Leyla Yunus (f).

Gender m/f: both

Further information on UA: 182/14 Index: EUR 55/2274/2015 Issue Date: 13 August 2014