

URGENT ACTION

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER SENTENCED TO PRISON

Azerbaijani human rights defender Elchin Mammad was sentenced to four years in prison on 14 October. He was arrested on 30 March on trumped up charges of theft and illegal possession of weapons and has remained behind bars since. Elchin Mammad is appealing the conviction. He is a prisoner of conscience and should be released immediately and unconditionally.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

Ilham Aliyev
President of Azerbaijan

19 Istiqlaliyyat Street Baku AZ1066, Azerbaijan

Please use online form: https://en.president.az/letters/new_form

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/PresidentIlhamAliyev/>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/presidentaz?lang=en>

Dear President,

I am writing to call for an immediate and unconditional release of prisoner of conscience, human rights lawyer and media reporter **Elchin Mammad**.

On 14 October, the Sumgait City Court sentenced Elchin Mammad to four years in prison on trumped-up charges of theft and illegal possession of weapons (Articles 177.2.4 and 228.1 of the Criminal Code). He appealed his sentence on 3 November, however the court has not yet set the date for his appeal hearing.

Police arrested Elchin Mammad in his house in the city of Sumgait on 30 March, a few days after he had published online a critical report on the human rights situation in Azerbaijan. They claimed that stolen jewellery had been found in Elchin Mammad's office and took him to the Sumgait city police station. While he was in detention, prosecution brought new charges against him of illegal weapons possession.

Elchin Mammad believes police planted stolen jewellery and weapons in his office, while searching it in his absence. On 31 March, Sumgait City Court remanded Elchin Mammad in custody for three months as a criminal suspect, which was extended several times pending his trial.

For years, Elchin Mammad has faced harassment from the authorities in connection with his human rights work. In 2015, his organization was investigated, he was subjected to arbitrary detention, placed under travel restrictions, repeatedly summoned by police for questioning. His sentencing on trumped up charges is a part of the continuing relentless crackdown on all dissent in Azerbaijan which must stop.

In light of the above, I urge you to:

- **Take all necessary steps to ensure Elchin Mammad's immediate and unconditional release and that his unfounded prosecution ends,**
- **End the ongoing abuse of the country's criminal justice system for persecution of government critics and human rights defenders.**

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Elchin Mammad is the president of the Social Union of Legal Education of Sumgait Youth, an NGO providing free legal assistance to families on low income. He is also the editor-in-chief of the newspaper *Yukselish Namine*. In 2014 the authorities launched criminal investigation targeting several NGOs, including Social Union of Legal Education of Sumgait Youth. Elchin Mammad was summoned and questioned several times by Sumgait police and placed under travel restrictions in connection with the investigation. In 2015 he was detained for 12 hours and released without charges, after he had taken part in the session of the Parliamentary Assembly Council of Europe (PACE).

In 2013, the government of Azerbaijan started a widespread crackdown on civil society, arresting prominent government critics, including human rights defenders and political activists, on fabricated charges, mostly of financial irregularities. Spurious charges of economic crimes and “abuse of authority” are commonly used in Azerbaijan to incarcerate leaders of independent NGOs and other critics of the authorities. Amnesty International has documented arbitrary application of criminal law in recent years in relation to some of the government’s most prominent critics including human rights defenders, journalists and lawyers. The authorities have recently stepped up crackdown on critics again using the COVID-19 pandemic as an excuse.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Azeri, English, Russian.
You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 8 January 2021
Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Elchin Mammad (he/him)

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur55/2069/2020/en/>