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Opposition journalists assaulted in Azerbaijan

A climate of impunity is fostering new assaults on citizens for peacefully exercising their right to freedom of expression. Journalists Ali Orucov and Nicat Hüseynov were attacked recently.

Authorities interpret any illegal action against journalists as an attack against themselves and principles of statehood and freedom of speech and press.

Ali Hasanov, chief of presidential administration's public-political department (Turan information agency reported on 26 December 2006)

Despite these positive statements by the Azerbaijani authorities, they are failing in their duty to combat impunity for attacks against journalists. They are failing to bring the perpetrators to justice.

It is this climate of impunity that fosters new assaults on citizens for peacefully exercising their right to freedom of expression.

Since March 2005, there have been five assaults against independent journalists by unknown actors, including one fatal and two near-fatal incidents. The fact that some assaults were carried out in busy streets during the daytime is a worrying indicator of the assumption of impunity by those perpetrating the assault. The most recent attacks have been on Ali Orucov and Nicat Hüseynov.

What happened to Ali Orucov and Nicat Hüseynov?

The relevant authorities must promptly investigate and take measures to prevent such attacks.

Only prompt and thorough steps in this direction will secure compliance with the Government of Azerbaijan's international obligations to demonstrate due diligence in taking steps to prevent and investigate human rights abuses by non-state actors, and to ensure redress for victims.

Please write to the President and Minister of Internal Affairs to end impunity on assaults against journalists.

Dear President Ilham Aliyev / Lt.-Gen. Ramil Usubov,

I am writing to express my concern about the attacks on Ali Orucov and Nicat Hüseynov.

The police and prosecution authorities must to provide information to the general public on the scope, methods, findings and progress of investigations into attacks on journalists. Such cases should not be considered closed, until they are effectively investigated and those responsible are brought to justice. The lack of transparency surrounding such cases contribute further to the climate of impunity for attacks on journalists.

I urge the government to demonstrate due diligence in taking steps to prevent and investigate assaults against journalists by non-state actors, and to ensure redress for victims.

The government must guarantee the right of freedom of opinion and expression as guaranteed by Azerbaijan's domestic legislation, as well as its international obligations.

Yours sincerely,

Please send appeals to:
President Ilham Aliyev
Office of the President of the Azerbaijan Republic
19 Istiqlaliyyat Street
Baku AZ1066 AZERBAIJAN
Fax: + 994 12 492 0625
E-mail: president@gov.az office@apparat.gov.az

Minister of Internal Affairs
Lt.-Gen. Ramil Usubov
Ministry of Internal Affairs
7 Husu Hajiyev Street
Baku 370005 AZERBAIJAN

[Photo Caption]

Nicat Hüseynov had to be hospitalized after an armed daytime attack on a street. © Institute for Reporter Freedom and Safety

Nicat Hüseynov is a journalist working for the opposition Azadliq newspaper. He was attacked by unknown men at 11:30am as he left his home in Baku for work and was walking towards a bus stop on 25 December 2006. Nicat was thrown to the ground, beaten and attacked with a knife. According to reports, there were eyewitnesses who called for help, causing the attackers to flee into a waiting taxi. Nicat Hüseynov was later hospitalized with internal injuries, head injuries and a minor stab wound.

Mr Hüseynov had published a number of articles on the subject of corruption in high office for the Azadliq newspaper, and claimed that he had received a number of threatening phone calls in the period preceding the attack. These calls allegedly referred to Nicat's journalistic activities. His case was submitted to the Nasimi regional police department's Station.

According to the Azerbaijani media freedom non-governmental organization the Institute for Reporter Freedom and Safety (IRFS), Elman Guliev, the police representative stated on 27 December 2006 that "We have not yet found witnesses to the attack on Nicat Hüseynov ..However, the work in this direction continues and the guilty will be found".

Ali Orucov is the press secretary of the opposition Azerbaijan National Independence Party. He was assaulted on 24 December 2006 by unknown assailants only a short distance from his home.

His neighbours were reported to have intervened to stop the assault, but the assailants later returned to threaten Ali in his apartment, when neighbours again intervened to deter the assailants. According to Ali Orucov, before leaving his apartment, his assailants threatened to abduct him if he did not stop writing "foul things". He suffered bruising and a fractured finger as a result of the assault.

Mr Orucov filed a complaint with the Binagadi region police station. He further claimed that he had been shadowed by unknown men for a number of days prior to the assault, after he had published an article in the Rating newspaper criticizing the government.

Nicat Hüseynov before he was attacked. © Institute for Reporter Freedom and Safety
