

URGENT ACTION

JOURNALIST HELD ON POLITICALLY MOTIVATED CHARGE

Azerbaijani investigative journalist Khadija Ismayilova was placed under pre-trial detention on 5 December on a politically motivated charge. The authorities also suspended the licence of Khadija Ismayilova's lawyer on 10 December.

Khadija Ismayilova was detained on 5 December and ordered to spend two months in pre-trial detention by the Sabail District court in Baku, the capital. She is charged under Article 125 of the Criminal Code of Azerbaijan (incitement to suicide or to an attempt of suicide). The authorities have accused Khadija Ismayilova of inciting her former colleague and a reported close personal friend to an attempt of suicide. According to the Azerbaijani authorities, Khadija Ismayilova was arrested for "insulting" his "honour and dignity in social networks and among her friends due to breaking off their relations and his intention to marry another woman". The authorities also claim that Khadija Ismayilova successfully lobbied for his dismissal from a media outlet, where both of them worked as reporters, and a broadcasting organization where he was subsequently employed as a journalist.

Both media outlets refuted the claim that Khadija Ismayilova was involved in the dismissal of the person in question. The Azerbaijani authorities have failed to disclose any other evidence that would show that Khadija Ismayilova deliberately intended to incite him to an attempt of suicide.

Amnesty International considers that the charge against Khadija Ismayilova is politically motivated and is the latest attempt to silence her journalistic work in a long history of her persecution. Khadija Ismayilova has previously received threats related to her investigative journalism and is also facing an unrelated criminal trial for defamation. Amnesty International considers Khadija Ismayilova a prisoner of conscience.

Khadija Ismayilova's lawyer, Khalid Baghirov, had his licence to practice law suspended on 10 December, a day after he agreed to represent Khadija Ismayilova. According to the Azerbaijani media, the reason for suspension of the licence was Khalid Baghirov's criticism of the judge at the Sheki Court of Appeal in the case of his defendant, Azerbaijani opposition leader and Amnesty International's prisoner of conscience Ilgar Mammadov.

Please write immediately in Azeri, English or your own language:

- Calling on the authorities to immediately and unconditionally release Khadija Ismayilova, as she is a prisoner of conscience, detained solely for exercising her right to freedom of expression;
- Calling on the authorities to ensure that disciplinary proceedings against lawyers are not arbitrarily used to undermine the right to a fair trial of Azerbaijani human rights defenders;
- Insisting on full respect for, and protection of, the right to freedom of expression in Azerbaijan.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 26 JANUARY 2015 TO:

President

Ilham Aliyev
Office of the President of Azerbaijan
19 Istiqlaliyyat Street
Baku AZ1066, Azerbaijan
Fax: +994 12 492 0625
Email: office@pa.gov.az
Salutation: Dear President Aliyev

Prosecutor General

Zakir Qaralov
Office of the Prosecutor General
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 first update of UA 257/14. Further information:

www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/EUR55/019/2014/en

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Khadija Ismayilova has been an outspoken government critic and has published several articles exposing corruption and human rights violations in Azerbaijan. She has been investigating claims of links between the president's family and a lucrative construction project in Azerbaijan's capital, Baku. On 7 March 2012 she received a letter containing pictures of her having sex – unknown individuals had apparently previously secretly entered her apartment and placed hidden cameras in her room. The pictures were accompanied by a note warning her that she would be “shamed” if she did not abandon her work. She refused and publicly exposed the blackmail attempt.

The day before Khadija Ismayilova's detention, the Presidential Chief of Staff Ramiz Mehdiyev accused Azerbaijani journalists of treason. Ramiz Mehdiyev referred to Khadija Ismayilova as “the best example” of journalists working against the government.

Khadija Ismayilova is also facing a criminal charge of defamation in an unrelated criminal case linked to her posting an image of an alleged official document revealing that an individual was an informant for Azerbaijan's intelligence services.

Her lawyer, Khalid Baghirov, has worked on overlooking the cases of many of Amnesty International's prisoners of conscience in Azerbaijan, including the human rights defender Arif Yunus, the leader of the opposition group REAL Ilgar Mammadov and the NIDA youth movement members.

Amnesty International has long-standing 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, assault, harassment, blackmail and other reprisals from the authorities and groups associated with them. Law enforcement officials regularly resort to torture and other ill-treatment of civil society activists, with impunity.

Amnesty International has recognized 23 people as prisoners of conscience in Azerbaijan, jailed solely for peacefully exercising their right to freedom of expression. For more information, see *Behind Bars, Silencing Dissent in Azerbaijan* (<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/EUR55/004/2014/en>); *Downward Spiral: Continuing Crackdown on Freedoms in Azerbaijan* (<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/EUR55/010/2013/en>); UA 182/14 and updates (<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/EUR55/007/2014/en>); UA 200/14 (<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/EUR55/011/2014/en>); UA 186/14 and updates (<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/EUR55/013/2014/en>).

Name: Khadija Ismayilova
Gender m/f: f

Further information on UA: 257/14 Index: EUR 55/023/2014 Issue Date: 15 December 2014