

URGENT ACTION

POLICE AND STATE OIL STAFF BEAT UP JOURNALISTS

Two journalists trying to film illegal house demolitions in Azerbaijan on 18 April were beaten up by and police, and had to be hospitalized.

Award winning journalist **Idrak Abbasov** tried to film the hundreds of State Oil Company of Azerbaijan (SOCAR) employees illegally demolishing houses in the settlement of Sulutepe, on the outskirts of the capital, Baku, where SOCAR wants to develop an oilfield. He was beaten unconscious as was his brother **Adalat Abbasov** who tried to protect him, and a female journalist who was with them, Gunay Musayeva, was assaulted.

According to a local human rights activist, Sulutepe residents were not notified that they would be evicted, or that their homes would be destroyed. Gunay Musayeva told Amnesty International that a group of SOCAR security staff were attacking Sulutepe residents attempting to prevent the demolitions when she and the brothers arrived. She said that when they saw the journalists filming the attack, a group of SOCAR employees and police snatched their cameras and struck Idrak Abbasov repeatedly with batons, kicking and hitting him on the floor until he lost consciousness. His brother Adalat Abbasov tried to protect Idrak, but was set upon by the same men who broke one of his ribs. "I kept telling them to stop beating him [Idrak], the poor man was on the floor and covered in blood," said Musayeva.

SOCAR employees punched Gunay Musayeva in the face, back and stomach, and pulled her away from the area by her hair. "They took my camera and my press ID, while they were hitting me they kept insulting us and told us to stop filming the beating of protesters".

Three other journalists, Esmira Javadova, Galib Hasanov and Elnur Mammadov, were forced to flee by SOCAR employees as they arrived in a taxi. Baton-wielding workers smashed the windows of the taxi as police watched. .

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

- Calling on the authorities to order an immediate investigation into the beating of Idrak Abbasov and the beating and harassment of other journalists who attempted to report on events in Sulutepe on 18 April, and bring the perpetrators to justice
- Calling on them to ensure that the police immediately stop ill-treating journalists and other civilians, and prevent beatings of civilians in the future.
- Urging them to ensure that planned demolitions are carried out by authorised government bodies and conducted in accordance with international standards prohibiting forced evictions.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 31 MAY 2012 TO:

Ministry of Internal Affairs

Col.-Gen. Ramil Usubov
7 Azerbaijan Prospekti,
Baku AZ1005, AZERBAIJAN
Fax: +994 12 590 98 64

Salutation: Dear Minister

Ombudsperson

Elmira Suleymanova
40 Uzeyir Hajibeyov Street
Baku AZ1000, AZERBAIJAN
Fax: +994 12 498 23 65

Email:

ombudsman@ombudsman.gov.az

Salutation: Dear Ombudsperson

And copies to:

President

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

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.

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The authorities in Azerbaijan have effectively criminalised peaceful anti-government protest, by banning demonstrations and imprisoning those who organize and take part in them. Police use excessive force to break up peaceful, but officially unsanctioned demonstrations. They have used threats and intimidation against human rights defenders, together with legislative and administrative means to shut down and deny registration to civil society groups working for democracy and human rights.

Journalists have been beaten up and abducted, while the range of independent media outlets has been curbed through laws banning foreign broadcasters from national airwaves.

New methods of exercising the right to freedom of expression, such as internet social media, are also under siege. Bloggers and youth activists have been harassed and imprisoned on trumped-up charges. The government is considering ways to control and monitor internet use.

As frustration with these increasingly tight controls grew, hundreds of people gathered in the streets in March and April 2011 demanding democratic reform and greater respect for human rights. The authorities suppressed these early signs of popular protest with a new wave of repression and intimidation. Following the protests, 14 people were convicted of organizing or participating in the anti-government rallies. The authorities also used trumped-up charges to arrest and imprison three men: two young members of the opposition and a human rights defender.

Three of the 17 recognised as prisoners of conscience have since been released following a campaign led by Amnesty International. However, as Azerbaijan prepares to host the 2012 Eurovision Song Contest in May, 15 prisoners of conscience remain in jail, many of whom were arrested solely for exercising their right to freedom of expression in a peaceful protest in April 2011.

Reports in the Azerbaijani press of beatings suffered by Babek Hasanov and Mahammad Majidli during their transfer from Prison No. 16 to Prison No. 14 on 5 March motivated young activists into rallying for a spontaneous protest. Around 60 activists gathered near the Academy of Sciences in the Yasamal District of Baku in the morning of 6 March to call for the immediate release of all prisoners of conscience, and an end to their ill-treatment.

Two musicians and a youth activist were beaten and arrested at a rally organised by several youth organisations on 20 March. During a performance by singer Jamal Ali and his band that contained a swearword, one of the demonstrators got up on the stage and asked him who he was swearing at. Before he resumed his performance, Jamal asked the crowd "What's wrong with swearing? Fuck Ilham's mother, does anyone have a problem with that?" At this point one of the organizers, Etibar Salmanli, approached Jamal Ali and asked him to stop, before plainclothes and uniformed police officers descended on the two men and band member Natig Kamilov.

Jamal Ali was ill-treated in custody on two occasions as he served his administrative sentence at a police station, despite the legal requirement that his sentence be served at an Administrative Detention Facility. For details, see UA 88/12, EUR 55/004/2012, 20 March 2012.

Names: Idrak Abbasov, Adalet Abbasov
Gender m/f: m