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Azerbaijan urged to end harassment of activists

Amnesty International calls on the Azerbaijani authorities to stop harassing civil society activists, after a youth activist and parliamentary candidate who revealed election violations was detained at the country's border.

Bakhtiyar Hajiyev was detained 18 November on the Azerbaijani-Georgia border and held overnight at a military drafting centre before being released.

"Bakhtiyar Hajiyev' arrest has all the hallmarks of the harassment and intimidation the Azerbaijani authorities all too often resort too in respect of government critics," said John Dalhuisen, Europe and Central Asia Deputy Programme Director at Amnesty International.

"As a registered student and a parliamentary candidate he is doubly excused military service and he quite clearly should not have been detained on these grounds."

There are fears that Bakhtiyar Hajiyev could be forcibly drafted into the army. The Azerbaijani authorities have used forcible drafting against government critics on previous occasions, including against editor Eynulla Fatullayev, who Amnesty International considers to be a prisoner of conscience.

The arrests come after the conditional release earlier this week of youth activists, bloggers, and prisoners of conscience Emin Milli and Adnan Hajizade, who had served 16 months of their respective 30 month and 24 month prison sentences for "hooliganism".

Amnesty International continues to call for their conviction to be overturned as Adnan Hajizade and Emin Milli were convicted on fabricated charges after an unfair trial.

Adnan Hajizade and Emin Milli's lawyers have submitted their case to the European Court of Human Rights in the hope that it will quash their convictions.

The pair were arrested on 8 July 2009 after they were attacked by two unknown men and were themselves accused of "hooliganism".