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Jailed Azerbaijani youth activist freed

The release of 20 year old youth activist Jabbar Savalan is an important step, but Azerbaijani authorities must release 16 more prisoners of conscience jailed in April following a series of peaceful protests, Amnesty International said today.

Jabbar Savalan was released last night after he received a presidential pardon.

“The release of a prisoner of conscience is always a cause for celebration but it is important that Jabbar Savalan’s conviction is also quashed and his reputation restored,” said John Dalhuisen, Amnesty International’s Deputy Director for Europe and Central Asia.

“This release is an important first step - but there are still 16 more prisoners of conscience dating from the same spring protests languishing in jail. Their release is imperative for the cause of justice in Azerbaijan.”

Jabbar Savalan’s case was part of Amnesty International’s annual December Letter Writing Marathon, during which hundreds of thousands of people in more than 80 countries take action to demand that people’s rights are respected. Over one million appeals were made as part of the 2011 marathon prior to Jabbar Savalan’s release.

“It feels good to be with my friends again. I feel good now that I can spend time with them and my family,” Jabbar Savalan told Amnesty International last night on his release.

“Amnesty International is a symbol of human rights and freedom, not just in Azerbaijan, but everywhere in the world. I am grateful for all the hard work done by your organisation and other organizations which fight for freedom in Azerbaijan.”

Jabbar Savalan was arrested and accused of drugs possession on 5 February, a day after he posted on Facebook calling for Egypt-inspired protests against the government. He was convicted despite a blood test showing that he had not used drugs, largely on the basis of a confession extracted under duress while he was denied access to a lawyer.

In March and April, hundreds of demonstrators took to the streets to protest against government corruption and to call for fair elections and respect for human rights.

A report released by Amnesty International in November, [*Azerbaijan: The Spring that Never Blossomed*](#), documents how hundreds of protestors were arrested and 17 who called for or allegedly organized the protests sentenced to long prison terms in unfair trials.

Jabbar Savalan told Amnesty International that his arrest has only strengthened his resolve to fight for the basic rights denied him by the Azerbaijani authorities.

“We will not be scared off by imprisonment or punishment. They may arrest us, but they can’t break us. Freedom of speech is our right, as it is the right of everyone. We will continue our struggle” he

said.

In May 2012 the international spotlight will fall on Azerbaijan as it hosts the 2012 Eurovision song contest. Azerbaijani activists are using this opportunity to focus the world's attention on the authorities' human rights abuses, supported by Amnesty International.