

URGENT ACTION

BLOGGERS' APPEAL HEARING SCHEDULED

Two jailed male Azerbaijani youth activists and bloggers will have their appeal heard in the capital, Baku, on 22 December. Emin Abdullayev and Adnan Hajizade were imprisoned on charges Amnesty International believes to have been fabricated.



Emin Abdullayev © Private

The two youth activists and bloggers were arrested on charges of “hooliganism” on 8 July, after reporting to police that they had been assaulted in a restaurant in Baku. Their arrest came just over a week after Adnan Hajizade posted a video critical of the Azerbaijani government on the video-sharing website YouTube. On 11 November, Adnan Hajizade was sentenced to two years, and Emin Abdullayev to two and a half years, after being convicted in an unfair trial.

On 23 November, Emin Abdullayev and Adnan Hajizade’s lawyers filed an appeal against the verdict. On 10 December the lawyers informed Amnesty International that the two youth activists and bloggers had been granted a hearing at the Baku Court of Appeal on 22 December.



Adnan Hajizade © Private

PLEASE WRITE IMMEDIATELY in English, Azeri, or your own language:

- Urging the authorities to ensure that Adnan Hajizade and Emin Abdullayev receive a fair appeal hearing in line with international fair trial standards;
- Noting that Amnesty International believes them to be prisoners of conscience, detained solely for the peaceful exercise of their right to freedom of expression and association, and is calling for their immediate and unconditional release.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 22 DECEMBER 2009 TO:

Fikrat Mammadov
Minister of Justice
1, Inshaatchylar prospect
Baku AZ1065
Azerbaijan

Fax: +994 12 430 09 81

Email: contact@justice.gov.az; international@justice.gov.az

Salutation: Your Excellency

Prof. Elmira Suleymanova
Ombudsperson
Office of the Ombudsman
40 Uz. Hajibeyov Street
AZ1000, Azerbaijan

Fax: + 994 12 498 8574

Email: ombudsman@ombudsman.gov.az

Salutation: Dear Ombudsperson

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives of Azerbaijan accredited to your country. Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the first update of UA 308/09 (EUR 55/010/2009). Further information:

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/EUR55/010/2009/en>

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Emin Abdullayev and Adnan Hajizade have used online networking tools, including Youtube, Facebook and Twitter, to disseminate information about the socio-political situation in Azerbaijan. Emin Abdullayev is also a co-founder of a youth group named Alumni Network while Adnan Hajizade is a coordinator of the youth movement known as OL!, which advocates non-violence and tolerance. Emin Abdullayev was also an outspoken critic of changes to the Azerbaijani Constitution set out in a referendum on 18 March 2009, following which the presidential term limit was abolished potentially allowing current President Ilham Aliyev or any successor to stand for re-election on a continuous basis.

Amnesty International has repeatedly highlighted its concerns on the increasingly limited sphere for freedom of expression in Azerbaijan and about the use of criminal charges to silence peaceful dissenting voices, most recently in its report Azerbaijan: Independent journalists under siege (Index: EUR 55/004/2009). For instance, prisoner of conscience Qanimat Zahid, the editor-in-chief of opposition newspaper Azadliq, was sentenced to four years' imprisonment on charges of hooliganism and assault in March 2008. Several other journalists have also been imprisoned on false charges in the past few years.

The international community has also expressed concerns about Emin Abdullayev and Adnan Hajizade. For example, on 23 July 2009, the Swedish Presidency of the European Union (EU) issued a statement on behalf of the EU in which it expressed concern at the arrest of the two activists, and reiterated its concern in a statement on 13 November, regretting that the trial proceedings did not reflect due process and believes that the court decision may further undermine the freedom of expression in Azerbaijan. On 12 November, Thorbjørn Jagland, Secretary General of the Council of Europe, also voiced concern about the very harsh sentences imposed by the court in Azerbaijan on Adnan Hadjizadeh and Emin Mili and stated that this sequence of events "will have an inevitable chilling effect on freedom of expression in Azerbaijan."

In its concluding observations with regard to Azerbaijan, published on 13 August 2009 after consideration of reports on Azerbaijan during its 96th session in July, the UN Human Rights Committee expressed concern about the "recent arrest and detention on remand of individuals who had expressed opinions in non-conventional media, especially since no explanation was provided as to why the arrest took place after the individuals had reported to the police attacks on themselves and why the judicial proceedings against them for hooliganism were not held in public." The Committee also reiterated its concern about reports of attacks on journalists, the closure of independent newspapers, the removal of licences for foreign radio stations to broadcast locally and the pattern of hooliganism charges against journalists, and urged Azerbaijan to take the necessary measures to put an end to direct and indirect restrictions on freedom of expression.

Further information on UA: 308/09 Index: EUR 55/011/2009 Issue Date: 11 December 2009

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