

URGENT ACTION

RELEASE REMAINING NIDA YOUTH ACTIVISTS

Two youth activists from the Azerbaijani civic movement NIDA, Zaur Gurbanli and Uzeyir Mammadli, were released on 29 December. Shahin Novruzlu and Bakhtiyar Guliyev had been released on 18 October 2014. All four were released as a result of a presidential pardon. Five others remain behind bars.

On 29 December 2014 **Zaur Gurbanli** and **Uzeyir Mammadli** were released following a presidential pardon. Two other NIDA members, **Shahin Novruzlu** and **Bakhtiyar Guliyev** had been released on 18 October 2014 as a result of a presidential order signed on 17 October. The two activists had to previously ask for a pardon from the President of Azerbaijan.

Pro-democracy youth activists **Rashadat Akhundov, Mammad Azizov, Ilkin Rustamzade, Rashad Hasanov, Zaur Gurbanli, Uzeyir Mammadli, Shahin Novruzlu** and **Bakhtiyar Guliyev** were arrested between March and May 2013 in Azerbaijan and later convicted under false charges of possession of drugs and explosives, hooliganism, and planning to organize acts of public disorder. Another NIDA activist, **Omar Mammadov** was arrested on 24 January 2014 on drug-related charges. While in 2013 he left NIDA to found the youth movement Akhin, he re-joined NIDA in prison, shortly after his arrest. They were prisoners of conscience, detained solely for their involvement in civil activism and for their plans to organize a peaceful protest against human rights violations.

Some of the arrested NIDA activists were allegedly tortured in detention, in order to get their confessions. **Shahin Novruzlu**, who was 17 years old at the time and was interrogated without the presence of his legal guardian as the law requires. He was missing four of his front teeth during his first court appearance. **Mammad Azizov**, lost hearing in one of his ears as a result of ill-treatment in custody. Their complaints of torture have never been effectively investigated.

Rashadat Akhundov, Mammad Azizov, Ilkin Rustamzade, Rashad Hasanov and **Omar Mammadov** remain imprisoned.

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

- Urging the authorities to immediately and unconditionally release **Rashadat Akhundov, Mammad Azizov, Rashad Hasanov, Ilkin Rustamzade** and **Omar Mammadov** who are prisoners of conscience, detained solely for exercising their right to freedom of expression;
- Calling on them to quash the convictions of **Zaur Gurbanli, Uzeyir Mammadli, Shahin Novruzlu** and **Bakhtiyar Guliyev**;
- Calling on the authorities to carry out an immediate, impartial and effective investigation into the allegations of torture and ill-treatment of the NIDA activists in detention;
- Insisting on a full respect for and protection of the rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 10 MARCH 2015 TO:

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

Prosecutor General
 Zakir Qaralov
 7 Rafibeyli Street.
 Baku AZ 1001, Azerbaijan
 Fax: +994 12 492 3230
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 third update of UA 68/13. Further information:

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/EUR55/006/2014/en>

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 INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

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 documented dozens of such cases and recognised at least 19 individuals as prisoners of conscience in Azerbaijan, imprisoned solely in connection with their attempts to peacefully exercise their right to freedom of expression. For more information, see: *Behind bars: Silencing dissent in Azerbaija* (<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/EUR55/004/2014/en>).

On 6 May 2014 over 150 supporters of the convicted NIDA activists gathered outside the Baku City Grave Crimes Court. Some of the supporters shouted protest slogans after the verdicts were read out in court. This prompted plainclothes and uniformed police officers, who were stationed outside, to use force to break up the crowd. Video footage showed protesters being punched and journalists having their cameras thrown on the ground. At least 26 individuals were dragged into a waiting bus and driven to a nearby police station. Some were released with warnings and fines, but five activists were detained for several days.

Name: Rashadat Akhundov, Mammad Azizov, Bakhtiyar Guliyev, Zaur Gurbanli, Rashad Hasanov, Uzeyir Mammadli, Shahin Novruzlu, Ilkin Rustamzade and Omar Mammadov.

Gender m/f: m

Further information on UA: 68/13 Index: EUR 55/001/2015 Issue Date: 27 January 2015