

URGENT ACTION

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER MUST BE FREED

Azerbaijani human rights defender Elchin Mammad was arrested on 30 March and has been detained since under trumped up charges, after publishing online a critical report on the human rights situation in Azerbaijan. Elchin Mammad should be released immediately and unconditionally.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

Ilham Aliyev

President of Azerbaijan

19 Istiqlaliyyat Street Baku AZ1066, Azerbaijan

Please use online form: https://en.president.az/letters/new_form

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/PresidentIlhamAliyev/>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/presidentaz?lang=en>

Dear President,

*I am writing to call for the immediate and unconditional release of prisoner of conscience, human rights lawyer and reporter **Elchin Mammad**.*

Police arrested Elchin Mammad in his house in the city of Sumgait on 30 March, a few days after he had published online a critical report on the human rights situation in Azerbaijan. They claimed that stolen jewellery had been found in Elchin Mammad's office and took him to the Sumgait city police station. According to his lawyer, Elchin Mammad believes police had planted stolen jewellery in his office, while searching it in his absence. On 31 March, the Sumgait Court remanded Elchin Mammad in custody for three months as a criminal suspect.

For years, Elchin Mammad has faced harassment from the authorities in connection with his human rights work. In 2015, his organization was investigated, he was subjected to arbitrary detention, placed under travel restrictions and repeatedly summoned by police for questioning.

The new criminal proceedings against Elchin Mammad have been once again instigated under trumped up charges, in retaliation for his human rights work and critical reporting. They are another example of the Azerbaijani authorities' continuing relentless crackdown on all dissent and must stop.

In light of the above, I urge you to:

- ***Take all necessary steps to ensure Elchin Mammad's immediate and unconditional release and an end to his unfounded prosecution,***
- ***Ensure that the ongoing abuse of the country's criminal justice system for persecution of government critics stops.***

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Elchin Mammad is the president of the Social Union of Legal Education of Sumgait Youth, an NGO providing free legal assistance to families on low income and non-profits. He is also the editor-in-chief of the newspaper *Yukselish Namine*, reporting on different human rights concerns in the country. In 2014 authorities launched an investigation into a number of NGOs, including Social Union of Legal Education of Sumgait Youth. He was summoned and questioned several times by the Sumgait police and placed under travel restrictions in connection with the investigation. In 2015 he was detained for 12 hours and released without any official charges after taking part in the session of the Parliamentary Assembly Council of Europe (PACE).

In 2013, the government of Azerbaijan started a widespread crackdown on civil society, arresting prominent government critics, including human rights defenders and political activists, on fabricated charges of financial irregularities. Spurious charges of economic crimes and “abuse of authority” are commonly used in Azerbaijan to incarcerate leaders of independent NGOs and other critics of the authorities. Amnesty International has documented in detail the arbitrary application of criminal law in recent years in relation to some of the government’s most prominent critics including human rights defenders, journalists and lawyers. While many have been released, having spent years in prison and following international pressure, they continue to face restrictions and harassment by the authorities, including through arbitrary travel restrictions and freezing of their organizations’ bank accounts.

The authorities have stepped up the crackdown on dissent using the COVID-19 pandemic as an excuse. In his Novruz Bayrami greetings to the nation on 19 March, President Ilham Aliyev alluded to political opposition in Azerbaijan as “traitors” and promised “new rules” for the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic threatening “to clear” Azerbaijan of its “enemies” and to “isolate the fifth column”. Several high-profile arrests of political and civil activists under spurious charges have followed Ilham Aliyev’s pronouncement, including the arrest of opposition activist Tofiq Yagublu under charges of hooliganism (see here: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/EUR55/2029/2020/en/>).

As the arrests and politically motivated prosecution of critics continue, Azerbaijan remains closed to human rights scrutiny. International human rights monitors, including Amnesty International, have been denied access to the country for several years.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Azeri, English, Russian.
You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 17 July 2020
Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Elchin Mammad (he/him)