

URGENT ACTION

FOUR YOUTH ACTIVISTS FACE PRISON SENTENCES

Four members of the NIDA youth movement were arrested on 8 and 15 March in Baku, Azerbaijan. All four had been involved in organising a peaceful protest, which was violently dispersed by the authorities on 10 March and face long prison sentences.

Youth activists **Mahammad Azizov**, **Bakhtiyar Guliyev**, and **Shahin Novruzlu** were arrested in a sting operation on 8 March; on 15 March **Rashad Hasanov** was also arrested. It is believed the five were arrested due to their involvement in organising a peaceful protest, which was violently dispersed by the authorities on 10 March.

According to Turgut Gambar – the head of NIDA (a non-violent, pro-democracy youth movement) – the activists were denied access to the lawyers of the choice during police questioning. They were reportedly questioned in the presence of state appointed lawyers after which Mahammad Azizov, Bakhtiyar Guliyev and Shahin Novruzlu appeared on state television reading pre-prepared confessions, prompting fears that they had been tortured or otherwise ill-treated.

Police claim to have found drugs and incendiary devices in activists' homes. A court in Baku has ordered them to serve three months in pre-trial detention on charges of illegal weapons possession. If convicted, the activists face long prison sentences. Relatives of the activists maintain that the drugs and incendiary devices were planted by plainclothes police officers during the search. When searching the house of Bakhtiyar Guliyev on 8 March, the police showed neither identification papers nor a search warrant. When an initial search of Mahammad Azizov's room found nothing, police searched a second time and claimed to have found a roll containing drugs. As the search continued, the officers claimed to have found a box in the yard of the house, which contained several bottles filled with fuel. The family said that this box had not been in their yard before the arrival of the officers.

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

- Noting that the Amnesty International considers Mahammad Azizov, Bakhtiyar Guliyev, Shahin Novruzlu and Rashad Hasanov to be prisoners of conscience, detained solely for the peaceful exercise of their rights to freedom of expression and assembly and calling for their immediate and unconditional release;
- Calling on the authorities to ensure that the four men (please name) are not tortured or otherwise ill-treated, and have access to appropriate medical treatment, lawyers of their choice and family members;
- Calling on them to immediately carry out an effective and independent investigation into allegations of torture or other ill-treatment, particularly in the cases of Mahammad Azizov, Bakhtiyar Guliyev and Shahin Novruzlu;
- Calling on them to respect the rights to freedom of expression and assembly, and ensure that no persons face criminal sanction for the legitimate exercise of their human rights.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 1 MAY 2013 TO:

Prosecutor General

Zakir Qaralov

Prosecutor General of the Republic of
Azerbaijan

7 Rafibeyli Street,

Baku 370001, AZERBAIJAN

Fax: +994 12 492 32 30 (keep trying)

Salutation: Dear Prosecutor General

President

Ilham Aliyev

Office of the President of the Republic of
Azerbaijan

18 Istiqlaliyyat Street,

Baku, AZ1066, AZERBAIJAN

Fax: +994 12 492 0625 (keep trying)

Email: office@pa.gov.az

Salutation: Dear President Aliyev

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country.

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY
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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 right to freedom of assembly and freedom of expression. Dissenting voices in the country are frequently targeted with trumped-up criminal charges, assault, harassment, or blackmail. Amnesty International has recently dozens of documents on such cases; for a summary, see the Annual Report 2012 on Azerbaijan, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/region/azerbaijan/report-2012>.

According to human rights groups in Azerbaijan, around 1,000 people participated in the 10 March protest in Baku, and approximately 90 were arrested. The demonstrators were calling for an end to non-combat deaths in the Azerbaijani military after a number of young conscripts reportedly died from 'hazing' – an aggressive and often violent initiation ceremony. Police used rubber bullets, water cannon and batons to disperse the peaceful protesters. Several demonstrators were injured after being beaten, some during their arrest and others while in custody. One demonstrator had his jaw dislocated after being hit in the face with a police helmet.

The Azerbaijani government has routinely used drugs and weapons charges to silence critical voices in the country, and are particularly intolerant of criticism of the President's family.

Mahammad Azizov and Bakhtiyar Guliyev were also the creators of a Facebook page that paid mock tribute to late President Heydar Aliyev, father of current President Ilham Aliyev. The page frequently posted satirical messages and cartoons about him and his family.

Name: Mahammad Azizov, Bakhtiyar Guliyev, Shahin Novruzlu, and Rashad Hasanov
Gender m/f: m

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