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AZERBAIJAN: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL CALLS FOR INDEPENDENT MEDICAL EXAMINATION OF POLITICAL PRISONER

As the trial of Tofiq Qasimov resumes, Amnesty International is calling on the presiding judge in the trial to urgently accept defence requests for an independent medical examination of this possible prisoner of conscience.

“We are dismayed that Tofiq Qasimov, who was diagnosed while in detention as suffering from a serious mental illness, was denied the chance to present to the court an evaluation by an independent psychiatrist of his fitness to stand trial,” Amnesty International said today. “We believe this may adversely affect his chances of a fair trial.”

Tofiq Qasimov, a member of parliament and prominent political figure in Azerbaijan, was diagnosed as suffering from reactive psychosis following his arrest in September 1995 on charges of complicity in a failed coup attempt in March that year. He was released on health grounds in February 1996 pending his trial, which began in May. On 21 May the presiding judge in the case refused to allow into consideration an evaluation by an independent psychiatrist, reportedly citing the potential “insult” a further examination may cause to the doctors who carried out the initial one.

Amnesty International is urging that any decision to continue trial proceedings is based on a thorough and independent assessment of Tofiq Qasimov’s state of health. The organisation is also concerned about allegations that the charges against him are false, and have been fabricated in order to punish Tofiq Qasimov for his non-violent political activity in opposition to the Azerbaijani Government.

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