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Azerbaijani youth activists beaten and detained at peaceful protest

The Azerbaijani authorities must launch an immediate investigation into the beating of four youth activists by police officers during and after a peaceful protest in the capital Baku today, Amnesty International said.

Jabbar Savalan and Dayanat Babayev were beaten as they were arrested along with 14 other protesters and a journalist when police violently dispersed a demonstration in central Baku. Eye-witnesses report Majid Marjanli and Abulfaz Gurbanly were later beaten up while in custody at Yasamal District police station.

The protest was organized in response to reports that two detainees recognized as prisoners of conscience by Amnesty International had been beaten up by prison guards.

Azerbaijan is due to host the Eurovision song contest this May – an event watched by around 125 million people. Last October the former Soviet country was elected to the UN Security Council.

"Azerbaijan cannot credibly present itself as a rights-respecting democracy so long as it continues to beat up and imprison peaceful protesters," said John Dalhuisen, Deputy Director of Amnesty International's Europe and Central Asia programme.

"The regime must realize that hosting glitzy events such as Eurovision won't mask the extent of the country's human rights violations. They need to drastically change their attitude to peaceful protest."

Azadliq newspaper has reported that some of those detained in the wake of Tuesday's demonstration - including former Amnesty International prisoner of conscience Jabbar Savalan - have already been taken to court on charges of "hooliganism".

"Azerbaijan must immediately release all those detained and launch an investigation into the assaults on youth activists," said John Dalhuisen.

"There must also be an investigation into the reported beating of two Amnesty International prisoners of conscience, Babek Hasanov and Mahammad Majidli."

On 5 March, opposition newspaper Azadliq reported that Babek Hasanov and Mahammad Majidli, were beaten by prison guards on 4 March as they were being transferred from one prison to another.

Both men had been arrested for taking part in peaceful protests against the government last spring. The protests were inspired by events in the Middle-East and North Africa.

Amnesty International declared the men prisoners of conscience in its November 2011 report [*The spring*](#).

that never blossomed: Freedoms suppressed in Azerbaijan.

Jabbar Savalan, 20, was arrested on fabricated drugs charges on 5 February 2011 one day after using Facebook to call for protests against the Azerbaijani government. He was released by presidential pardon on 26 December after an 11 month Amnesty International campaign for his release.