

AI Index: PRE 01/270/2011
26 May 2011

Jailed Azerbaijani journalist pardoned

The release today of prominent newspaper editor Eynulla Fatullayev is a step in the right direction for freedom of expression in Azerbaijan, Amnesty International said today.

He was released shortly after a presidential pardon and is now at home with his family.

The organization has led an international campaign for his release and named him a prisoner of conscience after his arrest and imprisonment in 2007 on trumped-up charges of terrorism and defamation

“Eynulla Fatullayev’s pardon and release are cause for celebration, but we still urge the Azerbaijani authorities to quash his convictions,” said John Dalhuisen, Amnesty International’s Deputy Director for Europe and Central Asia.

“As we celebrate Eynulla’s release we must not forget that many others are still being held on trumped-up charges in Azerbaijani prisons for no other reason than that they have criticized the authorities. We are calling for the release of all prisoners of conscience in Azerbaijan and an end to the recent clampdown on dissenting voices, whether online or on the streets.”

Eynulla Fatullayev was convicted of defamation after writing two articles that disputed the official account of the 1992 mass killings of Azerbaijani civilians in the town of Khojaly, during the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia in the Nagorno-Karabakh region.

He was subsequently convicted of terrorism charges for publishing an article that criticized Azerbaijan’s foreign policy decisions.

When the European Court of Human Rights in 2010 called on Azerbaijan to release him, the authorities handed him a new sentence of a further 2 ½ years on apparently fabricated charges of drug possession.

The campaign for his release culminated in an international twitter action targeting President Aliyev’s twitter account. The action was launched by Amnesty International’s UK section on 24 May at their 20th annual Media Awards Ceremony, recognizing excellence in human rights journalism. More than 800 people took part in the action before Fatullayev was released this evening.

“I am very happy to be released. I am extremely grateful to Amnesty International, who have campaigned since the beginning. In my opinion you saved me. Thank you to all those who tweeted,” Eynulla Fatullayev told the organization today.