



# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL AZERBAIJAN: APPEAL CASES

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## Climate of impunity fosters new assaults on opposition journalists in Azerbaijan

In Azerbaijan two more members of civil society were assaulted with impunity by unknown men days before the New Year, apparently for peacefully exercising their right to freedom of expression. This brings the total number of assaults perpetrated against independent journalists by non-state actors to five since March 2005. Amnesty International is concerned that the Azerbaijani authorities appear to be failing in their duty to combat impunity for such attacks by bringing perpetrators to account. The fact that one of these assaults was carried out in a busy street in broad daylight is a worrying indicator of the assumption of impunity by those perpetrating the assault.

On 24 December 2006 the press secretary of the opposition Azerbaijan National Independence Party **Ali Orucov** was assaulted by unknown assailants a short distance from his home. Ali Orucov's neighbours reportedly intervened to stop the assault, but the assailants later returned to threaten Ali Orucov in his apartment; reportedly, neighbours again intervened to deter the assailants. According to Ali Orucov, before leaving his apartment his assailants threatened to abduct him if he did not stop writing "foul things". He suffered bruising and a fractured finger as a result of the assault. Reportedly, Ali Orucov filed a complaint with the Binagadi region police station No. 7. Ali Orucov further claimed that he had been shadowed by unknown men for a number of days prior to the assault, after he had published an article in the *Rating* newspaper criticizing the government.



*Nicat Huseynov had to be hospitalized after armed attack by unknown men on 25 December 2006.*  
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On 25 December 2006 **Nicat Huseynov**, a journalist working for the opposition *Azadliq* newspaper, was attacked by unknown men at 11:30am as he left his home in Baku for work and was walking towards a bus stop. He was thrown to the ground, beaten and attacked with a knife. Reportedly, there were eyewitnesses who called for help, causing the attackers to flee into a waiting taxi. Nicat Huseynov was later hospitalized with internal injuries, head injuries and a minor stab wound. He had published a number of articles on the subject of corruption in high office for the *Azadliq* newspaper, and claimed that he had received a number of threatening phone calls in the period preceding the attack. These calls allegedly referred to Nicat Huseynov's journalistic activities. His case was apparently submitted to the Nasimi regional police department's Station No. 19. According to the Azerbaijani media freedom non-governmental organization *the Institute for Reporter Freedom and Safety* (IRFS), Elman Guliev, the police representative stated on 27 December 2006 that "We have not yet found witnesses to the attack on Nicat Huseynov... However, the work in this direction continues and the guilty will be found".

The *Turan* information agency reported on 26 December 2006 that Ali Hasanov, chief of presidential administration's public-political department, stated that "Authorities interpret any illegal action against journalists as an attack against themselves and principles of statehood and freedom of speech and press" and that "the police have started investigation of these incidents."

Amnesty International welcomes these statements by law enforcement officials and political figures but remains concerned at the recent history of failing to bring perpetrators of such attacks on journalists to account. The organization urges all relevant authorities to promptly investigate and to take measures to prevent such attacks. Only prompt and thorough steps in this direction will secure compliance with the Government of Azerbaijan's international obligations to demonstrate due diligence in taking steps to prevent and investigate human rights abuses by non-state actors, and to ensure redress for victims.

### **Background information**

Prior to December 2006 Amnesty International has documented a number of incidents in which journalists have been seriously assaulted by unknown actors, including one fatal and two near-fatal incidents involving three outspoken opposition journalists.

On 2 March 2005 **Elmar Huseynov**, editor-in-chief of the outspoken weekly newspaper *Monitor*, was shot and killed by unidentified individuals as he was arriving home at his apartment building in Baku. Elmar Huseynov's colleagues at *Monitor*, as well as international press freedom organizations such as the International Freedom of Expression Exchange, ascribed his murder to the political content of the newspaper, which closed following his death. On 6 March 2006 *Azadlıq* correspondent **Fikret Huseynli** was abducted, beaten and left for dead on the outskirts of Baku by unidentified men. He had earlier received threatening phone calls telling him to stop publishing articles and leave journalism. On 18 May 2006 **Baxaddin Xaziyev**, editor-in-chief of the opposition *Bizim Yol* newspaper and Deputy Chairman of the Popular Front of Azerbaijan party, was abducted and beaten by unidentified men, who allegedly told him to stop writing 'critical articles'. After beating him, the men drove their car over his legs and left him on the shores of a lake outside the Azerbaijani capital Baku.

These cases are also of particular concern given the close association of the victims of attacks with oppositional political views or parties. By contrast there have been no reported cases of attacks on journalists working for pro-governmental media over the past 18 months. The failure to vigorously investigate the cases cited above indicates a pattern which Amnesty International believes demonstrates that the Azerbaijani authorities are failing in their duty to ensure independent, impartial, effective and thorough investigations and to bring those responsible for attacks against journalists to justice. These failures are contributing to a climate of impunity for such attacks, as well as a working environment for journalists marked by fear and self-censorship.

### **Recommended actions:**

Please send courteous letters in Azeri, Russian, English, Turkish or your own language.

- Express concern about the attacks on Ali Orucov and Nicat Huseynov.
- Urge the police and prosecution authorities to provide information to the general public on the scope, methods, findings and progress of investigations into attacks on journalists. Such cases should not be considered closed, until they are effectively investigated and those responsible are brought to justice. The lack of transparency surrounding such cases contribute further to the climate of impunity for attacks on journalists.
- Urge the government to demonstrate due diligence in taking steps to prevent and investigate assaults against journalists by non-state actors, and to ensure redress for victims.
- Urge the government to guarantee the right of freedom of opinion and expression as guaranteed by Azerbaijan's domestic legislation, as well as its international obligations.

### **Please send appeals to:**

#### President

President Ilham Aliyev

Office of the President of the Azerbaijan Republic; 19 Istiqlaliyyat Street; Baku AZ1066  
AZERBAIJAN

**Fax: + 994 12 492 0625, email: [president@gov.az](mailto:president@gov.az)**

**Salutation: Dear President**

Minister of Internal Affairs

Lt.-Gen. Ramil Usubov

Ministry of Internal Affairs; 7 Husu Hajiyevev Street; Baku 370005, AZERBAIJAN

**Fax: + 994 12 92 45 90**

**Salutation: Dear Minister**

Head of the police station No. 7 of the Binagadi regional police department (case of Ali Orucov)

Nachalniku 7-go otdeleniya politsii, Ul. Mir Jalala, dom 99, 9-i mikrorayon, Baku A3 1147, AZERBAIJAN

Head of the police station No.19 of the Nasimi regional police department (case of Nijat Huseynov)

Huseynov)

Nachalniku otdeleniya 19-go politsii, Ul. 20 janvarya, dom 12, 4-i mikrorayon, Baku AZ1002, AZERBAIJAN

Procurator General

Zakir Qaralov

Procurator General; 7 Rafibeyli Street; Baku 370001, Azerbaijan

**Fax: + 994 12 492 32 30**

**Salutation: Dear Procurator General**

**COPIES TO:**

Minister of Foreign Affairs

Elmar Mammadyarov

Minister of Foreign Affairs; 4 S. Qurbanov Street; Baku AZ 1009, AZERBAIJAN

**Fax: +994 (12) 498 84 80, email: [secretariat@mfa.gov.az](mailto:secretariat@mfa.gov.az)**

**Salutation: Dear Minister**

Ombudsperson

Prof. Elmira Suleymanova

Ombudsman; 40 Uz. Hajibeyov Street; Baku AZ1000, AZERBAIJAN

**Fax: + 994 12 498 8574, email: [ombudsman@ombudsman.gov.az](mailto:ombudsman@ombudsman.gov.az)**

You may send copies to diplomatic representatives of Azerbaijan accredited to your country.

**PLEASE SEND ANY REPLIES FROM THE AUTHORITIES AS SOON AS POSSIBLE TO THE INTERNATIONAL SECRETARIAT OF AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL. (Eurasia Team, Europe and Central Asia Program, Amnesty International; 1 Easton Street; London WC1X 0DW; United Kingdom)**