

URGENT ACTION

ACADEMICS ARRESTED ON FABRICATED CHARGES

Academics Igbal Abilov and Bahruz Samadov were arrested on fabricated charges including “high treason” in retaliation of their academic writings and activism. Both remain in custody and are not allowed visitors or communication with their families. If found guilty they face lengthy prison terms of up to 20 years.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

President of Azerbaijan

Ilham Aliyev

Office of the President of Azerbaijan

19 Istiqlaliyyat Street. Baku AZ1066, Azerbaijan

Email: office@pa.gov.az

Dear President Aliyev,

I am writing to demand the release of academics Bahruz Samadov and Igbal Abilov who have been detained on spurious charges.

On July 22, 2024, Igbal Abilov, an ethnic Talysh scholar and minority rights researcher and advocate, who has lived in Belarus since he was a child, was arrested while visiting Azerbaijan. He was charged with treason, sedition and incitement of ethnic hatred. On 21 August 2024 Bahruz Samadov, another political scientist, was arrested on charges of treason while staying in Azerbaijan during a break from his doctoral studies. Both have been remanded in pre-trial detention. Neither is allowed contact with their families.

There is no official public information regarding the grounds for the charges against Bahruz Samadov and Igbal Abilov. Their trials are closed and lawyers are not allowed to share information about their cases, but have reported that they deny the charges. According to the media [reports](#), they stand suspected of treason for having communicated with fellow researchers and activists in Armenia, including during meetings and conferences held under the auspices of European institutions.

Their families believe that they have been arrested because of their critical academic research and activism. Bahruz Samadov has [spoken publicly](#) against the use of military force in Nagorno-Karabakh in 2020, and Igbal Abilov has been a vocal [advocate](#) for the rights of the national minorities, including the Talysh of Azerbaijan. Their arrests follow a pattern of abuse of the criminal justice system by the government of Azerbaijan to silence its critics.

I urge you to take immediate action to end all politically motivated prosecutions, release Bahruz Samadov, Igbal Abilov and all persons arbitrarily detained or imprisoned for their dissenting or critical views in Azerbaijan including academics, political and civic activists, journalists and human rights defenders.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Igbal Abilov is a researcher and academic specializing in history and ethnography. He lectures on international relations at the Belarusian State University and is also an author of several academic publications on ethnic minorities of the South Caucasus, Turkey, and Iran. An ethnic Talysh himself, he is also a co-founder of Talysh National Academy in Belarus. According to media reports, he has lived in Belarus since he was a child.

Igbal Abilov was detained by Azerbaijani security forces while visiting his family and relatives in Azerbaijan. On 22 June he was taken for questioning by the security forces and released after six hours. On 27 June, he attempted to return to Belarus, but was prevented from boarding the plane and had his passport confiscated. He was detained and transferred to a detention centre in Baku on 22 July. His family was not notified of his detention. On 24 July a court in Baku remanded him to four-month detention on charges of “high treason (Article 274 of the Criminal Code), “foreign-agent-instructed public appeals against state” (Article 281.3), and “incitement of ethnic hatred” (Article 283.1) He has not been allowed to meet his family members or communicate any information about his case to them. On 31 August, his lawyer Fariz Namazli, lawyer was also detained, questioned for three hours, and released without charges.

The Azerbaijani authorities have a [history of prosecuting the Talysh people](#), particularly those who advocate cultural or political autonomy. Two prominent Talysh activists imprisoned under trumped up and politically motivated charges have died in custody after being reportedly subjected to torture and ill-treatment and denial of medical treatment.

Bahruz Samadov, is a postgraduate student of political science at Charles University in Prague, Czechia. He is the author of several academic and media publications on current political issues in Azerbaijan, including critical articles and opinions about the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict over Nagorno Karabakh, and has taken part in academic conferences and meetings on promoting dialogue and peace in region.

Bahruz Samadov was detained on 21 August by Azerbaijan’s State Security Service while visiting the country on a break from doctoral studies. The police searched his house and confiscated laptops, mobile devices and passport. He has been charged with high treason (Article 274). Police in Baku also detained and questioned two of Bahruz Samadov’s colleagues, journalists [Samad Shikhi and Cavid Ağa](#) in connection with the case and placed them under a travel ban. Azerbaijani authorities have in the past [targeted peace activists](#) who advocated for a peaceful settlement of the conflict with Armenia over Nagorno Karabakh.

The Azerbaijani have long abused the criminal justice system to silence any critical opinion or research. The crackdown on critical voices has recently intensified, especially ahead of the 2024 United Nations Climate Change Conference COP29, scheduled in Baku November 2024.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Azeri, English, Russian
You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 12 November 2024
Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PRONOUN: Igbad Abilov (He/Him); Bahruz Samadov (He/Him)