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AZERBAIJAN: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL OPPOSES IMPRISONMENT OF FOUR JOURNALISTS FOR "INSULTING THE PRESIDENT"

The sentences of up to five years of imprisonment imposed on 19 October 1995 on four journalists found guilty of "insulting the President" violate the right to freedom of expression, according to Amnesty International.

"We consider the four imprisoned journalists as prisoners of conscience," the organization said.

The four men were brought before Baku City Court in connection with the publication of articles and caricatures about the Azerbaijani President, Heydar Aliyev, in the satirical newspaper *Cheshme* (Spring). They were convicted according to Article 188-6, part two, of the Azerbaijani Criminal Code that imposes imprisonment for insulting the honour and dignity of the President. The detainees claim that they are being punished for their political opposition to the President.

Ayaz Ahmedov was sentenced to five years' imprisonment, Yadigar Mamedli to three, and Asgar Ahmed and Malik Bayramov to two.

Amnesty International recognizes that elected officials in Azerbaijan, including the President, may wish to seek legal redress for written or oral statements that they consider defamatory. However, the organization believes that they already enjoy this right under the legal provisions which protect all residents of the Azerbaijani Republic from defamation.

Amnesty International urges the Azerbaijani authorities:

- to take swift action to ensure the immediate and unconditional release of the detainees; and
- to repeal Article 188-6, part two, to ensure that there are no further prosecutions of people for peacefully exercising their right to freedom of expression.

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