

URGENT ACTION

YOUNG ACTIVIST SENTENCED ON 'MADE-UP' CHARGES

A member of an opposition youth organization in Azerbaijan was sentenced to two and a half years in prison on 4 May on fabricated drug charges.

On 4 February, **Jabbar Savalan**, a 20-year-old student and member of the opposition Popular Front Party (PFP), posted on Facebook calling for protests against the government to take place in the capital Baku. Hours after the posting he told his family members that he was being followed. The next evening he was arrested in the city of Sumgayit as he returned home from a PFP meeting.

Police officers arrested him without explanation and took him to Sumgayit police station. Once there they asked him to empty his pockets, at which point he discovered 0.74g of marijuana in his outer coat pocket. Police then questioned him without a lawyer for two days, reportedly slapping and intimidating him to make him sign a confession. Jabbar Savalan maintains that he does not use drugs and that the marijuana was planted on him.

On 4 May Jabbar Savalan was convicted and sentenced to two and a half years in prison for possessing illegal drugs for personal use. The verdict ignored a blood test taken following his arrest showing he had not used drugs. His family and friends are adamant he does not use drugs, telling Amnesty International that "he did not even smoke or drink."

There has been no investigation into the allegations that police planted evidence on Jabbar Savalan. His lawyer, Anar Gasimov, told Amnesty International he was threatened by the police officer who interrogated Jabbar Savalan after the trial. The officer told the lawyer that he did not like his closing speech, that he knew Anar Gasimov lived in Sumgayit and that he would "see what I will do for you."

A month before his arrest, Jabbar Savalan had reposted an article critical of Azerbaijan's President on Facebook. He had also taken part in an anti-government protest on 20 January.

PLEASE WRITE IMMEDIATELY in English, Russian, Azeri or your own language:

- Calling for the immediate and unconditional release of Jabbar Savalan, as he is a prisoner of conscience, detained solely for peacefully exercising his right to freedom of expression.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 21 JUNE 2011 TO:

President

Ilham Aliyev
Office of the President of the
Azerbaijan Republic
19 Istiqlaliyyat Street
Baku AZ1066, AZERBAIJAN
Fax: + 994 12 492 0625
Email: office@pa.gov.az

Salutation: Dear President

Prosecutor General

Zakir Qaralov
7 Rafibeyli Street
Baku 370001. AZERBAIJAN
Fax: + 994 12 492 32 30

Salutation: Dear Prosecutor General

And copies to:

Ombudswoman

Elmira Suleymanova
40 Uz. Hajibeyov Street
Baku AZ1000, AZERBAIJAN
Fax: + 994 12 498 8574
Email:
ombudsman@ombudsman.gov.az

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Threats, harassment, and acts of violence against journalists and civil society activists in Azerbaijan are being carried out with impunity, leading to an increase in self-censorship. Criminal and civil defamation laws are being used to silence criticism, resulting in prison sentences and heavy fines against journalists.

On 12 February 2010, the parliament (Milli Mejlis) approved a ban on the use of video, photo, or voice recordings without the subject's prior knowledge or consent. Only law enforcement officials are exempt. Journalists and civil society activists are frequently subjected to violence and prevented from carrying out their work, sometimes through excessive use of force by police officers.

Following Jabbar Savalan's arrest for calling for protest, in March and April 2011 a series of protests against government corruption, organized using Facebook, were met with a wave of arrests and criminal charges. In April seven opposition activists were charged with "organizing mass disorder" for their participation in the violently dispersed 2 April "Day of Wrath" protest in Baku. Amnesty International considers them to be prisoners of conscience, detained solely for the peaceful exercise of the right to freedom of assembly.

The treatment of these activists highlights the range of human rights abuses currently occurring in Azerbaijan. Local rights groups report that the activists have been beaten by police and remanded in custody after closed hearings on the basis of no or very little evidence, without having been granted access to a lawyer of their choice. Amnesty International is deeply concerned by the authorities' systematic violation of individuals' rights to freedom of expression and assembly, by the reported ill-treatment of individuals by officials while in custody, and by numerous violations of individuals' right to a fair trial.

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