

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Public Statement

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Politically sensitive reporting met with physical reprisals in Azerbaijani exclave

Amnesty International is deeply concerned about allegations concerning the recent seizure, beating and imprisonment by police of opposition journalist Həkim Eldostu Mehdiyev, and the subsequent persecution of his relatives, in the Autonomous Republic of Nakhchivan in Azerbaijan. Amnesty International calls for the immediate, impartial and thorough investigation into these alleged human rights violations, and for the victims to receive appropriate reparations.

Həkim Eldostu Mehdiyev has worked as the regional correspondent for the opposition newspaper *Yeni Müsavat* (New Equality) since 2006. In September he assisted a visiting correspondent from the opposition *Azadlıq* (Freedom) newspaper to prepare a news report on the depopulation in the republic owing to labour emigration. The report was published on the website of *Radio Liberty* on 17 September and drew attention to reported shortages of gas and electricity in the region. Həkim Eldostu Mehdiyev also featured in a radio interview broadcast on 17 September on *Radio Azadlıq*, the Azeri service of *Radio Liberty/Radio Free Europe* in Azerbaijan.

On 22 September police officers from the National Security Service allegedly beat and detained Həkim Eldostu Mehdiyev in Jalilkand village and then reportedly seized him to an unknown location, where he was again beaten and held for seven hours. He was reportedly told to stop reporting on socio-economic problems in Nakhchivan and told to leave Azerbaijan with his family and not to report this incident to anyone. He then returned home, and reported the incident to the press.

On 23 September Həkim Eldostu Mehdiyev was summoned to the police where he was charged with disobeying police orders. He was tried immediately in Sarur regional court, without access to legal representation, and sentenced to 15 days' imprisonment in Böyük Düz prison. His family was denied the right to visit him in detention. Following his arrest a teahouse and a shop run by members of Həkim Eldostu Mehdiyev's family were closed and demolished, reportedly by employees of the Ministry of National Security. Amnesty International has received photographic evidence of the destruction of these two enterprises.

On 27 September Həkim Eldostu Mehdiyev was told by prison officials that he had been 'forgiven' and was released without further explanation. Həkim Eldostu Mehdiyev claimed he had been beaten while in detention. He was not able to receive medical treatment in a hospital, however, until 1 October after registering himself under a false name. Doctors determined that he had fractured one rib and severely bruised another.

Həkim Eldostu Mehdiyev was previously imprisoned between 1995 and 2000, reportedly because of his support for former Azerbaijani president, Abulfəz Elçibey, who was deposed by a coup in June 1993.

The Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic is an exclave of Azerbaijan, bordering Iran to the west and separated to the east from the territory of Azerbaijan by Armenia. Nakhchivan is blockaded to the east by Armenia (in response to the Turkish and Azerbaijani blockade of Armenia), and has had no overland transport links with Azerbaijan for 16 years. There are regular reports of socio-economic hardship and higher than average rates of labour emigration out of the republic to Turkey, with whom Nakhchivan shares a very short border to the west.

Amnesty International has documented an increase in cases of journalists reporting on corruption and official wrongdoing being subjected to either physical assault or imprisonment under Azerbaijan's libel laws over the last two years. The organization calls for Azerbaijan's Prosecutor-General to mount an immediate, impartial, and thorough investigation of the alleged seizure, beating and imprisonment of Həkim Eldostu Mehdiyev. Amnesty International likewise calls upon the Chairman of the Supreme Council of the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic to ensure conditions for the full exercise of the right of freedom of expression in the region.

Public Document

For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566

Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW. web: <http://www.amnesty.org>

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