

URGENT ACTION

JOURNALISTS FACE NEW CHARGES AND EXTENDED DETENTION

Ahead of COP29, Azerbaijani authorities have brought further false charges against, and extended detention of, six journalists from investigative news outlet Abzas Media. They have been in detention for over ten months, two of them subjected to alleged torture and ill-treatment and denial of the medical care that they require.

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

Ilham Aliyev

President of Azerbaijan
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Dear President,

I am writing to express my concern about the unfounded prosecution and arbitrary detention of more than a dozen journalists, under fabricated charges, ahead of the upcoming 2024 UN climate change conference (COP29).

Abzas Media Director, Ulvi Hasanli, his deputy Mahammad Kekalov, Editor-in-Chief Sevinj Vagifgizi, and journalists Nargiz Absalamova, Elnara Gasimova and Hafiz Babali were arbitrarily arrested between November 2023 and January 2024, accused of smuggling money by a group of persons through prior conspiracy. In August 2024, the prosecution also brought new false charges against them, of illegal entrepreneurship, money laundering and tax evasion, at the same time as the outlet continued to publish critical stories. In September 2024, a court in Baku extended their detention. They now face between eight to 12 years' imprisonment if convicted. The charges, which they all deny, have been brought against them to silence their critical voices. Ulvi Hasanli has also reported being threatened to surrender the letter he published from detention, in which he described widespread torture and other ill-treatment of detainees which he has witnessed. His lawyer has filed a complaint as Hasanli was punched in his eye and head during the arrest in November 2023. According to his family, he has been beaten by law enforcement officials when he was taken to court in September in front of the editor Sevinj Vagifgizi. The journalist Hafiz Babali needs a surgical operation and treatment that he is not receiving in prison.

Arbitrarily arrested journalists from other independent media outlets, such as Toplum TV and Kanal 13, have also recently had their detentions extended. Several of them have health issues and are denied the medical care they require, which in itself may amount to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

I urge you to take steps to ensure an immediate release of all journalists arrested in retaliation for their critical reporting, effective investigation of all allegations of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, and of fabrication of charges, and ensure that all those suspected of perpetrating, commissioning or condoning these and other human rights violations are brought to justice in fair trial proceedings. The clampdown on media and other independent voices in Azerbaijan must stop immediately.

Sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Abzas Media publications have covered alleged corrupt deals by companies connected with government officials. The outlet has also reported its findings about environmental issues such as dangerous pollution and health risks related to Gedabek gold mine near Soyudluin Gabaday district in western Azerbaijan. Abzas Media was reportedly planning a further investigation into the pollution related to the goldmine and other human rights violations prior to these arrests.

The six members of the investigative news outlet Abzas Media are not the only journalists prosecuted and detained under false charges in retaliation for their work. Independent journalist, Imran Aliyev, accused of cooperating with the Abzas Media, has also been arrested and is in pretrial detention. In November-December 2023, a court in Baku remanded into custody Aziz Orujov, Director of Kanal 13, and its anchor Shamo Eminov, also on charges of smuggling grant money. At least three more journalists covering corruption and human rights issues in Azerbaijan have been arrested on questionable charges. They include Teymur Karimov, reporter and Director of online news outlet Kanal-11. On 6 March 2024, police raided and detained several journalists and activists including the founder of Toplum TV, Alasgar Mammadli, journalist Mushfig Jabbar, board members of Third Republic, Ruslan Izzatli and founder of the organisation Institute for Democratic Initiatives (IDI) Akif Gurbanov and, as well as activists from IDI Ramil Babayev and Ali Zeynalov.

On 24 July 20204, Ulvi Hasanli reported receiving threats from the administration after publishing a letter from his detention centre, alleging that "prisoners are crucified, beaten and hung on bars in the corridors" and subjected to other torture and ill-treatment. The letter came shortly after The Council of Europe's Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT), had published a statement on 3 July 2024 in which it, exceptionally, expressed extreme concern regarding torture and other ill-treatment by police."

Azerbaijan adopted a new media law in 2022 imposing arbitrary barriers for media organizations to register and obtain funding. Many critical outlets have been arbitrarily denied registration. Some independent media have been forced to cease their work. Others risk prosecution under trumped-up charges if they accept financial support, including grants from abroad, to enable them to continue their work.

Since it was announced that Azerbaijan would be the host of COP29, the authorities have further intensified their crackdown on the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly. Several prominent government critics have been locked up under politically motivated charges, or forced into exile, in a haunting echo of the previous crackdowns documented by Amnesty International around other major international events hosted by Azerbaijan.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Russian, English

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 30 December 2024

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PRONOUN: Ulvi Hasanli (He/him); Sevinj Vagifgyzy (She/her);
Nargiz Absalamova (She/her)

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: [Azerbaijan: Release Arrested Journalists - Amnesty International](#)

ADDITIONAL TARGETS

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