

President Ilham Aliyev
Office of the President of the Azerbaijan Republic
19 Istiqlaliyyat Street
Baku AZ1066
AZERBAIJAN

Date:

Dear President,

Please release prisoners of conscience

I am deeply concerned to learn that 14 individuals currently detained in Azerbaijan have been identified as prisoners of conscience by Amnesty International. The organisation, which promotes human rights around the world, believes that **Dashgin Melikov, Ilkin Rustamzade, Mahammad Azizov, Bakhtiyar Guliyev, Shahin Novruzlu, Rashad Hasanov, Uzeyir Mammadli, Rashadat Akhundov, Zaur Gurbanli, Ilgar Mammadov, Tofiq Yagublu, Bakhtiyar Mammadov, Ilham Amiraslanov and Hilal Mammadov** have all been targeted in retaliation for their peaceful human rights or political activism. I am therefore calling on you to ensure that these individuals are immediately and unconditionally released.

Furthermore, I am concerned that these detentions are part of a wider pre-election crackdown on dissenting voices in the country, and by reports of the authorities' failure to respect their international obligations to protect the rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly.

I therefore call on the Azerbaijani authorities to:

- End the harassment, intimidation, arbitrary detention and criminal prosecution of individuals and organisations legitimately exercising the right to freedom of expression to express critical or dissenting views.
- Ensure that human rights defenders, lawyers and other civil society actors are able to carry out their legitimate activities without fear or threat of reprisal, obstruction or legal and administrative harassment.
- Respect the rights to freedom of assembly of all citizens of Azerbaijan and allow peaceful demonstrations to be organised in appropriate locations - generally within sight and sound of their target audience - with the necessary practical and security arrangements in place.

Thank you for your attention. I look forward to receiving your response on these extremely important issues.

Yours sincerely