

URGENT ACTION

DEFENDER'S HEALTH DETERIORATES IN PRISON

The health of imprisoned Azerbaijani human rights defender Taleh Khasmammadov has continued to progressively deteriorate. He is not receiving adequate medical care in the prison's hospital. He is currently serving a three-year sentence following his conviction on politically motivated charges.

Human rights defender **Taleh Khasmammadov**, from Goychay in Central Azerbaijan, has been investigating and reporting on cases of local corruption and police abuse for years. He is currently serving three years in jail on what appear to be politically motivated charges. According to Taleh Khasmammadov's family, he suffers from a severe form of goitre (a swelling of the thyroid gland) which is causing him severe headaches and difficulty breathing. Taleh Khasmammadov has been subjected to numerous beatings and placed in solitary confinement and his health has deteriorated further due to the harsh prison conditions. On 22 February, following many appeals from his family, the prison administration finally agreed to transfer him to the prison's hospital. However, his mother and wife visited him at the beginning of March and believe that he is not receiving adequate medical care as his health continues to deteriorate and he remains bedridden. According to his mother, he requires a proper medical assessment and a surgery, which cannot be safely and adequately provided in the prison hospital.

Taleh Khasmammadov was sentenced to four years in prison on separate hooliganism charges on 20 April 2012 and Amnesty International then considered him a prisoner of conscience. He was accused of attacking four police officers in a police station shortly after he published several articles on the involvement of local police in organized criminal activities. Taleh Khasmammadov was released on 28 December 2012 by a presidential pardon. Once released, he resumed his investigative work and reporting on local authorities and police corruption and on 24 February 2015 he was re-arrested on charges of hooliganism, accused of beating a man and attacking police officers afterwards. Two police officers who testified against him claimed that Taleh Khasmammadov hit the man unconscious following an argument and that he then attacked them when they tried to intervene. Taleh's mother, who witnessed the incident, explained that a man approached them while they were at the Goychay's market, spat on Taleh Khasmammadov's face and threw himself on the ground pretending to be unconscious. Police officers who were nearby arrested Taleh Khasmammadov without any resistance. The court refused to review CCTV footage of the incident or defence witnesses. On 22 July he was sentenced to three years in prison.

Please write immediately in Azerbaijani, English or your own language:

- Urging the authorities to ensure Taleh Khasmammadov receives all necessary medical treatment and care he may require and that he is transferred to a hospital outside of prison;
- Calling on the authorities to order a prompt retrial of Taleh Khasmammadov in accordance with international fair trial standards and to release Taleh Khasmammadov from prison pending his retrial;
- Urging them to carry out an investigation into the allegations that Taleh Khasmammadov was subjected to beatings and other ill-treatment while in prison and bring those responsible to justice;
- Insisting on full respect for, and protection of the right to freedom of expression in Azerbaijan.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 21 APRIL 2016 TO:

President Ilham Aliyev
Office of the President of Azerbaijan
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 AZ1001, Azerbaijan
Email: info@prosecutor.gov.az
Salutation: Dear Prosecutor General

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. HIS EXCELLENCY MR TAHIR TAGHIZADE, Embassy of the Embassy of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 4 Kensington Court, London, W8 5DL tel: 020 7938 3412 Fax 020 7937 1783 email: london@mission.mfa.gov.az, salutation: Your Excellency

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Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Taleh Khasmammadov is the chairman of the NGO Right and Law and has been working on issues of local corruption and police abuse in the Goychay and Ujar regions of Azerbaijan for years. Amnesty International recognized him as a prisoner of conscience in 2012, after he was arrested on trumped-up charges of hooliganism following the publication of an article alleging that local police had colluded with criminal gangs. His re-arrest in 2014, after he resumed his investigation and critical reporting on local authorities and police corruption, raises concerns that charges against him are politically motivated and made in retaliation for his critical reporting.

According to Taleh Khasmammadov's mother, Taleh faced ill-treatment while in detention. For the first 20 days at the pre-trial detention he was not allowed any contact with family members or his lawyer. He was not allowed to bathe and was not given access to the food and fresh clothes sent by his family. Local media and human rights organizations reported violations of international fair trial standards, such as the denial to question the defence's witnesses and the refusal to review available CCTV recordings from the incident, which have marred proceedings against him throughout the investigation and trial.

Amnesty International has longstanding concerns about the Azerbaijani authorities' failure to respect their international obligations to protect the rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly. Human rights defenders are often imprisoned on trumped-up or politically motivated charges in retaliation for their work or critical statements. Ill-treatment and beatings in detention are also commonly reported.

Amnesty International has recognized at least 18 people as prisoners of conscience in Azerbaijan, imprisoned solely for peacefully exercising their right to freedom of expression. For more information, see *Critical human rights situation in Azerbaijan further worsening ahead of 2015 election* (<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur55/2787/2015/en/>), *Azerbaijan: the Repression Games: The voices you won't hear at the first European Games* (<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur55/1732/2015/en/>), *Azerbaijan: Guilty of Defending Rights: Azerbaijan's human rights defenders and activists behind bars* (<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur55/1077/2015/en/>) and *Behind bars: Silencing dissent in Azerbaijan* (<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/EUR55/004/2014/en>).

Name: Taleh Khasmammadov

Gender m/f: male

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