

URGENT ACTION

SUPREME COURT ORDERS JOURNALIST'S RELEASE

On 5 April, Azerbaijan's Supreme Court ordered the release of Aziz Orujov, an independent journalist and CEO of the internet TV channel *Canal 13*, on a suspended three-year sentence. The prisoner of conscience had been detained since 2 May 2017 on fabricated charges and in inhumane conditions.

On 5 April, Azerbaijan's Supreme Court ordered the release of independent journalist and prisoner of conscience, **Aziz Orujov** on a suspended three-year sentence with three-year probation. On 15 December 2017, Aziz Orujov was found guilty of abusing official powers and illegal entrepreneurship, under Articles 308.2 and 192.2.2 of the Criminal Code of Azerbaijan respectively, and sentenced to 6 years imprisonment. The latter charge was quashed while the 'abuse of official power' charge was re-qualified for a lesser charge, which carries a maximum three year imprisonment penalty.

Aziz Orujov was arrested on 2 May 2017 while on his way to work and remanded in pre-trial detention under a 30 day administrative detention order for purportedly disobeying a police officer's legitimate orders. On 2 June 2017, when his administrative detention order was due to expire, new fabricated charges of illegal entrepreneurship and abuse of official powers were brought against him. The charges relate to him being the co-founder of the Caucasus Media Investigations Centre Public Union, an organisation he founded in 2006 with his brother and sister-in-law. The prosecution claims that from 2006 to 2014 the organisation received around AZN 193,000 (US\$ 113,000) in grants from various donors, and failed to register the grants and pay AZN 8,000 in tax. Registration and taxing of grants only became mandatory in February 2014 when legislative amendments entered into force, but the authorities have applied these retroactively to intimidate, harass, arrest and prosecute a number of government critics from independent media outlets and NGOs. Amnesty International believes Aziz Orujov's conviction stems solely from his peaceful work as a journalist.

Thank you to all those who sent appeals. No further action is requested from the UA network.

This is the first update of UA 186/17. Further information: www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur55/6826/2017/en/

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