

URGENT ACTION

NEW CHARGES AGAINST PRISONER OF CONSCIENCE

On 26 December 2018, the Azerbaijani authorities brought new criminal charges against prisoner of conscience Mehman Huseynov, just as his current jail term nears to an end.

The prominent journalist has been charged with assault for allegedly attacking an inspector at the detention centre. Mehman Huseynov denies the accusation. On 26 December 2018, he went on a hunger strike in protest of the new criminal charges and there are now grave concerns for his health which has been reported by his lawyer as 'critical'. If convicted, Mehman Huseynov could face up to seven more years in jail. He must be immediately and unconditionally released.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 20 FEBRUARY 2019

Please write urgently in your own words or using this template letter in Azeri, English or Russian:

H.E Ilham Aliyev
Office of the President of Azerbaijan
19 Istiqlaliyyat Street
Baku AZ1066, Azerbaijan
Email: office@pa.gov.az

His Excellency Ilham Aliyev,

On 26 December 2018, Azerbaijani authorities brought new criminal charges of "resisting a representative of the authorities with the use of violence dangerous to the representative's health and life" against Mehman Huseynov, a prisoner of conscience and outspoken Azerbaijani government-critic, just as his current jail term nears to an end. The prominent journalist was accused of allegedly attacking an inspector at the detention centre where he is being held. He denies the charges. If convicted, Mehman Huseynov could face up to seven years in jail. Mehman Huseynov has been on a hunger strike since 26 December to protest the new criminal charges and according to his lawyer, he is currently in a critical health condition.

Mehman Huseynov is currently serving a two-year prison sentence under trumped-up charges on a case of defamation of an entire police station. He was accused after he gave a statement in front of the courthouse in which he described torture and ill-treatment he had suffered at the hands of the police. He is a prisoner of conscience and should have never been prosecuted and convicted. With only three months left until his release, Amnesty International believes the new charges against Mehman Huseynov are politically motivated and have been brought in an effort to further punish him for having expressed his critical views of the government and to deter others from speaking up and seeking justice for police abuses - a persistent and well-documented problem in Azerbaijan.

I urge you to take all necessary steps to ensure that the new trumped-up charges against Mehman Huseynov are dropped and that he is immediately and unconditionally released, as he a prisoner of conscience, detained solely for peacefully exercising his right to freedom of expression.

Yours sincerely,

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

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

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

According to Mehman Huseynov's lawyer, prison officials have attempted several times since August 2018 to provoke Mehman Huseynov into a conflict with prison staff. His lawyer claims that it was clear that there was a plan in place to keep him in jail on new criminal charges.

Mehman Huseynov is a popular journalist and blogger in Azerbaijan who is known for his journalistic work on alleged corruption on the part of senior Azerbaijani officials. In March 2017, a Baku court sentenced Mehman Huseynov to two years in prison on charges of defaming an entire police station, after he gave a statement in front of the courthouse in which he described the abuses he had suffered at that police station. He referred to the time when a group of plain-clothes officers attacked Mehman Huseynov on January 2017, blindfolded and gagged him with towels, forced a bag over his head and took him to the Nasimi district police station, where police used an electroshock weapon on his groin, and punched him, bloodying his nose.

For years, Amnesty International has been documenting human rights violations in Azerbaijan. The rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly have been severely restricted and many journalists, human rights defenders and other activists have faced harassment, unjust prosecution under false charges and have been arbitrarily detained following unfair trials. According to Azerbaijani human rights defenders, in 2018, around 100 individuals remained in prison following arrest under politically motivated charges, and the number of such cases continues to grow. This practise has repercussions throughout civil society, creating a climate of fear and self-censorship.

As the arrests and politically motivated prosecution of critics continue unabated, Azerbaijan remains closed to human rights scrutiny. International human rights monitors, including Amnesty International, continue to be denied access to the country.

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur55/013/2012/en/>