

URGENT ACTION

HARASSMENT OF ACTIVIST AND FAMILY MUST STOP

Azerbaijani human rights activist and former prisoner of conscience Ilkin Rustamzade and his family have been facing threats and harassment since Ilkin Rustamzade launched a petition asking the government to provide social security to persons affected by COVID-19.

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

H.E Ilham Aliyev
President of Azerbaijan

19 Istiqlaliyyat Street Baku AZ1066, Azerbaijan

Please use online form: https://en.president.az/letters/new_form

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/PresidentIlhamAliyev/>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/presidentaz?lang=en>

Dear President,

*I am extremely concerned about the latest campaign of harassment against human rights defender and former prisoner of conscience **Ilkin Rustamzade** and his family.*

Ilkin Rustamzade began receiving anonymous threats on 29 March after he launched a petition calling on the government to provide social assistance to persons affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. A person with an anonymous account on social media threatened to publish intimate photos of Ilkin Rustamzade's wife unless he took down the petition. After his refusal to do so, on 6 April the intimate photos of his wife, with her name and telephone number, were published online and on an escort website. It appears that a coordinated and funded smear campaign has also been launched against Ilkin Rustamzade on paid Facebook pages and other online sites requiring payments for posts.

On 8 April the police searched the house of Ilkin Rustamzade's parents and took his father to the local police station in the Khatai district of Baku. His father was released shortly afterwards without any charges.

Ilkin Rustamzade has experienced ongoing harassment from the authorities for his peaceful activism. In 2013 he became a prisoner of conscience when he was arrested on fabricated charges and spent six years in prison.

In light of the above, I urge you to:

- ***Take all necessary steps to ensure that all harassment, threats and intimidation against Ilkin Rustamzade and his family stop immediately;***
- ***Ensure a prompt, independent and impartial investigation into the threats, harassment, violations of the right to privacy and the smear campaign against Ilkin Rustamzade and his family and ensure that those responsible are brought to justice.***

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Ilkin Rustamzade, an activist and then member of the pro-democracy youth group NIDA, was arrested in March 2013 on fabricated charges of hooliganism. He had allegedly posted a satirical video on YouTube. Authorities later added charges of inciting violence and organizing mass disorder for planning a peaceful protest rally in 2013. In May 2014 he was sentenced to eight years in prison following an unfair trial, together with seven other members of NIDA. He spent six years in prison and was released on 17 March 2019 further to a presidential pardon, but his unfair convictions were not quashed.

On 7 March 2019, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) had ruled that Ilkin Rustamzade was detained unlawfully, in violation of his right to liberty and security under Article 5.1 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

Recently, the Azerbaijani authorities have used the COVID-19 pandemic to increasingly crack down on their critics. On 19 March 2020, in his Novruz Bayrami greetings to the nation President Ilham Aliyev announced “new rules” for the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic including “isolating” and “clearing” Azerbaijan’s already fragmented political opposition (<https://en.president.az/articles/36212>). High-profile arrests of political and civil activists under spurious charges have followed the president’s pronouncement, including the arrest of opposition activist Tofiq Yagublu on charges of hooliganism (<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/EUR55/2029/2020/en/>) and human rights defender Elchin Mammad on charges of theft (<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur55/2069/2020/en/>).

As the arrests and politically motivated prosecution of critics continue, Azerbaijan remains closed to human rights scrutiny. International human rights monitors, including Amnesty International, have been denied access to the country for several years.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Azeri, English, Russian.

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 17 July 2020

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

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Ilkin Rustamzade (he/him)

And copies to:

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