

URGENT ACTION

PSYCHIATRIC DETENTION FOR CRITICIZING THE PRESIDENT

Opposition activist Agil Humbatov has been held in psychiatric detention in Baku, Azerbaijan's capital, and injected with unknown drugs without his consent since 2 April after he criticised the authorities' handling of the COVID-19 pandemic. On 2 June, his forced hospitalization was extended for another month. Agil Humbatov has been arbitrarily deprived of his liberty and must be freed immediately.

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

Agahasan Rasulov, Head Doctor
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Dear Head Doctor Rasulov,

I am writing to express my deep concern regarding the forcible psychiatric hospitalisation of **Agil Humbatov**, a member of the opposition Popular Front Party of Azerbaijan (PFPA). Since 2 April, he has been forcibly held at the Psychiatric Hospital №1 in retaliation for his criticism of the authorities. He is being administered medication without his free and informed consent and a justified necessity. He must be immediately released.

On 30 March, police arrested Agil Humbatov after he posted a video on social media criticizing the government's failure to help families who struggle during the Covid-19 pandemic. The next day, police officers took him to the Psychiatric Hospital №1, where he was confined as a patient purportedly suffering from paranoia. On 1 April, the Sabunchu District Court rejected the hospital's application for his forced hospitalization and ordered his release. On 2 April, police re-arrested Agil Humbatov and took him back to the hospital after he posted another video on social media saying that he was forcibly hospitalized in deplorable conditions because of his political views. On 3 April, the Baku Court of Appeals overturned the previous court decision and approved his forced hospitalization without any substantial evidence that would justify his internment in a psychiatric hospital. The court ruled that Agil Humbatov posed danger to the public, based on the same circumstances that were previously dismissed by the Sabunchu District Court as insufficient.

The administration of the hospital has since refused to allow Agil Humbatov's family to visit him. On 12 May, he complained to his wife over the phone that doctors inject him with unknown drugs against his will, and that his health has worsened as a result.

It is my understanding that on 2 June the hospital administration took the decision to extend Agil Humbatov's forced hospitalization by one month. His forcible hospitalisation is unfounded and appears to be intended to punish him simply for having expressed his critical views of the government. This is an egregious abuse of his human dignity and his right to health, and it violates his rights to freedom of expression, personal liberty, and may amount to torture and other ill-treatment.

In light of the above, I urge you to immediately end any forced treatment imposed on Agil Humbatov against his will and immediately release him from the psychiatric hospital.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Arbitrary detentions of government critics are commonplace in Azerbaijan. Numerous activists, opposition members, journalists and human rights defenders have been prosecuted for merely exercising their rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly, and detained and imprisoned under politically motivated charges.

Recently, the Azerbaijani authorities have used the COVID-19 pandemic as a pretext to lock up a growing number of their critics. On 19 March, President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev announced “new rules” for the duration of the Covid-19 pandemic, and promised to “clean up” Azerbaijan’s political opposition, which he called traitors and “the fifth column”. (<https://en.president.az/articles/36212>). Arrests of high-profile political activists and human rights defenders 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/>).

More than a dozen individuals, comprising of political activists, journalists, human rights defenders and others who dared to criticize the authorities’ handling of the pandemic have been detained and remanded in so-called administrative detention for periods ranging from 10 to 30 days on bogus charges, including disobeying police orders or breaking the rules of lockdown. (<https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/EUR5524122020ENGLISH.pdf>).

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

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: English, Russian, Azerbaijani.
You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 30 July 2020.
Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Agil Humbatov (he/him)

And copies to:

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