

# URGENT ACTION

## ACADEMICS SENTENCED ON SPURIOUS CHARGES OF TREASON

Academics Bahruz Samadov and Igbal Abilov, sentenced to 15 and 18 years respectively on fabricated charges of treason following unfair trials, must be immediately and unconditionally released. Their prosecution and sentencing reflect the Azerbaijani authorities' ongoing campaign against critics, academics and human rights defenders who are prosecuted solely for their peaceful, free expression.

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

*President of Azerbaijan*

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I am writing to draw your attention to the long prison sentence against two academics in Azerbaijan.

On 23 June 2025, Azerbaijani researcher, peace activist and OC Media contributor Bahruz Samadov was sentenced to 15 years in prison on trumped-up charges of "high treason." His prosecution was politically motivated, with no credible evidence ever publicly presented. The trial was effectively held behind closed doors: only a few individuals, including his grandmother (his closest living relative), friends and several activists were permitted in the courtroom for the verdict.

In response to the prosecutor's request for a 16-year sentence, Bahruz Samadov went on a hunger strike for 5 days. According to his grandmother, he also attempted to take his own life in detention but was saved by a fellow inmate. His lawyer and local activists have since raised urgent concerns over his mental and physical health, and have requested an immediate visit by the Public Defender (Ombudsman) and supervising penitentiary service officials.

On 20 May 2025, Igbal Abilov, a Talysh academic, was sentenced to 18 years in prison by the Lankaran Court for Grave Crimes on charges of "high treason" and "inciting ethnic hatred." As an ethnic Talyshi scholar, Abilov had long advocated for the preservation of the Talysh language, history, and culture. His conviction follows a deeply flawed, closed-door trial in violation of fair trial rights. The charges against Igbal Abilov appear to stem from his long-standing academic work on Talysh minority issues, language, history, and cultural identity.

The sentencing of Igbal Abilov and Bahruz Samadov to lengthy prison terms on fabricated charges seems to be part of an effort to suppress academic criticism and discourage engagement with politically sensitive topics.

**We call on you to immediately and unconditionally release Bahruz Samadov and Igbal Abilov. Pending their release, they must have access to adequate health care, and independent observers and the Public Defender must be allowed to visit them in detention. Additionally, I ask you to end the broader reprisals against peaceful critics, journalists and activists, and ensure that Azerbaijan fully complies with its obligations under international human rights law.**

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Bahruz Samadov, a PhD candidate at Charles University in Prague, has long been a vocal critic of human rights violations in Azerbaijan and an advocate for peace in the South Caucasus. Since 2020, after he co-signed the “Anti-war Statement of Azerbaijani Leftist Youth,” he has been publicly vilified by the Azerbaijani state media, experts and officials as a “traitor” for his anti-war views and calls for peace. He was arrested on 21 August 2024 while visiting Baku from Prague,<sup>4</sup> and was charged with “high treason” under Article 274 of the Criminal Code. His family and the lawyer of his choice were unable to contact him for two days following his arrest. He was refused bail, and his defence’s petition to move him to house arrest and allow him to contact his family during his pretrial detention was denied.

Bahruz Samadov has denied all charges, stating there is no evidence of any collaboration with the Armenian intelligence services. His writings, published in respected regional and international outlets including OC Media, Eurasianet, and openDemocracy, were focused on peaceful solutions to the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict, and on human rights, and so were his posts on social media. The charges against Bahruz Samadov stem from his peaceful activism, advocacy for dialogue and peace with neighbouring Armenia, and criticism of the expulsion of the ethnic Armenian population from the break-away region of Nagorno-Karabakh, which Azerbaijan brought under its control by military force between 2020 and 2022.

Reportedly the main evidence presented in the court against Igbal Abilov consisted of exchanges about minority rights issues with a fellow academic from Armenia, which the prosecution argued amounted to espionage and treason. Igbal Abilov has consistently denied all charges, and his colleagues told Amnesty International that the exchange was part of a scholarly collaboration focused on linguistic and ethnographic studies, with no indication that any classified or sensitive information was ever shared. Igbal Abilov’s trial was held behind closed doors – excluding independent observers, journalists, and human rights monitors – raising serious concerns about the impartiality of the proceedings.

Azerbaijani officials and state media portrayed Abilov as a traitor and guilty of treason, long before the trial concluded, violating his right to be presumed innocent. Similarly to the case of Bahruz Samadov, no credible evidence was ever publicly presented – or otherwise known of – to justify the allegations of high treason and the subsequent severe sentence.

The Azerbaijani authorities have long abused the criminal justice system to silence any critical opinion or research.

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

**PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: November 2025**  
Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

**NAME AND PRONOUN:** Bahruz Samadov (He/Him), Igbal Abilov (He/Him).

**PREVIOUS UA:** [Azerbaijan: Academics Arrested on Fabricated Charges: Igbal Abilov and Bahruz Samadov - Amnesty International](#)

## ADDITIONAL TARGETS

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