



## Free Khadija



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### **Imprisoned for investigating corruption Journalism is not a crime**

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We hope you will feel inspired to take action on all of our campaigns but remind you that all actions are optional.

This mailing is also available to download at

[www.amnesty.org.uk/youth](http://www.amnesty.org.uk/youth)

# YOUTH GROUP ACTION

## In a nutshell

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Khadija Ismayilova, an award-winning investigative journalist and outspoken government critic in Azerbaijan, has been locked up by the authorities for exposing corruption\*. She is a prisoner of conscience\* and must be released immediately.

We are asking groups to:

- Write to the President of Azerbaijan asking for the release of Khadija
- Send Khadija and her mother messages of support
- Write to the media around the time of the Azerbaijan Grand Prix in June
- Organise a creative stunt

We are also encouraging youth groups to think of a creative angle to this campaign using a Grand Prix/Racing car theme.

## **Free Khadija: Journalism is not a crime**

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Khadija Ismayilova has published numerous articles exposing human rights violations and corruption at the highest levels in the country. The authorities punished her first by running a smear campaign\* in the state-controlled media and later by bringing trumped-up\* criminal charges against her, including tax evasion, embezzlement\* and illegal business.

Khadija was detained on 5 December 2014 and was sentenced to seven-and-a-half years in prison on 1 September 2015. The trial, which took place in Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan, was supposedly open, but on several occasions observers were not allowed into the courtroom.

The Azeri authorities are very sensitive to public criticism of their human rights record. Generating media attention is an important way to bring pressure on the regime to release political prisoners. On June 19th, Baku will be hosting the European Grand Prix. This will be a great opportunity to generate attention in your area.

## **TAKE ACTION 1: Call for Khadija's release.**

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Please write to the President asking him for the immediate and unconditional release of Khadija Ismayilova and allow Khadija to continue her journalistic investigations freely.

Send your letters to:

President Ilham Aliyev  
Office of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan  
18 Istiqlaliyyat Avenue Baku, AZ 106  
Azerbaijan  
Start your letter: Dear President

\*See page 5 for definitions

## YOUTH GROUP ACTION

### TAKE ACTION 2: Show Solidarity.

Support Khadija and her mother Elmira Ismayilova by sending them messages of support and solidarity. Please send your messages back to us to the address below or email them to: [anne.montague@amnesty.org.uk](mailto:anne.montague@amnesty.org.uk).

Anne Montague - Community Organiser (Youth)  
Human Rights Action Centre  
17-25 New Inn Yard  
EC2A 3EA

Suggested messages:

"Biz sizinləyik" ("we are with you" in Azerbaijani)  
"Möhkəm ol" ("stay strong" in Azerbaijani)

### TAKE ACTION 3: Do a publicity stunt

The Azerbaijan government is very sensitive to public criticism, especially of its human rights record, and in relation to the president in particular. On June 19th, the European grand prix will be staged in Baku. This is an excellent opportunity to raise Khadija's case in your local area.

### TAKE ACTION 4: Write to your local media

Around the time of the Grand Prix, you can write a letter to the editor of your local paper, or to a national title. Key points to make:

- The European Grand Prix is happening in Azerbaijan on June 19th which will be a great spectacle.
- However, there are many people unable to witness the action, including those locked up simply for expressing their opinion or for criticising the government. People like Khadija Ismayilova.
- The Azerbaijani authorities love to use these major international moments to show that they are open for business and to gloss over their terrible human rights record.
- We want to remind the world that this regime is not all about glitz and glamour, but about severe restrictions on basic human rights.
- Call on President Ilham Aliyev to release Khadija and all other Prisoners of Conscience immediately and unconditionally, and to respect and protect the right to freedom of expression.

**Need support with media work?** We have a network of Regional Media Support Officers ready to help you maximise your impact on local press, radio, and TV. Contact [anne.montague@amnesty.org.uk](mailto:anne.montague@amnesty.org.uk) for more details.

### CREATIVE ACTION

We are inviting youth groups to think about how they can incorporate a creative element to any or all of the above actions. As mentioned on June 19th Azerbaijan will be hosting the European Grand Prix. **Can you think an eye-catching and interesting way to use the theme of racing cars in your campaigning?** We'd love to see your creative ideas. Please send them to the contact address or email mentioned above.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

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### Trumped up charges

Khadija Ismayilova is a prominent investigative journalist and an outspoken government critic in Azerbaijan. She has done extensive reporting on wrongdoings in the country's government and has written many stories exposing shady business deals involving the Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev's extended family.

Shortly before her arrest in December 2014, Ismayilova published a list of the political prisoners in Azerbaijan that had been compiled by a group of human rights defenders, many of whom have since themselves been imprisoned. The day before Khadija was arrested, the Presidential Chief of Staff, Ramiz Mehdiyev, accused Azerbaijani journalists of treason\*. In his statement, Ramiz Mehdiyev referred to Khadija as "the best example" of journalists working against the government.

Khadija has been behind bars since 5 December 2014 on charges of tax evasion, embezzlement and illegal business. The charges against her are trumped up. On 26 December 2014, the offices of the Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's Azerbaijani service, where Khadija worked, were raided and sealed off by members of the Prosecutor's Office without official explanation. Documents and other equipment were taken. Khadija has been previously targeted and harassed by the authorities, including being given a travel ban prior to her arrest.

### Smear Campaign

Khadija has also been the victim of a smear campaign by the media which is controlled by the government which caused Khadija and her family great distress, particularly to her 72-year old mother, Elmira Ismayilova. The press ran stories blaming her mother for her daughter's "shameless lifestyle", while the local press published an article entitled "Khadija's Armenian Mother Should Die" which named the neighbourhood where Elmira Ismayilova lives. The local press also attacked Khadija Ismayilova's sister.

Before she was arrested she made this public statement on Facebook:

"TO INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVISTS: You are doing everything right. Keep doing it.

TO DEMOCRATIC COUNTRIES, DIPLOMATS, INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS:

Just in case, I want to remind my request to international community in terms of possible advocacy actions regarding my possible arrest. Some of you want to help, but can do it only with private diplomacy. Thank you, but No.

WHEN MY CASE IS CONCERNED: if you can, please support by standing for freedom of speech and freedom of privacy in this country as loudly as possible. Otherwise, I rather prefer you not to act at all. I don't want any private diplomacy for my case. I don't believe in human rights advocacy behind closed doors. People of my country need to know that human rights are supported."

## More information

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Here are some links to the investigative journalism of Khadija Ismayilova:

[Latest report \(in Azeri\) is about Czech company of Arzu Aliyeva, president's daughter.](#)  
[2012 President awarded family stake in gold fields](#)

[2012 President's family has a stake in Eurovision concert hall](#)

[2011 Tracking the President's family business](#)

More information from Amnesty International on Azerbaijan:

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/europe-and-central-asia/azerbaijan/>

## Glossary

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**Corruption:** illegal, bad, or dishonest behaviour, especially by people in positions of power

**Prisoner of Conscience:** someone kept in prison because their political, religious, or other beliefs are different from those of the government

**Smear Campaign:** a planned attempt to harm the reputation of a person or company by telling lies about them

**Trumped-Up:** to give or use false information so that someone will be accused of doing something wrong and punished

**Embezzlement:** to secretly take money that is in your care or that belongs to an organization or business you work for

**Treason:** (the crime of) showing no loyalty to your country, especially by helping its enemies or trying to defeat its government

From: <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/>

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