

URGENT ACTION

FREE PROMINENT OPPOSITION LEADER

On December 14, 2023, the Azerbaijani authorities arrested a prominent opposition figure and unrelenting government critic, Tofiq Yagublu, on spurious forgery and fraud charges. A wave of arrests in Azerbaijan that has been targeting independent journalists has now come for one of the country's most vocal opposition leaders. On December 15, a court placed Tofiq Yagublu in pre-trial detention for four months, which has been extended since. He denies all charges, and he is being targeted because of his opposition activities.

TAKE ACTION:

- Write a letter in your own words or using the sample below as a guide to one or both government officials listed. You can also email, fax, call or Tweet them.
- [Click here](#) to let us know the actions you took on **Third Urgent Action 38.20**. It's important to report because we share the total number with the officials we are trying to persuade and the people we are trying to help.

President of Azerbaijan

Ilham Aliyev

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Baku AZ1066, Azerbaijan
Email: office@pa.gov.az

Embassy of Azerbaijan in the United States

Ambassador Khazar Ibrahim

2741 34th St
NW, Washington, DC 20008
Email: azerbaijan@azembassy.us OR
consul@azembassy.us
Salutation: Your Excellency

Dear President / Your Excellency,

I am writing to draw your attention to the prosecution of **Tofiq Yagublu**, a prominent opposition figure, former journalist, and outspoken government critic in Azerbaijan.

On December 14, 2023, police arrested Tofiq Yagublu as he was exiting the metro in central Baku. They later claimed to have found 5,000 euros, 2,500 manats, and an unspecified number of US dollars in his family's home. According to his daughter, Nigar Hazi, the money had been planted by authorities. Tofiq Yagublu was charged with fraud (Article 178.3.2 of the Criminal Code), forgery of a document (Article 320.1), and use of counterfeit documents (Article 320.2).

On December 15, 2023, the Narimanov District Court of Baku issued an order to hold Yagublu in pretrial detention for a period of four months, which has been subsequently extended.

This is not the first time Tofiq Yagublu has been detained on dubious charges. Tofiq Yagublu has been arrested and subjected to ill-treatment for his political activism and criticism of the government for more than a decade now.

I urge you to take the necessary steps that will ensure Tofiq Yagublu's immediate and unconditional release. I also urge you to end the misuse of the criminal justice system in Azerbaijan to target criticism and dissent.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Tofig Yagublu is a prominent opposition figure, a former journalist, and an outspoken government critic in Azerbaijan. He is a member of the Musavat Party and a senior politician in the National Council of Democratic Forces – a coalition of opposition parties and activists. Yagublu has faced years of harassment for his peaceful activism and was recently arrested again as part of a series of arrests in Azerbaijan targeting independent journalists and government critics.

On December 14, 2023, police arrested Tofig Yagublu as he was exiting the metro in central Baku. The same day, about 20 police officers searched Yagublu's home, where they claim to have found €5,000 (about US\$ 5,500), 2,500 Azerbaijani manat (about US\$ 1,500) and an unspecified amount in US dollars.

On December 15, 2023, the Narimanov District Court of Baku ordered to remand Yagublu in pretrial custody pending investigation on forgery and fraud charges, contending that Yagublu would abscond or interfere with the investigation without any evidence to substantiate this claim. The court also referenced the nature and gravity of the offense allegedly committed by Yagublu as a justification of his placement in the pretrial detention.

Yagublu has been repeatedly arrested and subjected to ill-treatment for his political activism and criticism of the government for more than a decade. He was [first arrested in 2013](#) after traveling to the city of Ismayili, in northern Azerbaijan, on January 23-24, 2013, to observe demonstrations and riots that were taking place there at the time. In March 2014, following an unfair trial under politically motivated charges, the Shaki Court of Grave Crimes found him guilty of inciting mass violence and sentenced him to five years in prison. Amnesty International recognized Tofig Yagublu as a prisoner of conscience.

On October 19, 2019, Tofig Yagublu was placed in “administrative detention” for 30 days for purportedly failing to obey police orders at a peaceful protest rally violently dispersed by the police. Yagublu claimed that he was subjected to torture and other ill-treatment while in detention, but the authorities have failed to investigate these allegations.

On December 1, 2020, Tofig Yagublu was detained and handcuffed by police, who then placed a plastic bag over his head and severely beat him at the police station. He gave a video interview the following day, in which severe bruising and swelling was visible around his eyes. In the interview, Tofig Yagublu said that the officers who beat him up demanded that he say on camera that he would halt his political struggle and stop criticizing President Ilham Aliyev.

Tofig Yagublu's unfounded prosecution is part of the Azerbaijani authorities' ongoing crackdown on human rights defenders, government critics, [independent media](#), and [all dissent](#). Criticism of the authorities is routinely met with repression, and those who challenge the government face trumped-up charges, unfair trials and lengthy prison sentences.

NAME AND PRONOUN: Tofig Yagublu (He/him)

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Azeri, English, Russian, or your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: November 12, 2024