

URGENT ACTION

RELEASE ARRESTED JOURNALISTS

At least fourteen journalists have been arrested in Azerbaijan on apparent fabricated charges in retaliation for their critical reporting. Several of them have reportedly been subjected to ill-treatment. They should be immediately released.

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 **Urgent Action 31.24**. 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.

Ilham Aliyev
President of Azerbaijan
19 Istiqlaliyyat Street Baku AZ1066, Azerbaijan
Email: office@pa.gov.az

Embassy of Azerbaijan in the United States
Ambassador Khazar Ibrahim
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NW, Washington, DC 20008
Email: azerbaijan@azembassy.us OR
consul@azembassy.us

Dear President, or Dear Ambassador,

I am concerned about the arbitrary detention of at least 14 journalists in retaliation for their critical reporting.

On April 18, police arrested **Imran Aliyev**, journalist and founder of parliamentary watchdog website, Meclis.info. He is accused of smuggling grant money and charged with “conspiring to bring money into the country unlawfully” (Article 206.3.2 of Criminal Code). His relatives have reported that Imran Aliyev has been ill-treated in custody and forced to waive his right to a lawyer. He had bruises and visible marks of violence on his face and body when appearing at court the next day, where he was remanded in pretrial detention.

At least 13 other journalists remain in prison on similar unfounded charges of smuggling grant money received from international donors and extortion.

These include six journalists from investigative news outlet, AbzasMedia: its director, **Ulvi Hasanli**; his deputy, **Mahammad Kekelov**; editor-in-chief, **Sevinj Vagifgyzy**; staff journalists, **Elnara Gasimova** and **Nargiz Absalamova**; and investigative journalist, **Hafiz Babali**, who are accused with smuggling grant money. Similar charges were brought against journalists, **Aziz Orujov** and **Shamo Eminov**, from online news channel Kanal 13; the founder of independent news outlet Toplum TV, **Alasgar Mammadli**; and its journalist, **Mushfig Jabbar**.

At least three independent journalists, **Teymur Karimov**, **Ibrahim Humbatov**, and **Arshad Ibrahimov**, remain in prison over unfounded and dubious charges of extortion.

I urge you to take steps to immediately release all journalists arrested for their critical reporting, including on charges of smuggling and extortion, ensure an effective investigation of their allegations of ill-treatment, and stop the clampdown on media freedom.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The crackdown on independent media in Azerbaijan has recently intensified.

On November 20, 2023, police raided the office of AbzasMedia in Baku. They claimed to have found 40,000 euros in cash, an alleged grant money brought into the country illegally. **Ulvi Hasanli**, the director of AbzasMedia alleged that the money had been planted by the police. He also reported being beaten and otherwise ill-treated in detention. Deputy director, Mahammad Kekalov, was reportedly held incommunicado for 48 hours and pressured to renounce his lawyer. They were denied visits by their family members and refused calls with their lawyers in the first three months of detention. AbzasMedia publications had previously covered alleged corrupt deals by companies connected with government officials. The outlet was reportedly planning further investigation on gold mine pollution and other human rights violations prior to the arrests.

In December, the court remanded Aziz Orujov, director of Kanal 13, and its anchor, Shamo Eminov, on charges of smuggling grant money (similar to those in the case of AbzasMedia). The court also ordered to block online access to Kanal 13, which had given platform to political opposition and dissenting voices and covered various human rights issues.

Simultaneously, the authorities also arrested at least three journalists covering corruption and human rights issues on charges of extortion (Article 182). They include Teymur Karimov, reporter and director of online news outlet Kanal11; Arshad Ibrahimov, the head of the news website Dunyaninsesi.az operating in Ganja; and Ibrahim Humbatov of Azerinfo.az.

On March 7, 2024, police raided one of the last remaining independent news channels, Toplum TV; its partner organization, the Institute of Democratic Initiatives; and the Platform for the Third Republic, an opposition group detained about a dozen journalists and activists. Toplum TV founder, Alasgar Mammadli, and journalist, Mushfig Jabbar, remain in detention on accusations of smuggling money, while others arrested have been released pending trials.

In recent years, Azerbaijan adopted restrictive amendments regulating the work of media and non-governmental organizations to lay down ground for legal action and prosecution. The new media law adopted in 2022 imposes arbitrary barriers for media organizations to register and obtain funding. Most critical outlets and journalists are denied registration on arbitrary grounds. As a result, they are either forced to cease operations or become vulnerable to prosecution if they continue their work or accept financial contributions of grant money.

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

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: June 20, 2024

NAME AND PRONOUN: Ulvi Hasanli (He/him)