

URGENT ACTION

RELEASE JOURNALISTS ARRESTED AFTER COP29

On December 6, 2024, in the aftermath of UN Climate Change conference COP29 held in Baku, Azerbaijani, authorities detained seven journalists and media workers on spurious charges of “smuggling”, which carry prison sentences from 5-8 years. Their arbitrary detention and prosecution are a reprisal for their journalistic work and part of the government’s crackdown on critical voices, which intensified one year ago.

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 2.25**. 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

CC: 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

Dear President,

I am writing to express my concern about the ongoing arbitrary detention of **at least seven journalists and media workers** after the 2024 UN Climate Change Conference (COP29).

On December 6, 2024, law enforcement arrested Meydan TV employees **Khayala Agayeva, Aytaj Ahmadova, Aynur Ganbarova, Natig Javadli, Aysel Umudova, Ramin Deko (Jabayilzade)**, and Deputy Director of Baku School of Journalism, **Ulvi Tahirov**. They were reportedly accused of smuggling currency into the country. This accusation, which is similar to that used against other critical voices in Azerbaijan, is trumped up and politically motivated. I am particularly concerned that they were refused access to their lawyers after they were detained. Their lawyers reported that they waited from one to five hours to see their clients on December 6.

I urge you to take all necessary steps to ensure an immediate release of all media workers arrested in retaliation for their critical reporting, including the recently arrested employees of MeydanTV and to put an end to the clampdown on media and other independent voices in Azerbaijan.

Sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The UN Climate Change Conference (COP29) was held in Baku, Azerbaijan, on November 11–22, 2024. Independent Azerbaijani voices were missing from the conference¹, with many activists and journalists either behind bars or in exile.

On December 6, 2024, soon after the conference concluded, law enforcement officers arrested multiple journalists and media workers including Meydan TV employees **Khayala Agayeva, Aytaj Ahmadova, Aynur Ganbarova, Natig Javadli, Aysel Umudova, Ramin Deko (Jabrayilzade)** and Deputy Director of the Baku School of Journalism, **Ulvi Tahirov**. They were reportedly charged with smuggling (Article 206.3.2 of the Criminal Code). If convicted, they face up to eight years' imprisonment.

The Azerbaijani authorities' [crackdown against independent media](#) has led to the prosecution of more than 15 journalists and media workers from independent media outlets since November 2023, including [Ulvi Hasanli](#), Sevinj Vagifgizi, Mahammad Kekalov, Nargiz Absalamova, Elnara Gasimova, Hafiz Babali (Abzas Media), [Teymur Karimov](#) (Kanal-11), Aziz Urujov and Shamo Eminov (Kanal-13), Farid Mehralizada, (RFE/RL's Radio Azadliq) as well as founders and [employees of Toplum TV](#) and the Institute for Democratic Initiative, which together trained young journalists, including Akif Gurbanov, Alasgar Mamadli, Ramil Babayev, Ilkin Amrahov, Musgfig Jabarov, Farid Ismayilov, and Elmir Abbasov. All are placed in pre-trial detention, except for Farid Ismayilov and Elmir Abbasov. In addition, the editor in chief of Toplum TV, Khadija Ismayilova has a travel ban. Most of them face similar trumped-up charges of smuggling of foreign currency.

In the run up to COP29 and the elections held in February and September 2024, the Azerbaijani authorities arrested and prosecuted their critics, including prominent scholar Gubad Ibadoghlu, the political opposition activist, Tofiq Yagublu, environmental human right defender, Anar Mammadli, and researcher, Bahruz Samadov. On December 3, 2024, they arrested the well-known human rights defender, Rufat Safarov.

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

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: March 6, 2025

NAME AND PRONOUN: Khayala Agayeva (She/her), Aytaj Ahmadova (She/her), Aynur Ganbarova (She/her), Natig Javadli (He/him), Aysel Umudova (She/her), Ramin Deko (Jabrayilzade) (He/him), Ulvi Tahirov (He/him)

¹COP29: Finance target is a blueprint for inequalities and violations - Amnesty International