

Joint statement by civil society representatives on political arrests and mistreatment of detainees in Azerbaijan

Baku, 17 May 2013

On 30 April 2013, youth activists staged a peaceful action in Baku, Azerbaijan. Participants united around the slogan “No terror,” to commemorate victims on the fourth anniversary of an act of terror committed at the Azerbaijan State Oil Academy. Police arrested Popular Front Party Youth Movement Chairman Abulfaz Gurbanli, N!DA Civic Movement Board Member Turgut Gambar, and Free Youth Organization member Ilkin Rustemzade. Gurbanli and Gambar were sentenced to 10 days of administrative detention, and Rustemzade to 15 days.

We are deeply concerned by reports of mistreatment of these individuals while in the custody of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Baku City Chief Police Office. Following their arrest, police denied the detainees’ access to their lawyers, refused to accept food sent for them by their relatives, and forcibly shaved their heads. On 10 May, photos were distributed on pro-governmental websites, showing the three activists being forced to clean while in detention, along with some derogatory comments about them.

We believe that these activists were targeted for political reasons and were illegally detained. Further, the release of the photos taken of the activists while they were in custody was illegal and constitutes a violation of their right to privacy. It was clearly intended to pressure them and other activists and to discredit them in society. The officials responsible must be identified and punished.

We emphasize that these actions are contrary to both national and international law. The Azerbaijani Constitution prohibits the mistreatment of persons in detention. Further, Article 32 provides for personal inviolability and Article 46 provides for protection of honor and dignity by the state. These principles are also contained in international treaties that Azerbaijan has joined, including the European Convention on Human Rights.

As representatives of civil society, we protest the illegality of these actions. These three young men were arrested for exercising their rights to freedom of expression and assembly. We call for those officials responsible for the violations of their rights to be prosecuted.

We further call on the international community to increase the level of attention to human rights violations in Azerbaijan in the run-up to the presidential election in October, and to exert greater pressure on the authorities to fulfill their international obligations.

1. Intigam Aliyev, Head of the Legal Education Society
2. Arzu Abdullayeva, Chair of the Azerbaijan National Committee of Helsinki Citizens’ Assembly
3. Gubad Ibadoglu, Director of the Economic Research Center
4. Zohrab Ismayil, Head of the “Support to Free Economy” Public Union
5. Vidadi Isgandarli, Chairman of the “Support to Protection of Democracy” Public Union
6. Irada Javadova, Director of the “Enlightenment for Human Rights” Public Union
7. Anar Mammadli, Director of the Elections Monitoring and Democracy Education Center
8. Leyla Yunus Director of the Institute for Peace and Democracy
9. Mirali Huseynov, Chair of the “Democracy Learning” Public Union
10. Rasul Jafarov, Chairman of the Human Rights Club
11. Zaur Akbar, Director of the “Youth Club” Public Union
12. Arastun Orujlu, Director of the “East-West” Research Center
13. Bakhtiyar Hajiyev, Director of the Positive Change Youth Movement

14. Matanat Azizova, Director of the Women's Crisis Center
15. Elchin Abdullayev, Director of the Democratic Institutions and Human Rights Public Union
16. Shahla Ismayil, Director of the Women's Association for Rational Development
17. Samir Kazimli, Coordinator of the Alliance for the Defense of Political Freedom
18. Rovshan Aghayev, Director of the Center of Support of Economic Initiatives
19. Asima Nasirli, Head of the "Feminist Women's Movement" Public Union
20. Ogtay Gulaliyev, Head of the Society for Democratic Reforms
21. Mirvari Gahramanli, Head of the Oil Workers' Rights Protection Committee
22. Mehriban Vazir, Chairman of the Center for Political Culture of Azerbaijani Women Public Union
23. Ilgar Ibrahimoglu, Chairman of the Center for the Protection of Freedom of Conscience and Religion
24. Leyla Aliyeva, Director of the National and International Studies Center
25. Aygun Panjaliyeva, Board Member of the NIDA Civic Movement
26. Rovshan Hajibayli, Director of the Democratic Journalism School
27. Eldar Zeynalov, Director of the Azerbaijan Center for Human Rights
28. Elshan Hasanov, Coordinator of the "Azerbaijan without Political Prisoners" Community Alliance
29. Khalid Kazimov, Director of the Regional Human Rights and Media Center
30. Ulvi Hasanli, Board Member of Free Youth Organization
31. Anar Orujov, Director of the Caucasus Media Investigation Center
32. Alovzat Aliyev, President of the Azerbaijan Migration Center Public Union
33. Elchin Namazov, Director of the Institute for the Defense of Rights and Freedoms

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