

Joint statement of the Azerbaijani Civil Society

[Updated Version]

24 December 2013

We, representatives of Azerbaijan's civil society, condemn the Azerbaijani authorities for keeping Election Monitoring and Democracy Studies Center Director, human rights defender Anar Mammadli in pretrial detention through a December 23 Baku Appeals Court decision. We call for his immediate release.

We are certain that Anar Mammadli incurred the wrath of the Azerbaijan government and was thrown in jail for exposing fraud in this year's presidential election. We believe Anar Mammadli, who clearly was jailed by the authoritarian regime for his professional activity, is a prisoner of conscience and express our solidarity with him.

We assess Anar Mammadli's arrest as a full-scale campaign of revenge by the authoritarian Azerbaijani authorities against civil society.

Anar Mammadli is facing criminal prosecution on trumped up charges of illegal entrepreneurship and tax evasion solely because of the election monitoring activity he and his organization undertook, with support from foreign donors, during the 2013 presidential elections.

Acting on political orders from the Azerbaijani authorities, Nasimi District Court Judge Rashid Samadov placed Anar Mammadli in pretrial detention for three-months on December 16. In continuation of those political orders, Baku Appellate Court Judge Mirpasha Huseynov upheld the decision of Nasimi District Court on December 23.

Together with Anar Mammadli, two other people – Bashir Suleymanli, executive director of EMDSC and Elnur Mammadov, chairman of “International Cooperation of Volunteers” Public Union [the partner organization of EMDS in its election monitoring project] – are also facing similar charges and have been barred from leaving the country.

Unsatisfied with repressive measures against individual civil society activists, on December 17 the parliament adopted new reactionary legislative amendments that will further restrict NGO activities. During the last five years, Azerbaijani authorities have created numerous bureaucratic obstacles for local civil society organizations and sought to weaken their activities by adopting countless reactionary legislative amendments. Not only local civil society organizations, but also branches of international organizations in Azerbaijan are targeted by the authorities. Activities of the Human Rights House and National Democratic Institute have been paralyzed; several others undergo inspections by various state bodies.

The scenario of post-election repressions in Azerbaijan resembles post-election repressions that took place in Belarus in 2011 and Russia in 2012. In particular, the arrest of Anar Mammadli resembles that of well-known human rights defender Alex Bialiatski in Belarus, and legislative amendments restricting NGO activity resemble those adopted in Russia.

All these repressions have the same goal – to silence those who speak about violations of human rights, fraud, and corruption in the country. Dozens of journalistic investigations in the international and local media have proved that the Azerbaijani economy is monopolized by high-level officials and their family members, and public funds are embezzled by a group of oligarchs. International anti-corruption watchdogs and journalists revealed facts proving that contracts related to the most profitable spheres in the extractive industry are given to relatives of the country's top officials.

Investigations have also revealed the illegal flow of billions dollars to offshore zones and other countries via murky schemes. Investigations by local and foreign journalists show that relatives of high-level bureaucrats are engaged in illegal business activities: taking into their hands the most profitable industries by using companies established in offshore zones. However, Azerbaijan's law enforcement neglects its duty to investigate and prosecute these illegal business activities and tax evasion in the millions of dollars by oligarch businessmen.

These investigations and reports, as well as the critical assessment of the Presidential elections by local and international organizations, have provoked Azerbaijani authorities' wrath toward civil society.

The arrest of Anar Mammadli coincided with the eve of the Shahdeniz II gas export investment agreement signing ceremony, a crucial event for Azerbaijan's economy. New amendments restricting NGO activities were adopted on the day of the event.

We consider this a message by Azerbaijani authorities to the West that although they are signing a new strategic energy deal with the European Union, they do not need European values and human rights.

To support this message, before and after the presidential elections the authorities carried out a number of politically motivated arrests, and jailed dozens of innocent people, including prominent journalists, bloggers, human rights defenders, lawyers, youth activists, and members of opposition parties. There are dozens of political prisoners including the chairman of Republican Alternative Movement Ilgar Mammadov, journalists Tofiq Yagublu, Avaz Zeynalli, Parviz Hashimli, journalist and human rights defender Hilal Mammadov, youth activists from NIDA and Azad Genjlik organizations, as well as other political and public figures.

The authorities not only jail their opponents, they also created a fertile ground for flourishing corruption and money-laundering by big business empires under the control of high-level bureaucrats by adopting numerous repressive legislative amendments that restrict freedom of information in the country.

No government official has ever declared their assets to the public, although such requirements have been in the law for many years. The declaration of incumbent President Ilham Aliyev, which was obligatory for him to register as a candidate with the Central Election Commission in the presidential elections, has been hidden from the Azerbaijani people.

While corruption and bribery flourish in the country, high-level officials regularly trample over rule of law through the massive violation of citizens' property rights.

Three fundamental freedoms declared in the Azerbaijani constitution and the European Convention on Human Rights – freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, and freedom of association – are on the verge of extinction.

In recent years, two journalists, Elmar Huseynov and Rafiq Tagi, were killed for their professional work, another journalist Novruzali Mammadov died in the prison due to lack of necessary medical assistance; several other journalists have been the targets of unsuccessful murder attempts. During the last seven years, in almost every quarter we have witnessed the arrest of another journalist, blogger or human rights defender.

The private lives of prominent critical and investigative journalists have been violated and information gathered is used as blackmail by the security services – they are filmed secretly and illegally, and these videos are distributed in the Internet. The broadcasts of all independent local and foreign TV and radio companies have ceased in the country and the broadcast media has been forced to serve the interests of the ruling regime.

The situation with regards to freedom of association has also deteriorated further in recent years. The authorities refuse to register NGOs established by independent activists. Hundreds of NGOs have been denied registration, including EMDSC, led by Anar Mammadli.

In the past ten years we witnessed deterioration of the situation of freedom of assembly.

Azerbaijan, a member state of the United Nations, Council of Europe and Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), does not fulfill its own obligations in the field of human rights. The Azerbaijani authorities violate the Constitution, as well as human rights conventions that it has voluntarily joined.

Azerbaijan's response to the critical assessment of the last presidential elections by the OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission, as well as widespread crackdown of local election watchdogs before and after the voting day, including the arrest of EMDSC's chairman, once again shows that the 2013 presidential election was conducted in an atmosphere of serious intolerance by the authorities.

We, the representatives of local civil society organizations, call on the Azerbaijani government to release immediately all political prisoners, including Anar Mammadli, Ilgar Mammadov and others.

We also call on the Azerbaijani government to bring legislation in line with Council of Europe standards in order to ensure fundamental freedoms in the country. We also call on the Azerbaijani government to fulfill commitments it has undertaken within the framework of the UN Convention against Corruption, Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) and Open Government Initiative.

In 2014, from May to October, for six months, Azerbaijan will chair the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe – one of the main guarantors of human rights in Europe. We believe that in preparation for the chairmanship in such a prominent international organization, Azerbaijan must demonstrate respect for human rights.

Therefore, we call on the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, Human Rights Commissioner of the Council of Europe, members of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, and other bodies of the Council of Europe to react to the unbearable condition of human rights in Azerbaijan. We call on all interested parties in the Council of Europe to address the Azerbaijani authorities and to impose necessary sanctions on them if they do not fulfill their human rights commitments.

We also call on the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe to demand that the Azerbaijani government stop repressions against human rights, and free victims of these repressions before considering approving the mandate of Azerbaijan's delegation for the January session.

Leaders of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe [OSCE] Parliamentary Assembly and OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, the European Commission, members of the European Parliament and Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, representatives from the United States and Canadian governments, and a number of number of other influential international organizations have recently expressed concern over Anar Mammadli's arrest and the anti-civil society and anti-human rights legislative changes.

Numerous international human rights organizations have assessed Anar Mammadli's arrest as political repression, and Amnesty International has declared him a prisoner of conscience.

In response to accusations from international organizations, the Azerbaijani authorities justified its repressions in a statement by the Azerbaijani Prosecutor General's Office that called concerns expressed over Mammadli's case "pressure on Azerbaijan's independent judiciary."

We, representatives of Azerbaijan's civil society, share the concerns of international organizations over the human rights situation in Azerbaijan, and remind the Azerbaijani authorities that human rights issues cannot be considered the internal affairs of any state.

To this end, we once again call on the international community to undertake all necessary steps to improve the deteriorating human rights situation in Azerbaijan.

List of endorsers of statement on Anar Mammadli

Human rights defenders

1. Akif Gurbanov, Democratic Initiatives Institute
2. Alakbar Mammadov, human rights defender
3. Alovzat Aliyev, Azerbaijan Migration Center
4. Alovzat Sadigly, Education Research Center Public Union
5. Annagi Hacibeyli, Azerbaijan Lawyers Association
6. Arzu Abdullayeva, Helsinki Citizens Assembly - Azerbaijan
7. Arastun Oruclu, East-West Research Center
8. Arif Aliyev, "Yeni Nasil" journalists association
9. Asabali Mustafayev, Democracy and Human Rights Resource Center
10. Aytakin Imranova, Islam, Democracy and Human Rights Center
11. Azer Mehtiyev, Public Union For Economic Initiatives

12. Avaz Hasanov, Society for Humanitarian Research
13. Bashir Suleymanli, Election Monitoring and Democracy Studies Center
14. Dilara Efendiyeva, human rights defender
15. Elchin Abdullayev, Democratic Institutions and Human Rights Public Union
16. Elchin Namazov - Institute for Defense of Rights and Freedoms, chairman
17. Eldaniz Yusibov, World Union of Azerbaijani Political Immigrants, the Netherlands
18. Emin Huseynov, Institute for Reporters' Freedom and Safety
19. Emin Aslan, Media Rights Institute
20. Elnur Mammadov, Volunteers International Cooperation Public Union
21. Elshan Hasanov, Public Alliance "Azerbaijan Without Political Prisoners"
22. Elshan Naghiyev, Center for Citizen Initiatives and Legislation Improvement
23. Fuad Hasanov, Democracy Monitor
24. Gulnara Akhundova, Rights advocate
25. Gunay Huseyn, Democracy and Women's Initiatives social union
26. Hafiz Hasanov, Law and Development Public Association
27. Hasan Huseynli "Intelligent Citizen' Enlightenment Center
28. Ilgar Gasimov, Legal Assistance Public Union
29. Irada Javadova, Education on Human Rights Public Association
30. Ilham Huseynli, Democratic Development and Economical Cooperation PU
31. Intiqam Aliyev, Legal Education Society
32. Khalid Kazimov, Regional Human Rights and Media Center
33. Khaled Aghaliyev, Media Rights Institute
34. Lazim Umudov, "Aran Regional Human Rights" Public Union
35. Leyla Yunus, Peace and Democracy Institute
36. Leila Alieva, Center for National and International Studies
37. Letafet Malikova, Regional Human Rights and Education Public Association
38. Maharram Goyushov, Center for Gazakh Regional Development Resources
39. Matanat Azizova, Woman Crisis Center
40. Mehriban Zeynalova, CLEAN WORLD
41. Mehemmed Talibli, Economic Innovation Center
42. Metanet Muslumgizi, Media Rights Center
43. Malahat Nasibova, Democracy and NGO's development Resource Cente
44. Mubariz Tagiyev, Human Rights in Extractive Industries Public Union
45. Mirvari Gahramanli, Committee to Protect Oil Workers
46. Mirali Huseynov, "Democracy Learning" Public Union
47. Novella Jafarova , Association for Protection of Women's Rights, on behalf of D. Aliyeva
48. Nasrulla Nurullayev, Chairman, Care for the elderly intellectuals
49. Nasraddin Karamov, "Aran" Ecological Education Public Union
50. Nicat Imran, Chairman of the Board of Youth Organization "Solidarity"
51. Ogtay Gulaliyev, Society for Democratic Reforms
52. Rafik Tamrazov, Center of Equal Opportunities
53. Rashid Hacili, Media Rights Institute
54. Rasul Jafarov, Human Rights Club
55. Ruhangiz Huseynova, "Solidarity Among Women" SU
56. Saadet Bananyarli, Azerbaijan Section of the International Organization on Human Rights
57. Saida Gojamanli, Azerbaijan Bureau on Human Rights and Law
58. Sevil Yuzbasheva, Eco World public union

59. Sevil Allahverdiyeva , Center of Women’s Problems Research CWPR
60. Solmaz Mehdiyeva, Human Rights Resource Center on Guba-Khachmaz regions
61. Shahin Hajiyeu, Najaf Najafov Fund
62. Shaban Nasirov, Human Rights – 2003 Public Union
63. Shahla Ismayil, Women's Association for Rational Development
64. Shukur Izzatoglu, PU Regional Centre for Human Rights and Social Studies
65. Vidadi Isgenderli, human rights defender
66. Ziya Guliyev, Chairman of Center for Legal Initiatives
67. Zohrab Ismayil, Public Association for Assistance to Free Economy

Lawyers

68. Alasgar Mammadli, independent lawyer
69. Aslan Ismayilov, lawyer
70. Asima Nasirli, lawyer
71. Elchin Sadigov, lawyer
72. Eldeniz Vahidbeyli, lawyer
73. Fariz Namazli, lawyer
74. Gunay Ismayilova, lawyer
75. Khalid Bagirov, lawyer
76. Khalisa Shahverdi, Lawyer
77. Leyla Madatli, lawyer
78. Muzaffar Bahkishov, lawyer
79. Namizad Safarov, lawyer
80. Nemat Karimli, lawyer
81. Rosvhana Rahimova, lawyer
82. Sadiga Mehdizade, lawyer
83. Yalchin Imanov, lawyer
84. Yashar Aghazade, lawyer
85. Zibeyda Sadigova, lawyer

Journalists/ Media

86. Aynur Imranova, freelance journalist
87. Ayten Mammadova, journalist
88. Elchin Mammad, editor-in-chief of “Yuksalish Namina” newspaper
89. Elnur Astanbayli, journalist
90. Emin Milli , Meydan TV director
91. Ganimat Zahid, editor-in-chief of Azadlig newspaper
92. Idrak Abbasov, journalist
93. Jahangir Youssouf - Photojournalist
94. Kamran Mahmudov, journalist
95. Kamila Maharramli-journalist
96. Khadija Ismayil, journalist
97. Mahammad Turkman, journalist
98. Mehman Aliyev, Turan Agency
99. Mehman Huseynov, photo and video reporter

100. Nijat Kamal, journalist
101. Rahim Hajiyeu, first deputy editor-in-chief of "Azadlig" newspaper
102. Rovshan Hajiyeu, journalist
103. Samir Kazimli, journalist
104. Shahvalad Chobanoglu, journalist
105. Tahmina Tagizade, Baku coordinator of Meydan TV
106. Tural Mustafayev, freelance Reporter
107. Turkan Huseynova, microblogger
108. Ulviyya Asadzade, journalist
109. Zahir Amanov, "Janub Khabarlari" newspaper
110. Zamin Haji, journalist

Politicians/activists

111. Ali Karimli , Azerbaijan Popular Front Party chairman
112. Altay Goyushov
113. Arif Yunusov, conflictologist
114. Azer Ismayil, Sabirabad regional branch of Musavat Party
115. Azer Gasimli, political analyst
116. Bakhtiyar Hajiyeu, youth activist
117. Beybala Ebil, Chairman of the council of CFPF, member of the National Council
118. Ehed Memmedli
119. Elchin Hasanov
120. Eldar Namazov, chairman of EI Movement
121. Erkin Gadirli, board member of Republican Alternative (ReAI) Movement
122. Gultakin Hajibayli, Committee on International Relations of the National Council
123. Hikmat Hajizade, political expert
124. Isa Gambar, Musavat Party chairman
125. Jamil Hasanli, Chairman of the National Council
126. Javid Hajibayli, Musavat Party
127. Kanan Gasimli, Member of N!DA Civic Movement
128. Khazar Teyyublu, founder of the Teleqraf.az website, member of the National Council
129. Mehriban Vazir
130. Mirmahmud Miralioğlu, chairman of the Classical Popular Front Party (CPFP)
131. Nargiz Yagublu, deputy chairman of Musavat Party's Youth Organization
132. Narmin Rahimli, activist
133. Natiq Adilov, Azerbaijan Popular Front Party
134. Natig Jafarli, Executive Secretary of REAL Movement
135. Punhan Imamli, chairman of Youth Organization of Citizens' Solidarity Party
136. Rashad Shirin, Political Analyst
137. Samir Asadli, Central Executive Apparatus of the Civic Solidarity Party
138. Sulhaddin Akbar, chairman of the Open Society Party
139. Tural Abbasli, board member of Musavat Party
140. Tural Huseynli
141. Turgut Gambar, Board member of N!DA Civic Movement
142. Ulvi Hasanli, Board member of N!DA Civic Movement
143. Vidadi Mirkamal, chairman of the Legal Committee of the National Council
144. Yegana Hajibekova National Council member

Others Public Figures

145. Aytikin Huseynli
146. Bahar Haji-zade
147. Elmir Mirzayev
148. Gunay Gasimova
149. Gunay Ismayilova
150. Gunay Rzayeva
151. Gulchin Seyidova
152. Islam Sarvaroglu
153. Jahangir Alibayzade
154. Mammad Mammadzada
155. Murad Hasanli
156. Nazli Agayeva
157. Naila Aliyeva
158. Nigar Fatali
159. Rasim Karaja
160. Rovshan Agayev
161. Sadig Fataliyev
162. Samira Ahmadbayli
163. Sevda Safaraliyeva
164. Shahla Sultanova
165. Shahla Aliguliyeva
166. Tatyana Kryuchkina
167. Vafa Subhani