

Joint statement on the arrest of NGO leader in Azerbaijan

We, the Civil Society of Azerbaijan, strongly condemn the detention on fabricated charges of our colleague, head of the "Intelligent Citizen" Awareness Center, Hasan Huseynli and call for his immediate release.

Mr. Huseynli, 57 years old, was detained yesterday, March 31 at around 18:00, as a suspect on charge of hooliganism for allegedly stabbing another person.

Working in the second largest city of Azerbaijan, Gandja, Hasan Huseynli is the most well-known and active member of Azerbaijani civil society in the western region of the country.

As the head of the "Intelligent Citizen" Enlightenment Center, established in 2004, Huseynli has been known for promotion of open society, human rights and democracy ideas in the western part of Azerbaijan and implementation of programs on enlightenment of the youth and their participation in study abroad programs. With support of donors such as USAID, Peace Corps, Baku Education Information Center, Open Society Institute, European Commission, British Embassy, SILBA, ALDA, Visegrad, Robert Bosch Foundation and so on, the "Intelligent Citizen" Awareness Center has carried out more than 20 successful projects.

The local governor has waged pressure campaign against the "Intelligent Citizen" Awareness Center and its director Hasan Huseynli in the recent years. Throughout Azerbaijan, the NGOs increasingly face multiple challenges implementing their work, working with local people and even holding conferences, seminars or trainings in closed places.

Despite of such illegal bans, the "Intelligent Citizen" Awareness Center has served as a resource center for fellow NGOs from the capital and other regions of Azerbaijan, supporting implementation of their projects. That is why it has become the target of the local authorities.

Huseynli's case bears striking similarity to that of journalists Ganimat Zahid and Serdar Alibayli, activist Yadigar Sadigov and bloggers Emin Milli and Adnan Hajizade who were arrested on the false hooliganism charges.

We consider Hasan Huseynli's detention to be part of a larger clampdown on civil society in the wake of presidential election. This crackdown was kicked off in November 2013 with legal actions against Anar Mammadli, head of the Azerbaijani election watchdog Elections Monitoring and Democracy Studies Center, and excessive tightening of NGO legislation. The politically-motivated sentencing of two other activists, Ilgar Mammadov and Tofiq Yagublu, to 7 and 5 years in jail respectively is yet another evidence of the crackdown.

Detention of NGO leaders on false charges and the rise in persecutions following the draconian NGO amendments represent violation of the Article 11 of the European Convention on Human Rights (freedom of assembly and of association) and the obligations of Azerbaijan undertaken before the Council of Europe.

Coming less than two month to go before Azerbaijan's assumes its first Chairmanship of the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers, this arrest once again demonstrates Azerbaijan's reluctance to protect fundamental rights and freedoms.

We call on the Azerbaijani government to free our colleague Hasan Huseynli and the civil society activists detained or convicted on trumped-up charges, to respect human rights values and duly fulfill its international human rights obligations and commitments.

April 01, 2014

Undersigned:

1. **Akif Gurbanov**, Democratic Initiatives Institute
2. **Arzu Abdullayeva**, Helsinki Citizens Assembly - Azerbaijan
3. **Asabali Mustafayev**, Democracy and Human Rights Resource Center
4. **Aytəkin Imranova**, Islam, Democracy and Human Rights Center
5. **Anar Orujov**, Caucasus Media Investigations Center
6. **Aslan Ismayilov**, lawyer
7. **Azer Mehtiyev**, Public Union For Economic Initiatives
8. **Avaz Hasanov**, Society for Humanitarian Research
9. **Aynur Bashirova**, Media expert
10. **Aynur Imranova**, Support for Development of Democracy and Media
11. **Bashir Suleymanli**, Election Monitoring and Democracy Studies Center
12. **Elchin Abdullayev**, Democratic Institutions and Human Rights Public Union
13. **Elchin Mammad**, Social Union of Legal Education of Sumgait Youth
14. **Elchin Hasanov**, Rights advocate
15. **Elman Abbasov**, Rights advocate

16. Elnur Malikov, Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization
17. Eldeniz Vahidbeyli, lawyer
18. Emin Huseynov, Institute for Reporters' Freedom and Safety
19. Fuad Hasanov, Democracy Monitor
20. Gulnara Akhundova, Rights advocate
21. Gubad Ibadoglu, Economic Researches Center
22. Hafiz Hasanov, Law and Development Public Association
23. Jasur Mammadov, Doctrine Journalists' Military Research Center
24. Ilgar Ibrahimoglu, Rights advocate
25. Intigam Aliyev, Legal Education Society
26. Vugar Bayramov, Center for Economic and Social Development
27. Khalid Kazimov, Regional Human Rights and Media Center
28. Leila Alieva, Center for National and International Studies
29. Letafet Malikova, Regional Human Rights and Education Public Association
30. Matanat Azizova, Woman Crisis Center
31. Mehriban Zeynalova, Clean World
32. Mubariz Tagiyev, Human Rights in Extractive Industries Public Union
33. Novella Jafarova, Association for Protection of Women's Rights, on behalf of D. Aliyeva
34. Nasrulla Nurullayev, Chairman, Care for the elderly intellectuals
35. Rafik Tamrazov, Center of Equal Opportunities
36. Rashid Hacili, Media Rights Institute
37. Rashad Shirin, Political Analyst
38. Rasul Jafarov, Legal Protection and Awareness Society
39. Ruhangiz Huseynova, Solidarity Among Women
40. Rovshan Agayev, Center Support for Economic initiatives
41. Saadet Bananyarli, Azerbaijan Section of the International Organization on Human Rights
42. Sabit Bagirov, Entrepreneurship Development Foundation
43. Saida Gojamanli, Azerbaijan Bureau on Human Rights and Law
44. Samir Aliyev, Center For Support For Economic Initiatives
45. Shahin Hajiyev, Najaf Najafov Fund
46. Shahla Ismayil, Women's Association for Rational Development
47. Shahin Nasrullayev, Rights advocate
48. Farman Nabiyev, Mingechevir Media Center
49. Ziya Guliyev, Center for Legal Initiatives
50. Zohrab Ismayil, Public Association for Assistance to Free Economy