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PRESS RELEASE

Azerbaijan: Supreme Court Upholds Bloggers' Conviction

ARTICLE 19 is deeply concerned by the Azerbaijani Supreme Court's decision to uphold rulings in the case of bloggers Emin Milli and Adnan Hajizade. ARTICLE 19 believes that Milli and Hajizade, who are imprisoned on charges of hooliganism, were targeted for expressing opinions critical of the Azerbaijani authorities. ARTICLE 19 calls on the Azerbaijani government to release Milli and Hajizade from prison and to cease the imprisonment of persons for expressing critical opinions.

On 19 August, the Azerbaijani Supreme Court considered the case of imprisoned bloggers and youth activists Emin Milli and Adnan Hajizade. In its decision, the Court upheld the lower courts' rulings, which convicted Milli and Hajizade of hooliganism and sentenced them to two and a half years and two years of imprisonment respectively. The two were arrested on 8 July 2009 after appealing to police as victims of an assault following an incident in which they were attacked in a restaurant.

"Milli and Hajizade are clearly in prison for exercising their right to freedom of expression", comments ARTICLE 19 Executive Director Agnès Callamard. *"Yesterday's ruling demonstrates the lack of independence of the Azerbaijani judiciary."*

Milli and Hajizade's lawyers plan to apply to the European Court of Human Rights now that the domestic appeals process has been exhausted. The OSCE Representative for Freedom of the Media and the Council of Europe High Commissioner for Human Rights have both expressed concern regarding Milli and Hajizade's imprisonment, noting that the move seemed to be an attempt by the Azerbaijani authorities to silence critical voices.

ARTICLE 19 calls on the Azerbaijani government to release Milli and Hajizade and others currently imprisoned for expressing critical opinions, including *Realniy Azerbaijan* and *Gundelik Azerbaijan* newspaper editor-in-chief Eynulla Fatullayev and *Yeni Fikir* youth movement leader Ruslan Bashirli. ARTICLE 19 further calls on the Azerbaijani government to cease its imprisonment of persons for political reasons, and to fully comply with its international commitments to freedom of expression.

NOTES TO EDITORS:

- For more information, please contact Rebecca Vincent at rebecca@article19.org or +44 20 7324 2500.

- ARTICLE 19 is an independent human rights organisation that works around the world to protect and promote the right to freedom of expression. It takes its name from Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which guarantees free speech.