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PRESS RELEASE

Azerbaijan: Release of One Blogger Not Enough

London 18.11.10: ARTICLE 19 welcomes the release of blogger Adnan Hajizade after serving 16 months of a 24-month prison sentence, but expresses its deep concern regarding the alarming state of freedom of expression in Azerbaijan.

Following Hajizade's release, ARTICLE 19 calls on the Azerbaijani authorities to immediately and unconditionally release others imprisoned for expressing critical opinions, including blogger Emin Milli, editor Eynulla Fatullayev, and youth activist Ruslan Bashirli. ARTICLE 19 urges the authorities to take immediate steps to address the broader freedom of expression problems in the country.

Today the Baku Court of Appeals released Hajizade 10 months early on parole. He was arrested and charged with hooliganism along with fellow blogger and youth activist Emin Milli in July 2009, when they appealed to police as victims of an assault. They were later convicted and sentenced to 24 and 30 months' imprisonment respectively. Hajizade and Milli are widely considered to have been arrested as a result of their civic activism and video blogging. Shortly before their arrest, Hajizade had appeared in a satirical online video which criticised the Azerbaijani government's high expenditure on two imported donkeys from Germany.

"We are so pleased that Adnan has been released", comments ARTICLE 19 Executive Director Agnès Callamard. "However, the Azerbaijani authorities need to do much more to improve freedom of expression in the country, starting with the release of others imprisoned for expressing critical opinions".

ARTICLE 19 has serious concerns regarding the broader freedom of expression situation in Azerbaijan, where journalists are often subjected to acts of violence whilst their attackers go unpunished, criminal law is abused to imprison government critics, and the state dominates the broadcast media. As a result, self-censorship has become pervasive, with few persons willing to undertake the significant risks associated with pursuing critical or investigative journalism.

ARTICLE 19 calls upon the Azerbaijani authorities to take immediate steps to address this alarming situation, in compliance with Azerbaijan's obligations under international law.

NOTES TO EDITORS:

- For more detailed information on the freedom of expression situation in Azerbaijan, please see ARTICLE 19's recent report *Living as Dissidents: Freedom of Expression in Azerbaijan*, available at <http://www.article19.org/pdfs/publications/living-as-dissidents-freedom-of-expression-in-azerbaijan.pdf>, or the recent joint report *Free Expression under Attack: Azerbaijan's Deteriorating Media Environment*, available at <http://www.article19.org/pdfs/publications/free-expression-under-attack.pdf>.
- For more information, please contact: Rebecca Vincent, Europe Programme Manager/Coordinator 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.