

URGENT ACTION

ACTIVIST ARRESTED, CHARGED WITH TREASON

Azerbaijani human rights defender Leyla Yunus and her husband, Arif Yunus, have been charged with treason and other crimes. Leyla Yunus has been placed in pre-trial detention and her husband has been placed under travel restrictions.

Azerbaijani human rights defender **Leyla Yunus** was on her way to a press conference on 30 July when men in civilian clothes believed to be police stopped her car and forced the driver to change direction. Nothing was known of her whereabouts after that until, after several hours, the Office of the Prosecutor General called Leyla Yunus's husband, **Arif Yunus**, to tell him that she had been detained. Arif Yunus went to the prosecutor's office and was interrogated and detained too. Amnesty International considers Leyla Yunus a prisoner of conscience.

A judge ruled the same day that Leyla Yunus should be remanded in custody. According to an informed source in Azerbaijan, she has been charged with treason, the basis for which was not explained in court, and with tax evasion, fraud and misuse of authority in relation to a grant received by her NGO, which the authorities had prevented her from registering. Arif Yunus is also facing criminal charges of treason, tax evasion and fraud, and the Court placed him under travel restrictions.

Leyla and Arif Yunus had been by Azerbaijani police in the preceding weeks. The couple had been placed under surveillance and prevented from leaving the country, and their passports were taken away on 28 April. The authorities had also regularly summoned Leyla Yunus to the prosecutor's office and interrogated her as a witness in connection with the criminal proceedings against independent Azerbaijani journalist Rauf Mirgadirov: he had been arrested on what appear to be trumped-up charges of spying for Armenia.

Leyla Yunus had been collaborating with Rauf Mirgadirov on joint reconciliation projects with Armenian NGOs. She is also an outspoken critic of the Azerbaijani government. On 25 July, Leyla Yunus organized a press conference, where she called for an international boycott of the first European Games (to be held in Baku in 2015) because of the regime's dire human rights record.

Please write immediately in Azeri, English, Russian or your own language:

- Calling on the authorities to release Leyla Yunus immediately and unconditionally;
- Insisting on full respect for, and protection of, the right to freedom of expression in Azerbaijan.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 11 SEPTEMBER 2014 TO:

President

Ilham Aliyev
Office of the President of Azerbaijan
19 Istiqlaliyyat Street
Baku AZ1066, Azerbaijan
Fax: + 994 12 492 0625
Email: office@pa.gov.az

Salutation: Dear President Aliyev

Prosecutor General
Zakir Qaralov
7 Rafibeyli Street
Baku AZ1001, Azerbaijan
Email: info@prosecutor.gov.az

Salutation: Dear Prosecutor General

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please insert local diplomatic addresses below:

Name Address 1 Address 2 Address 3 Fax Fax number Email Email address Salutation Salutation

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the first update of UA 182/14. Further information:
<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/EUR55/007/2014/en>

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Azerbaijan is locked in a dispute with its neighbour, Armenia, over the ethnic Armenian-populated region of Nagorno-Karabakh, which declared unilateral independence from Azerbaijan in 1991. Armenia and Azerbaijan fought a war over the region in the early 1990s, which left thousands dead and hundreds of thousands displaced. The local de facto authorities in Nagorno-Karabakh have maintained an effective independence, with a fragile ceasefire coming into effect in 1994. Both Azerbaijani and Armenian governments often fuel nationalist sentiments against each other for political reasons.

Amnesty International has longstanding concerns about the Azerbaijani authorities' failure to respect their international obligations to protect the rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly. Dissenting voices in the country frequently face trumped-up criminal charges, physical assault, harassment, blackmail and other reprisals from the authorities and groups associated with them. Law-enforcement officials regularly use torture and other ill-treatment against detained civil society activists, with impunity.

Independent human rights and pro-democracy organisations have long faced harassment and severe restrictions in Azerbaijan. Over the past several years, the European Court of Human Rights has issued several decisions finding the Azerbaijani authorities responsible for violating the right to freedom of association by arbitrarily denying or delaying the registration of NGOs. NGO leaders often have no choice but to operate behind the strict legal framework, especially when it comes to receiving and registering grants. This is then used by the authorities to instigate criminal case against them based on financial irregularities.

Amnesty International has documented dozens of cases like that of Leyla and Arif Yunus, and has recognized at least 19 people prisoners of conscience in Azerbaijan, jailed solely for their peaceful attempts to exercise their right to freedom of expression and association. For more information, see: *Behind bars: Silencing dissent in Azerbaijan* (<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/EUR55/004/2014/en>).

Names: Leyla Yunus (f), Arif Yunus (m)
Gender m/f: both

Further information on UA: 182/14 Index: EUR 55/009/2014 Issue Date: 31 July 2014