

URGENT ACTION

YOUTH ACTIVISTS SENTENCED, AWAITING APPEAL

Eight youth activists from the Azerbaijani civic movement NIDA were sentenced to between six and eight years' imprisonment on 6 May. Their lawyers appealed the sentence. The decision of the appeals court is expected on 11 July.

Pro-democracy youth activists **Rashadat Akhundov, Mammad Azizov, Bakhtiyar Guliyev, Zaur Gurbanli, Rashad Hasanov, Uzeyir Mammadli, Shahin Novruzlu and Ilkin Rustamzade** were arrested between March and May 2013 in Azerbaijan and later convicted under false charges of possession of drugs and explosives, hooliganism, and planning to organize acts of public disorder. They are prisoners of conscience, detained solely for their involvement in civil activism and their plans to organize a peaceful protest against human rights violations in Azerbaijan.

Police claim to have found Molotov cocktails in the homes of Bakhtiyar Guliyev and Shahin Novruzlu on 8 March 2013 but their parents insist that these were planted by plainclothes officers who searched their houses. The activists' prosecution also relies on the "confessions" of Bakhtiyar Guliyev and Mammad Azizov who, however, allege that they have been tortured and forced to give testimonies in the absence of lawyers of their choice.

Mammad Azizov told his lawyer that he had been beaten after refusing to testify, as a result of which he temporarily lost hearing in one ear. Shahin Novruzlu stated that he had been tortured by the police. During his first appearance in court his four front teeth were missing after he had been interrogated by police. Shahin was 17 years old at the time. The authorities have not investigated these allegations of torture and other ill-treatment.

On 6 May 2014, Baku City Grave Crimes Court passed a guilty verdict and sentenced the NIDA activists them to between six and eight years' imprisonment. It ignored dismissed the allegations of torture and ignored the relevant evidence. The activists' lawyers have appealed the sentence. The appeal process started on 26 June and will last until 11 July. The final decision of the appeal process is expected on 11 July.

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

- Calling for an immediate and unconditional release of Rashadat Akhundov, Mammad Azizov, Bakhtiyar Guliyev, Zaur Gurbanli, Rashad Hasanov, Uzeyir Mammadli, Shahin Novruzlu and Ilkin Rustamzade who are all prisoners of conscience, detained solely for exercising their right to freedom of expression;
- Calling for an immediate, impartial and effective investigation into the allegations of torture and ill-treatment of the NIDA activists;
- Insisting on a full respect for and protection of the rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 11 JULY 2014 TO:

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

Salutation: Dear President
Prosecutor General
Zakir Qaralov
7 Rafibeyli Street
Baku, AZ 1001
Azerbaijan
Fax: +994 12 492 3230
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 second update of UA 68/13. Further information:

www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/EUR55/009/2013/en

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

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

Amnesty International has documented dozens of such cases and recognised at least 19 individuals as prisoners of conscience in Azerbaijan, imprisoned solely in connection with their attempts to peacefully exercise their right to freedom of expression. For more information, see: *Behind bars: Silencing dissent in Azerbaijan* (<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/EUR55/004/2014/en>).

On 6 May 2014 over 150 supporters of the convicted NIDA activists gathered outside the Baku City Grave Crimes Court. Some of the supporters shouted protest slogans after the verdicts were read out in court. This prompted plainclothes and uniformed police officers, who were stationed outside, to use force to break up the crowd. Video footage showed protesters being punched and journalists having their cameras thrown on the ground. At least 26 individuals were dragged into a waiting bus and driven to a nearby police station. Some were released with warnings and fines, but five activists were detained for several days.

Name: Rashadat Akhundov, Mammad Azizov, Bakhtiyar Guliyev, Zaur Gurbanli, Rashad Hasanov, Uzeyir Mammadli, Shahin Novruzlu and Ilkin Rustamzade
Gender m/f: m

Further information on UA: 68/13 Index: EUR 55/006/2014 Issue Date: 3 July 2014