

URGENT ACTION

ACTIVISTS FACE 12 YEARS' JAIL ON NEW CHARGES

Eight pro-democracy activists charged in connection with organizing a peaceful protest on 10 March are now facing up to 12 years of imprisonment under further new charges of planning to organize 'public disorder'.

Pro-democracy youth activists **Bakhtiyar Guliyev, Mahammad Azizov, Shahin Novruzlu, Rashad Hasanov, Rashadat Akhundov, Zaur Gurbanli, Uzeyir Mammadli** and **Ilkin Rustamzade** were arrested between March and May this year and charged with possession of drugs and explosives, and hooliganism. Amnesty International declared them prisoners of conscience. On 12 September, they were additionally charged with planning to organize acts of public disorder and using Molotov cocktails on the 10 March protest against deaths in the army.

Police claim to have found Molotov cocktails in the homes of Bakhtiyar Guliyev and Shahin Novruzlu on 8 March, but their parents insist that these were planted by plainclothes officers who searched their houses. Bakhtiyar Guliyev and Mahammad Azizov attempted to withdraw "confessions" they had given earlier in the absence of lawyers of their choice. Mahammad Azizov told his lawyer that he had been beaten after refusing to testify against Rashad Hasanov. Their "confessions" were later aired on state television, and the authorities have continued to rely on them and have not investigated allegations of torture and other ill-treatment.

According to defence lawyers, there is no link between the three activists accused of preparing the Molotov cocktails and the others in this case, except their involvement in organizing the peaceful protest. All eight activists deny the charges against them.

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

- √ Noting that the eight activists (naming them) are prisoners of conscience detained solely for the peaceful exercise of their rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly, and calling on the authorities to release them immediately and unconditionally;
- √ Calling on them to order a prompt, effective and impartial investigation into allegations of torture and other ill-treatment, particularly in the cases of Mahammad Azizov, Bakhtiyar Guliyev and Shahin Novruzlu;
- √ Urging them to ensure that the rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly are respected and that no one is persecuted for the peaceful exercise of their rights.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 30 OCTOBER 2013 TO:

Prosecutor General

Zakir Qaralov
Prosecutor General of the Republic of
Azerbaijan
7 Nigar Rafibeyli Street
Baku AZ 1001, Azerbaijan
Fax: +994 12 392 32 30 (keep trying –
office hours are GMT+4)

Salutation: Dear Prosecutor General

President

Ilham Aliyev
Office of the President of the Republic of
Azerbaijan
18 Istiqlaliyyat Street
Baku AZ 1066, Azerbaijan
Fax: +994 12 392 0625 (keep trying –
office hours are GMT+4)
Email: office@pa.gov.az

Salutation: Dear President Aliyev

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 68/13. Further information:

www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/EUR55/004/2013/en

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Police claim that on 8 March, a day before they arrested the activists, they found 19 bottles filled with gasoline and illegal drugs in the home of Bakhtiyar Guliyev, three bottles of gasoline and illegal drugs in the home of Shahin Novruzlu, and more illegal drugs in the home Mahammad Azizov. Relatives living with the activists say that the drugs and fuel bottles were planted by plainclothes police officers during the searches.

Rashad Hasanov was arrested on 14 March, Uzeyir Mammadli and Rashadat Akhundov on 30 March, and Zaur Gurbanli on 1 April. All of them were charged with the illegal possession of firearms and explosives. Ilkin Rustamzade was arrested on 17 May and initially charged with hooliganism for his alleged involvement in the filming and uploading of a peaceful "Harlem Shake" video to Youtube, which he denies. Prosecutors have not clarified how Ilkin Rustamzade is suspected of organising "public disorder" together with the seven members of NIDA civic movement. His only link to the 10 March protest is his role in creating a Facebook event page publicising the protest, which proceeded peacefully until it was violently broken up by the authorities.

When searching the house of Bakhtiyar Guliyev on 8 March, the police showed neither identification papers nor a search warrant. While the family were asked to wait in one room, the officers claimed to have found a large box containing the 19 bottles in another room in the Guliyevs' apartment. The family said that this box had not been in their apartment before the arrival of the officers, and they later discovered a box with fuel containers in their front yard, from which they believe the officers filled the bottles.

When an initial search of Mahammad Azizov's room found nothing, police returned the same day to search a second time, and then claimed to have found drugs wrapped in a paper. His family believe the police planted the drugs during the first search. After their arrest the activists were interrogated without access to lawyers of their choosing, and Mahammad Azizov, Bakhtiyar Guliyev and Shahin Novruzlu were forced to appear on state television reading pre-prepared confessions. Mahammad Azizov told his lawyer that he had been made to confess by threats to prosecute his family, and Shahin Novruzlu, who was under 18 at the time, was forced to confess without a legal guardian present.

The only evidence presented against Rashadat Akhundov, Zaur Gurbanli and Uzeyir Mammadli is their membership of NIDA's board.

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

Further information on UA: 68/13 Index: EUR 55/009/2013 Issue Date: 18 September 2013