

Reporters Without Borders

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Europe/Ex-USSR - Azerbaijan

Arrest

Two months preventive detention ordered for Azerbaijani journalist

5 December 2014

Reporters Without Borders demands the immediate release of widely respected Khadija Ismayilova, accused of having driven a colleague to attempted suicide.

The Sabail District Court of Baku issued the preventive sentence order on 5 December.

Ismayilova, one of the "[100 Heros of Information](#)" honoured by Reporters Without Borders during World Press Freedom Day on 3 May, is former director of [Radio Azadlyg](#), the Azerbaijani service of *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, and contributes to a number of other media organizations.

She is well known for deep investigations into the corruption at the highest levels of government. She is one of very few journalists who addresses that highly sensitive topic.

She is [charged](#) under article 125 of the Penal Code with having allegedly provoked the attempted suicide of **Tural Mustafayev**. That former contributor to *Radio Azadlyg* and another independent media platform, *Meydan TV*, had tried to kill himself two months earlier. The investigation was said to point to Ismayilova as responsible. Mustafayev told *Meydan TV* that he could not speak about his testimony because he had signed a non-disclosure agreement. But according to sources close to Ismayilova, he would say that she would have dismissed him from *Radio Azadlyg*, which she then directed.

Before Ismayilova was brought to court, she had been summoned for interrogation by the city prosecutor in the attempted suicide case. Her lawyer, Elton Guliev, did not have time to speak to reporters in detail, but foresaw arrest as possible. Ismayilova had told her family before she entered the courtroom to bring her clothing and her medications.

"We are scandalized by these false accusations and this unjust detention," said Johann Bihl, head of the Eastern Europe and Central Asia desk of Reporters Without Borders. *"The defamation campaigns against Khadija Ismayilova that began two years ago have now reached their peak. The arrest of a leading figure in independent investigative journalism in Azerbaijan who sets the standard in the field, proves that officials are more determined than ever to eliminate all opposition to their rule. We urge the court system to show independence, withdraw charges against her and free her as soon as possible. Officials must put a stop to this relentless campaign against her."*

The day before the court order, Ramiz Mehdiyev, the head of presidential administration, gave a [speech](#) to present a new document, entitled "A World Order of Double Standards and Modern Azerbaijan." In his talk, Mehdiyev accused Ismayilova of disseminating hateful ideas about Azerbaijan for the benefit of her alleged "friends," a reference to western countries.

Ismayilova has been subjected for many years to pressure and legal action from officials. In [2012](#) and [2013](#), she was targeted by systematic defamation as well as attempts at blackmail involving explicit videos. Last February, she was accused of spying for the United States.

In recent months, the Azerbaijani government has been conducting an [unprecedented crackdown](#) on human rights advocates, journalists and their supporters. In that context, officials have also been stepping up action against Ismayilova.

She is [being sued for libel](#), as part of a legal proceeding that began on 9 October, by a former member of the Popular Front party. He accuses her of having defamed him in an article in which she pointed to his work in subverting opposition organizations on behalf of intelligence services.

On 12 October, the chief prosecutor [barred](#) her from leaving the country. Two weeks earlier, she had appeared before the European parliament to speak of the human rights situation in Azerbaijan, and to highlight the plight of her [imprisoned colleagues](#).

During that trip, Ismayilova received a number of anonymous threats. On her return from Strasbourg on 3 October, she was [held](#) at the Baku airport and questioned for four hours.

[At least 15 journalists and bloggers](#), whose right to a fair trial is never respected, are presently imprisoned because of their professional activities. Azerbaijan is ranked 160th of 180 countries in the Reporters Without Borders [2014 World Press Freedom Index](#).

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