



For immediate release – 12 November 2009

PRESS RELEASE

Azerbaijan: Imprisonment of Bloggers Politically Motivated

ARTICLE 19 condemns the prison sentences handed down to two internet journalists and youth activists, Emin Milli and Adnan Hajizade, on 11 November 2009 on politically motivated “hooliganism” charges.

On 8 July 2009, Emin Milli and Adnan Hajizade were physically attacked, apparently unprovoked, in a Baku restaurant. Witnesses reported that the two had been discussing their youth movement activities when two strangers approached them, demanded that they stop discussing such matters, and attacked them. Following the attack, Milli and Hajizade filed reports as victims of an assault with the police and requested medical assistance. The police did not provide them with medical assistance; rather, they proceeded to interrogate the youths for five hours without their attorneys being present.

The criminal investigation and trial proceedings have been widely criticised by international and national observers as flawed and pre-determined. An ARTICLE 19 observer, present at one of the court hearings on 6 November, witnessed one of the alleged victims testified that he did not remember writing a statement accusing Milli and Hajizade, a statement which had also reportedly stated he was attacked by three men.

Notwithstanding the evidence, the Sabail District Court in Baku sentenced Emin Milli to two and a half years’ imprisonment, while Adnan Hajizade received a sentence of two years.

ARTICLE 19 believes that Milli and Hajizade have been the targets of political persecution because they used blogging as a tool to further civic participation. This is a particularly troubling development in light of deteriorating media freedoms in Azerbaijan ahead of planned parliamentary elections planned for November 2010.

“The imprisonment of Emin Milli and Adnan Hajizade sends a clear signal to anyone critical of the current government,” comments Dr Agnès Callamard, ARTICLE 19 Executive Director. *“Don't try to organise, don't encourage public debate and don't try new media.”*

ARTICLE 19 is concerned that the imprisonment of Emin Milli and Adnan Hajizade is another measure by the Azerbaijani authorities to silence independent and critical voices. The authorities should immediately release Emin Milli and Adnan Hajizade, expunge the charges against them and thoroughly investigate and prosecute those originally responsible for assaulting them.

NOTES TO EDITORS:

- For more information please contact: Nathalie Losekoot, Senior Programme Officer: Europe at Nathalie@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.