

PUBLIC

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Fear for Safety

28 April 2003

**AZERBAIJAN Eldar Zeynalov (m), Head of the Human Rights Centre of Azerbaijan
Zemfira Yusif-Zade (f), his sister-in-law
E. Tarifova (f), his aunt
Leyla Yunus (f), Head of the Institute for Peace and Democracy
Other Human Rights Defenders in Azerbaijan**

Eldar Zeynalov, Zemfira Yusif-Zade, E. Tarifova and Leyla Yunus have recently been subjected to a series of threats and attacks, which they fear may be state sponsored. Amnesty International is concerned for their safety and at continuing attempts to hinder the work of human rights defenders in Azerbaijan.

On 28 April, Eldar Zeynalov's sister in law, Zemfira Yusif-Zade and aunt, E. Tarifova, who share a flat with him and his wife were beaten up by neighbours, who demanded that they should leave the country. The police were called but reportedly refused to protect them. Later on the same day, a group of 30 to 40 members of the ruling party of Azerbaijan, turned up at the office of the Institute for Peace and Democracy. They attacked the office and demanded that the head of the institute, Leyla Yunus, should also leave the country.

Six days before this, on 22 April, Amnesty International member and head of the Human Rights Centre of Azerbaijan, Eldar Zeynalov had returned to the capital Baku from a human rights workshop in the disputed region of Nagorno Karabakh. On the same day, members of pro-governmental organizations appeared on the state-run television station to denounce him and Leyla Yunus, as "enemies of the people". Eldar Zeynalov's whereabouts and home telephone number were broadcast, and the audience was asked to take action to ensure that he would not be able to move around freely.

The following day, a group of 30 to 50 people attacked the office of the Human Rights Centre of Azerbaijan. Eggs and other items were thrown at the building, which also had its windows broken. A wooden cross carrying an effigy of Eldar Zeynalov was set on fire and protestors called for him to be tried for treason. A member of the Organization for the Liberation of Karabakh threatened to kill Eldar Zeynalov and to destroy the Human Rights Centre in a suicide attack. When the police were called, one of the policemen reportedly expressed his support for the violent action.

Two days later, on 25 April, the Human Rights Centre was once again attacked, with members of a government party reportedly participating in the violence. On the same day, a pro-government newspaper also condemned Eldar Zeynalov, by writing that he was not of Azeri origin and therefore could not do any good for Azerbaijan.

According to an Azeri television report on 24 April, The Ministry of Interior is reportedly considering criminal procedures against Eldar Zeynalov on issues relating to his visit to Armenia and the disputed region of Nagorno Karabakh.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Tensions have continued between Armenians and Azeris over the disputed region of Nagorno Karabakh which is populated mainly by Armenians and which has proclaimed itself independent. The open conflict ended with a ceasefire in 1994, but the status of Nagorno Karabakh has not been resolved.

The Human Rights Centre of Azerbaijan and the Institute for Peace and Democracy in Azerbaijan belong to the independent Federation of Azerbaijani Human Rights Organizations. The two organizations have been criticised on several occasions by pro-governmental institutions. Eldar Zeynalov and Leyla Yunus have collected information about human rights violations in Azerbaijan. As head of the Human Rights Centre, Eldar Zeynalov has also engaged in communication with other human rights groups from the Caucasus for many years.

Amnesty International has been informed on other occasions that Azerbaijani government officials had publicly condemned the actions of civil society activists, who had peacefully exercised their right to freedom of expression. The son of President Aliev of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliev in February had condemned all protests against the Ceyhan-Baku pipeline as masterminded by Armenia and directed against the interest of Azerbaijan.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in English, Russian or Azeri or your own language:

- condemning the threats and attacks against Zemfira Yusif-Zade, E. Tarifova, Eldar Zeynalov, Leyla Yunus and human rights defenders in Azerbaijan;
- expressing concern at the continuing and increased attacks against human rights defenders and calling for their targeting, harassment and intimidation to cease immediately;
- calling on the authorities to take the necessary measures to guarantee their safety and the safety of their relatives including Zemfira Yusif-Zade and E. Tarifova;
- calling upon the authorities to impartially and thoroughly investigate the attacks and bring anyone found responsible for violating the rights of Eldar Zeynalov, Leyla Yunus, Zemfira Yusif-Zade, E. Tarifova and other human rights defenders to justice;
- calling upon the authorities to protect the right to freedom of expression and the right to freedom of assembly according to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Azerbaijan is a party.

APPEALS TO:

President of the Azerbaijani Republic

President Heydar Aliev

Istiqlal St. 19

370066

Baku

Azerbaijani Republic

Telegrams: President Aliev, Baku, Azerbaijan

Fax: + 994 12 92 06 25

E-mail : president@gov.az

Salutation: Dear President

Minister of Internal Affairs of the Azerbaijani Republic

Lt.-Gen. Ramil Usubov

Ministry of Internal Affairs

Husu Haiyev Str.7

370005

Baku

Azerbaijani Republic

Telegrams: Internal Affairs Minister, Baku, Azerbaijan

Fax: + 994 12 92 45 90

Salutation: Dear Lt.-Gen. Ramil Usubov

COPIES TO: Diplomatic representatives of Azerbaijan accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 9 June 2003.