

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

PUBLIC STATEMENT

Index: EUR 55/006/2009
17 July 2009

Azerbaijan: Two youth activists arrested

Amnesty International is deeply concerned by the latest development in the continued clampdown against civil society and media activists in Azerbaijan. Emin Milli (real name Emin Abdullayev) and Adnan Hacizade were arrested on 8 July on a charge of 'hooliganism', and remanded in custody for two months on 10 July. Amnesty International believes that both may have been targeted for peacefully exercising their right to freedom of expression.

Emin Milli and Adnan Hacizade are well-known youth activists who have used online networking tools, including Youtube, Facebook and Twitter, to disseminate information about the socio-political situation in Azerbaijan. Emin Milli is also a co-founder of a youth group named Alumni Network while Adnan Hacizade is a coordinator of the youth movement known as OL!

According to information available to Amnesty International, on 8 July 2009 Emin Milli and Adnan Hacizade were dining with civil society activists in a restaurant in the capital, Baku. While they were discussing online activism, two well-built men were said to have approached their group, demanded that they stop talking about politics, and assaulted Emin Milli and Adnan Hacizade. The assault reportedly resulted in injuries to the two youths, including the breaking of Adnan Hacizade's nose and injury to Emin Milli's leg.

Following the events, Emin Milli and Adnan Hajizade went to the police to lodge a complaint. However, rather than accepting their complaint about their assault, the police detained first Adnan Hacizade and then Emin Milli as the latter reportedly refused to leave the police station without his fellow activist. Both are said to have been charged with "hooliganism carried out by a group of people", which carries up to five years' imprisonment.

Amnesty International is concerned at reports that the police did not carry out a thorough and impartial investigation of the events; among other things they failed to interview potential witnesses. Despite this, the alleged assailants were reportedly discharged.

Of further concern are reports that the authorities have not respected the rights of the two detained activists guaranteed by the law of Azerbaijan and international human rights standards. In particular, according to information received by Amnesty International, Emin Abdullayev and Adnan Hacizade were denied access to their lawyers until the afternoon of 9 July. During this time, however, Adnan Hacizade was reportedly questioned by the authorities.

Azerbaijani human rights organizations have expressed concern that the charges brought have been fabricated to punish the two youths for their online activism critical of the government. This is not the first case in which the Azerbaijani authorities have used criminal charges to silence peaceful dissenting voices. For instance, prisoner of conscience Qanimat Zahid, the editor-in-chief of opposition newspaper *Azadliq*, was sentenced to four years' imprisonment on charges of hooliganism and assault in March 2008. Several other journalists have also been imprisoned on questionable charges in the past few years. Amnesty International recently highlighted its

concerns on the increasingly limited sphere for freedom of expression in Azerbaijan in the report *Azerbaijan: Independent journalists under siege* (AI Index: EUR/55/004/2009).

Amnesty International considers that if Emin Milli and Adnan Hajizade are being detained solely for the peaceful exercise of their right to freedom of expression, their arrest and detention would violate Azerbaijan's obligations to respect their right to freedom of expression. In such a situation, Amnesty International would regard them as prisoners of conscience, who should be released immediately and unconditionally.

Public Document

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