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AZERBAIJAN

RELEASE JOURNALISTS ARRESTED AFTER COP29

On December 6, following the UN Climate Change Conference (COP29) in Baku, Azerbaijani authorities arrested seven journalists and media workers. They face dubious charges of "smuggling," which carry prison terms of 5 to 8 years. These arrests are a clear retaliation against their journalistic work. The government's crackdown on dissenting voices has escalated over the past year.

Write to the President of Azerbaijan urging him to:

- Take all necessary steps to ensure the immediate release of all media workers arrested in retaliation for their critical reporting, including the recently detained employees of Meydan TV.
- Put an end to the clampdown on media and other independent voices in Azerbaijan.

Write to:

Ilham Aliyev
President of Azerbaijan
19 Istiqlaliyyat Street
Baku AZ1066, Azerbaijan
office@pa.gov.az

Salutation: Your Excellency:

And copy:

Mr. Vasif Cingiz Oglu Abutalibov
Chargé d'affaires, a.i.
Embassy of the Republic of Azerbaijan
275 Slater Street, Suite 1203
Ottawa, ON K1P 5H9
Tel: (613) 288-0497 Fax: (613) 230-8089
Email: reception@azembassy.ca

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The UN Climate Change Conference (COP29) took place in Baku, Azerbaijan, from November 11 to 22, 2024. Despite the significance of the event, independent Azerbaijani voices were largely absent. Many activists and journalists were either in prison or forced into exile, effectively silencing critical perspectives on climate and other issues during the conference.

On December 6, just days after COP29 ended, Azerbaijani authorities arrested several journalists and media workers. Among those detained were Meydan TV employees Khayala Agayeva, Aytaj Ahmadova, Aynur Ganbarova, Natig Javadli, Aysel Umudova, Ramin Deko (Jabrayilzade), and the Deputy Director of the Baku School of Journalism, [Ulvi Tahirov](#). They were charged under Article 206.3.2 of the Criminal Code for alleged "smuggling." If convicted, they face up to eight years in prison.

[This crackdown adds to an alarming trend](#). Since November 2023, over 15 journalists and media workers from independent outlets have been prosecuted. These include individuals from Meydan TV, Abzas Media, [Kanal-11](#), Kanal-13, Radio Azadliq (RFE/RL), and [Toplum TV](#), as well as members of the Institute for Democratic Initiatives. Most have been placed in pre-trial detention, facing dubious charges such as currency smuggling.

Notably, Khadija Ismayilova, the editor-in-chief of Toplum TV, remains under a travel ban. Two media workers, Farid Ismayilov and Elmir Abbasov, are not detained but still face charges. This wave of repression has paralyzed independent media, targeting those who trained and mentored young journalists.

The arrests of journalists are part of a broader effort by Azerbaijani authorities to silence dissent. In the lead-up to COP29 and elections held in February and September 2024, authorities targeted prominent critics.

These included scholar [Gubad Ibadoghlu](#), political activist Tofiq Yagublu, environmental and human rights defender [Anar Mammadli](#), and researcher [Bahruz Samadov](#). On December 3, they arrested well-known human rights defender [Rufat Safarov](#).

This escalating campaign against independent voices underscores a troubling pattern of repression, further isolating Azerbaijan's civil society and undermining freedoms essential for democratic accountability.

Please take action as soon as possible until March 31, 2025! The UA will be duly updated should there be the need for further action.