

URGENT ACTION

Azerbaijan: Release journalists arrested after COP29

On 6 December, in the aftermath of UN Climate Change conference COP29 held in Baku, Azerbaijani authorities detained seven journalists and media workers on spurious charges of “smuggling”, which carry prison sentences from 5-8 years. Their arbitrary detention and prosecution is a reprisal for their journalistic work and part of the government’s crackdown on critical voices, which intensified one year ago.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

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

Dear President,

I am writing to express my concern about the ongoing arbitrary detention of at least seven journalists and media workers after the 2024 UN Climate Change Conference (COP29).

On 6 December 2024, law enforcement arrested Meydan TV employees Khayala Agayeva, Aytaj Ahmadova, Aynur Ganbarova, Natig Javadli, Aysel Umudova, and Ramin Deko (Jabrayilzade), and Deputy Director of Baku School of Journalism Ulvi Tahirov. They were reportedly accused of smuggling currency into the country. This accusation, which is similar to that used against other critical voices in Azerbaijan, is trumped up and politically motivated. I am particularly concerned that they were refused access to their lawyers after they were detained. Their lawyers reported that they waited from one to five hours to see their clients on 6 December.

I urge you to take all necessary steps to ensure an immediate release of all media workers arrested in retaliation for their critical reporting, including the recently arrested employees of MeydanTV and to put an end to the clampdown on media and other independent voices in Azerbaijan.

Sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The UN Climate Change Conference (COP29) was held in Baku, Azerbaijan, on 11–22 November 2024. Independent Azerbaijani voices were missing from the conference¹, with many activists and journalists either behind bars or in exile.

On 6 December, soon after the conference concluded, law enforcement officers arrested multiple journalists and media workers including Meydan TV employees Khayala Agayeva, Aytaj Ahmadova, Aynur Ganbarova, Natig Javadli, Aysel Umudova, Ramin Deko (Jabrayilzade) and Deputy Director of the Baku School of Journalism Ulvi Tahirov. They were reportedly charged with smuggling (Article 206.3.2 of the Criminal Code). If convicted, they face up to eight years' imprisonment.

The Azerbaijani authorities' [crackdown against independent media](#) has led to the prosecution of more than 15 journalists and media workers from independent media outlets since November 2023, including [Ulvi Hasanli](#), Sevinj Vagifgizi, Mahammad Kekalov, Nargiz Absalamova, Elnara Gasimova, Hafiz Babali (Abzas Media), [Teymur Karimov](#) (Kanal-11), Aziz Urujov and Shamo Eminov (Kanal-13), Farid Mehralizada, (RFE/RL's Radio Azadliq) as well as founders and [employees of Toplum TV](#)^[OBJ] and the Institute for Democratic Initiative, which together trained young journalists, including Akif Gurbanov, Alasgar Mamadli, Ramil Babayev, Ilkin Amrahov, Musgfig Jabarov, Farid Ismayilov and Elmir Abbasov. All are placed in pre-trial detention, except for Farid Ismayilov and Elmir Abbasov. In addition, the editor in chief of Toplum TV, Khadija Ismayilova has a travel ban. Most of them face similar, trumped-up charges of smuggling of foreign currency.

In the run up to COP29 and the elections held in February and September 2024, the Azerbaijani authorities arrested and prosecuted their critics, including prominent scholar [Gubad Ibadoghlu](#), the political opposition activist Tofiq Yagublu, environmental human right defender [Anar Mammadli](#) and researcher [Bahruz Samadov](#). On 3 December, they arrested the well-known human rights defender [Rufat Safarov](#).

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Russian, English
You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: March 2025
Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PRONOUN: [Khayala Agayeva](#) (She/her), [Aytaj Ahmadova](#) (She/her), [Aynur Ganbarova](#) (She/her), [Natig Javadli](#) (He/him), [Aysel Umudova](#) (She/her), [Ramin Deko \(Jabrayilzade\)](#) (He/him), [Ulvi Tahirov](#) (He/him)

¹ [COP29: Finance target is a blueprint for inequalities and violations - Amnesty International](#)