

PRESS RELEASE - THE OBSERVATORY

AZERBAIJAN: Rasul Jafarov sentenced to 6.5 years of jail for human rights work

Paris-Geneva, April 16, 2015 – The six and a half year jail sentence handed down today by the Baku Grave Crimes Court against Rasul Jafarov is unacceptable, declared the Observatory. The conviction of the human rights defender, arbitrarily detained since August 2014, should be overturned and he should be immediately and unconditionally released.

The Observatory mandated a lawyer, Ms. Anastassiya Miller, to observe the trial against **Rasul Jafarov**. She attended several hearings, including today's verdict. To her, ***“it is clear that the trial was based on trumped-up charges and that there is no evidence of Mr. Jafarov's guilt”***.

An Observatory delegation visited Baku in January 2015 to meet with civil society actors in order to first-hand witness the impact of the Azeri government crackdown on independent voices. The delegation also tried to visit jailed human rights defenders, including Rasul Jafarov. Despite having submitted several official requests, access to the prisons was impossible.

Following this mission, the Observatory will release its report on April 21, documenting the repression against human rights defenders in Azerbaijan and denouncing its intensification ahead of the Baku Euro Games, to be held in June 2015.

The Observatory calls for the immediate release of Rasul Jafarov and all the other arbitrarily detained defenders, including: **Intigam Aliyev, Leyla Yunus, Arif Yunusov, Khadija Ismayilova, Anar Mammadli, Hilal Mammadov and Rauf Mirqadirov¹**.

Background information:

Mr. Rasul Jafarov actively participated in the “Sing for Democracy” and the “Art of Democracy” movements ahead of the Eurovision song contest in Baku in May 2012, and was planning a campaign called “Sports for Human Rights” prior to the European Games which will take place in Baku in June 2015. Mr. Jafarov is also the Head of the “Human Rights Club”, established in December 2010. Despite repeated attempts to register his NGO with the Azerbaijani government, registration was refused several times by the authorities.

Mr. Jafarov was arrested on August 2 on charges of illegal entrepreneurship (Article 192 of the Criminal Code), tax evasion (Article 213) and abuse of office (Article 308). His detention term was extended by three months on October 23. On December 12, additional charges were brought against him under Articles 179.3.2 (embezzlement allegedly causing damage to third parties identified as “victims” by the investigative body) and 313 (service forgery)². In addition to his imprisonment term, Mr. Jafarov will have to cover the cost of 350 Manat (approx. 310 Euros) for court expertise.

The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders (OBS) was created in 1997 by FIDH and the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT). The objective of this programme is to intervene to prevent or remedy situations of repression against human rights defenders.

¹ For more information about the seven human rights defenders currently in detention, please see Observatory Open Letter to the authorities, dated December 18, 2014, as well as Observatory Press Release, dated January 14, 2015.

² For more information about Mr. Jafarov's trial, see The Observatory's Urgent Appeal, AZE 001 / 0115 / OBS 001.3, April 2, 2015.

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