

## PRESS RELEASE - THE OBSERVATORY

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### **Azerbaijan: Trial against Ms. Leyla and Mr. Arif Yunus to open after a year in custody**

**Paris-Geneva, July 10, 2015** – On July 13, 2015, the trial of Ms. Leyla and Mr. Arif Yunus will open before the Baku Administrative-Economical Court. After almost a year in detention, where they have been denied the medical treatment they desperately require, they will face charges such as “large-scale fraud”, “forgery”, “tax evasion” and “illegal business.” The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders urges the authorities in Azerbaijan to immediately and unconditionally release them.

**Ms. Leyla Yunus**, Director of the Institute for Peace and Democracy (IPD) and a member of OMCT General Assembly, and Mr. **Arif Yunusov**, Chief of IPD's department of conflictology, were arrested as part of a large crackdown targeting human rights defenders and civil society which began in the summer of 2014. In addition to the charges listed above, they are also facing charges of “state treason” that will be examined in a separate process at a later stage. The Observatory recalls that human rights defenders Mr. Intigam Aliyev and Mr. Rasul Jafarov are currently serving a 7.5 and 6.5-year prison sentence respectively on very similar and equally spurious charges of tax evasion, illegal entrepreneurship, and abuse of power.

**“The abysmal record of the judiciary in Azerbaijan sadly shows that there is absolutely no chance that the Yunus couple will benefit from a fair and impartial trial”**, said FIDH President, Karim Lahidji.

**“This is why we call once again for the authorities in Azerbaijan to immediately and unconditionally release our colleague Leyla and her husband Arif, as well as all human rights defenders currently detained for their work”**, added OMCT Secretary General, Gerald Staberock.

Since they were first detained, Ms. Leyla and Mr. Arif Yunus have suffered from serious health conditions and been denied the appropriate medical care. Ms. Leyla Yunus has lost 16 kilograms since her arrest and is struggling with the consequences of an enlarged liver. She also has a severe case of diabetes, however her special dietary needs have been denied. Finally, while she has been assaulted on several occasions by her cell-mate, no measures have been taken by the penitentiary authorities to ensure her physical integrity.

Mr. Arif Yunusov, who was hospitalised for a pre-stroke condition shortly before his arrest, suffers from high blood pressure. He is being held at the Investigative Prison of the Ministry of National Security, the only remaining prison in Azerbaijan which is not under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Justice. This situation puts him at high risk of being tortured and ill-treated. The extreme levels of isolation and the absence of a proper medical unit in this prison has been denounced by various international human rights bodies, such as the UN Committee Against Torture (CAT) and the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT).

*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.*

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