



His Excellency Charles Michel  
Prime Minister of Belgium  
Rue de la Loi 16  
1000 Brussels  
Belgium

4 June 2015

Dear Prime Minister Michel,

As members of the Sport for Rights campaign, we are writing regarding the inaugural European Games that will take place from 12-28 June in Baku, Azerbaijan.

Although the Azerbaijani regime spends a great deal of time and money to promote a positive image abroad, at home, it is engaged in a brutal human rights crackdown. This crackdown has particularly intensified over the past year, as the authorities have worked aggressively to silence all forms of criticism and dissent.

As a result, there are now dozens of political prisoners in the country, including eight journalists and five human rights defenders (listed in the appendix), jailed on spurious charges, with some facing prison sentences of up to 12 years. Another human rights defender is trapped in the Swiss embassy in Baku, facing arrest if he leaves. These individuals have been targeted for their work defending the rights of others and telling the truth about the situation in their country.

In light of these serious problems, we are asking you to make your participation in the opening ceremony of the Games contingent on the release of the jailed journalists and human rights defenders in Azerbaijan. Similarly, we ask that you do not send a high-level government delegation to the Games unless these individuals are released. Further, we urge you to make an immediate public statement condemning the ongoing human rights crackdown in the country and calling for the release of the jailed journalists and human rights defenders.

We want to be clear that we are not calling for a public boycott of the Games. We are simply asking you to take this opportunity to impact positive, democratic change, and to help our Azerbaijani colleagues, in the spirit of Belgian values.

Sincerely yours,

Mike Harris, Director, 89up

Thomas Hughes, Executive Director, ARTICLE 19

Robert Hårdh, Executive Director, Civil Rights Defenders

Nina Ognianova, Europe and Central Asia Program Coordinator, Committee to Protect Journalists

Maran Turner, Executive Director, Freedom Now

Danuta Przywara, Chair of the Board, Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights

Jodie Ginsberg, Chief Executive, Index on Censorship

Karim Lahidji, President, International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), within the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders

Jesper Højberg, Executive Director, International Media Support

Simon Papuashvili, Project Coordinator, International Partnership for Human Rights (IPHR)

Bjørn Engesland, Secretary General, Norwegian Helsinki Committee

Karin Karlekar, Director, Free Expression Program, PEN American Centre

Ivana Skalova, Head of the Eastern European Program, Center for Democracy and Human Rights, People in Need

Emma Hughes, Strategy Director, Platform

Joanna Furmaga, Chair, Polish Green Network

Gerald Staberock, Secretary General, World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), within the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders

Yulia Slutskaaya, Director, Solidarity with Belarus Information Office

## APPENDIX: LIST OF JAILED JOURNALISTS AND HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

### *Jailed journalists:*

1. **Nijat Aliyev** – editor-in-chief of the website azadxeber.az, serving a 10-year prison sentence on spurious charges of drug possession and the illegal import and sale of religious literature.
2. **Araz Guliyev** – editor of the website xeber44.com, serving an eight-year prison sentence on spurious charges of illegal possession of weapons, inciting hatred, and offensive action against the flag or emblem of Azerbaijan.
3. **Parviz Hashimli** – *Bizim Yol* newspaper reporter and editor of the moderator.az website, serving an eight-year prison sentence on spurious charges of organising the sale of weapons from Iran.
4. **Seymur Hezi** – *Azadliq* newspaper reporter and presenter of the Azerbaijan Hour satellite television programme, serving a five-year prison sentence on spurious hooliganism charges.
5. **Khadija Ismayilova** – Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty journalist detained on spurious charges of embezzlement, illegal entrepreneurship, tax evasion, abuse of power, and inciting someone to attempt suicide.
6. **Hilal Mammadov** – editor-in-chief of *Tolishi Sedo* newspaper, serving a five-year prison sentence on spurious charges of drug possession, treason, and inciting hatred.
7. **Rauf Mirkadirov** – *Zerkalo* newspaper columnist, detained on spurious treason charges, awaiting trial.
8. **Tofiq Yagublu** – *Yenu Musavat* newspaper columnist, serving a five-year prison sentence on spurious charges of organising mass riots and using violence against police officers.

### *Jailed (and effectively jailed) human rights defenders:*

1. **Intigam Aliyev** – human rights lawyer and Chairman of the Legal Education Society, serving a 7.5-year prison sentence on spurious charges of tax evasion, illegal entrepreneurship, and abuse of power.
2. **Emin Huseynov** – Director of the Institute for Reporters' Freedom and Safety, trapped at the Swiss Embassy in Baku, facing arrest on spurious charges of tax evasion, illegal entrepreneurship, and abuse of power.
3. **Rasul Jafarov** – Chairman of the Human Rights Club, serving a 6.5-year prison sentence on spurious charges of tax evasion, illegal entrepreneurship, and abuse of power.
4. **Anar Mammadli** – Chairman of the Election Monitoring and Democracy Studies Centre, serving a 5.5-year prison sentence on spurious charges of tax evasion, illegal entrepreneurship, and abuse of power.
5. **Arif Yunus** – historian and academic, detained on spurious charges of treason and fraud, awaiting trial.
6. **Leyla Yunus** – Director of the Institute for Peace and Democracy, detained on spurious charges of treason, fraud, forgery, tax evasion, and illegal entrepreneurship, awaiting trial.