

3 March 2017

Azerbaijan: Mehman Huseynov is sentenced to two years imprisonment on defamation charges

On 3 March 2017, human rights defender and journalist **Mehman Huseynov** was arrested in the courtroom of Surakhansky district court of Baku and sentenced to two years imprisonment on charges of defamation.

[Mehman Huseynov](#) is an Azerbaijani human rights defender and journalist who documents corrupt practices and violations of human rights in Azerbaijan. He is Chairman of the **Institute for Reporters' Freedom and Safety (IRFS)**, an Azerbaijani human rights organisation that campaigns for freedom of expression and freedom of information.

On 3 March 2017, the Surakhansky district court of Baku found Mehman Huseynov guilty of “slander, which equates to an accusation of committing a very serious crime” under part 2 of Article 147 of the Criminal Code of Azerbaijan and sentenced to two years imprisonment. Mehman Huseynov intends to appeal this decision.

The case is connected to the illegal arrest of Mehman Huseynov on 9 January 2017. At approximately 8:00 PM that day, in the centre of Baku, five off-duty policemen in plainclothes forcibly dragged Mehman Huseynov to an unmarked vehicle where his mouth was sealed with tape, a bag was put over his head and he was beaten and tasered. Later he was brought to an unknown location where he was beaten further by eight unidentified people. Following this, Mehman Huseynov was brought to the 22nd Nasimi police station and held incommunicado for over twelve hours. He was falsely accused of disobedience to a lawful order by police officers. On 10 January 2017, Mehman Huseynov was tried in a closed hearing and found guilty, by Nasimi district court of Baku, of committing an administrative offence under Article 535 part 1, of the Administrative Code of Azerbaijan (disobedience to a lawful order by police officers), on the basis of false charges. Mehman Huseynov was sentenced to a 200 manat fine (approximately 105 euro).

Several international organisations issued statements about the illegal detention and ill-treatment of Mehman Huseynov on 9 and 10 January 2017. Mehman Huseynov could not receive a medical examination or medical aid in Azerbaijan since his ID was revoked in 2012 and hospitals refused to accept him. Front Line Defenders and The Georgian Center for Psychosocial and Medical Rehabilitation for Torture Victims sent a team of medical doctors to Baku to conduct a medical and psychological examination of the human rights defender, according to the Istanbul Protocol. The allegations made by Mehman Huseynov regarding inhumane treatment are consistent with the findings of the medical examination and the mental health assessment.

The chief of Baku police has filed a lawsuit against Mehman Huseynov accusing him of spreading false information about his detention and ill-treatment.

Front Line Defenders believes that the sentencing of Mehman Huseynov is directly linked to his legitimate and peaceful human rights work. Front Line Defenders is worried about the physical and psychological integrity of Mehman Huseynov while in detention.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Azerbaijan to:

1. Quash the sentence against Mehman Huseynov and release him as it is believed that it was solely motivated by his legitimate and peaceful work in defence of human rights;
2. Provide the necessary medical treatment for Mehman Huseynov and take all necessary measures to guarantee his physical and psychological integrity and security;
3. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the assault against Mehman Huseynov, with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
4. Ensure that the treatment of Mehman Huseynov, while in detention, adheres to the conditions set out in the '*Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment*', adopted by UN General Assembly resolution 43/173 of 9 December 1988;
5. Cease targeting all human rights defenders in Azerbaijan and guarantee in all circumstances that they are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions including judicial harassment.