



Statement of Azerbaijani National Platform of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum

Baku, 02 January, 2019

We, the undersigning members of Azerbaijan National Platform of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum condemn the new criminal case initiated by the penitentiary against the imprisoned blogger Mehman Huseynov on the article 315.2 (Resistance or application of violence concerning the representative of authority. Application of the violence dangerous to life or health, concerning persons shall be punishable by imprisonment for the term from three up to seven years) of the Criminal Code just two months before the end of his prison term. Mehman Huseynov's lawyer was not allowed to visit him in the prison number 14, he started a dry hunger strike in the penitentiary facility and it has reached 7th day.

Mehman was imprisoned because he publicly complained about police torture against him and he was persecuted because he criticized government officials by demonstrating their unexplained wealth. This is already the fifth case recently, when political prisoner is framed to a new case in prison just before the end of the prison term.

After only two hearings, a Baku court found Huseynov guilty and sentenced him to two years in prison on 3 March 2017. Several appeals were rejected by the courts in Azerbaijan on behalf of Mehman Huseynov, the latest on 24 August 2018 when a regional court in Garadagh ruled against the motion for conditional release of the blogger Mehman Huseynov.

Mehman Huseynov is director of Institute for Reporters' Freedom and Safety (IRFS) and we consider his imprisonment in 2017 as a serious threat to civil society and freedom of expression.

The next fake charges to keep the famous blogger Mehman Huseynov in jail is happening on the eve of the next round of European Union-Azerbaijan human rights dialogue which is going to take place at the beginning of February 2019 in Baku and it creates a serious regret over the failure of the dialogue .

National Platform further underlines that Azerbaijan is a member state of the Council of Europe and has ratified several legally binding conventions which put legal obligations on contracting parties.

National Platform expresses with a deep concern that to keep Mehman Huseynov in imprisonment with the new trumped-up charges contradicts the obligations of Azerbaijan as a member state of the Council of Europe and creates troubled environment for free activities of the civil society organizations and journalists.

National Platform calls on the Azerbaijani government

- to abandon the practice of keeping political prisoners in imprisonment with new false accusations and to grant an immediate release of Mehman Huseynov without condition.
- to put an end to the ongoing pattern of arrest, prosecution and imprisonment of journalists, bloggers, human rights defenders, civil society activists and dissident voices on politically motivated grounds. Release all of those who are currently behind bars in retaliation for their legitimate exercise of freedom of expression and other fundamental rights.
- to take concrete and effective measures to implement the recommendations relating to freedom of expression issued by the Human Rights Committee, the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders and other international bodies.

The European Union

- to put as a condition to release Mehman Huseynov and other political prisoners before the next upcoming round of EU-Azerbaijan human rights dialogue to take place in Baku in early February 2019 for signing a Strategic Partnership Agreement between the European Union and Azerbaijan.

Signed,

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3. Arzu Abdullayeva
4. Avaz Hasanov
5. Aynura Adullayeva
6. Bakhtiyar Hajiyev
7. Dilara Afandiyeva
8. Elchin Abdullayev
9. Elchin Sultanov
10. Emin Huseynov
11. Fuad Hasanov
12. Ilgar Huseynli
13. Intigam Aliyev
14. Gubad Ibadoglu
15. Khalid Kazimov
16. Leyla Aliyeva
17. Mirvari Gahramanli
18. Rafiq Tamrazov
19. Rasul Jafarov
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21. Shahla Ismayil
22. Samir Aliyev
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25. Zohrab Ismayil