



**Friends of Azerbaijan  
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**Press Release 16<sup>th</sup> July 2009**

# **Two Baku bloggers could face five years for disputed 'hooliganism' charges**

Adnan Hadji Zadeh and Emin Milli were arrested on 8<sup>th</sup> July 2009 after reporting an incident where they claimed to have been assaulted in a Baku Café. They were then placed in pre-trial detention for two months and have been charged with hooliganism under article 222.1 of the criminal code, whilst the other men were released without further questioning.

Their lawyers, the only people who have had contact with the men since the arrest, state that there is no evidence the two men committed any offence. Furthermore, they believe that the judge's decision to detain them was illegal. Both Adnan and Emin sustained injuries during the attack and Friends of Azerbaijan are concerned that they have not received the medical care they require.

Adnan and Emin are well known in their country for being outspoken about the lack of freedom of expression in Azerbaijan and are engaged in the growing youth movement which aims to bring an end to the intimidation and harassment currently employed by authorities across Azerbaijan.

'Reporters Without Borders' classified Azerbaijan as 150th out of 173 countries in their 2008 press freedom index and has raised an international campaign for this case by releasing a public letter to the Minister of Justice in Baku. An Amnesty International country report from June 2009 states 'journalists continue to face assault, harassment, intimidation and even imprisonment for exercising their right to freedom of expression' in Azerbaijan.

## **British companies enjoy huge oil-related deals, leaving local BP employee to suffer under a repressive regime**

One of the bloggers, Adnan Hadji Zadeh, has worked for BP's public relations team in Baku for several years, causing diplomatic difficulties for the company who have been making enquiries to the Azerbaijan authorities since Sunday. BP is one of the largest foreign investors in Azerbaijan and benefit hugely from the naturally oil-abundant country. The Friends of Azerbaijan believe that BP therefore has a moral obligation to ensure that they assist the development of free speech in the country and represent an open, democratic agenda.

Following a visit to Azerbaijan to research the oil industry, Michelle, from Friends of Azerbaijan explains, 'the level of fear I encountered with locals when I asked them to express their views on the oil industry, the future of the country or ideas for development, was astounding. I was frequently believed to be a journalist who would quote them, leaving them to face the consequences by the authorities. It was extremely difficult to find people who would openly express their views, but those who did were clearly not happy with the state of affairs and continue to bravely speak out about the situation'.

**Friends of Azerbaijan request that the authorities of Azerbaijan:**

- Allow family members to visit the detainees to check their state of health
- Immediately release Adnan Hadji Zadeh and Emin Milli
- Continue to seek ways to improve freedom of expression in the country by working with National, European and International organisations

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**Note to editors:**

**Friends of Azerbaijan** is a new organisation consisting of British and Azeri nationals interested in developing links between the two countries and in particular to support the efforts to improve and develop freedom of expression and media, currently lacking in the country.

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