



Friends of Azerbaijan
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Two bloggers could face five years in attempt by the government to silence all opposition

Friends of Azerbaijan are concerned for the fate of two young bloggers following their upcoming trial in Azerbaijan next week. So far proceedings have fallen short of international standards on fairness and transparency and a number of international human rights bodies have suggested that there is evidence of a governmental attempt to silence any criticism of the current regime by bringing exaggerated charges against the activists.

Adnan Hadji Zadeh and **Emin Milli** were arrested on 8th 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 accused of hooliganism under article 222.1 of the criminal code. The men whom Milli and Hajzade claimed had assaulted them were released by police without further questioning or charges and without explanation into this difference of approach. Due to the bloggers reputation for speaking out about the government, their commitment to free speech and efforts to develop a free thinking society, Friends of Azerbaijan can only presume that this is a case of intimidation and fear-mongering by the government through utilizing trumped up charges to convict individuals they wish to silence and therefore discouraging others to speak out.

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 continue to claim that they were beaten by two men who were later released by the authorities.

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 of journalists currently employed by authorities across Azerbaijan. Both activists have been focusing on strategies to educate young people about their rights, their ability to speak out and their right to a free thinking country.

This is not the first case where trumped up charges have been brought against journalists in Azerbaijan. Human rights group Amnesty International produced a report this summer entitled 'Azerbaijan: Independent Journalists Under Siege' which features further cases of intimidation, and journalistic restrictions.

'Following the murder of a prominent newspaper editor in March 2005, President Ilham Aliyev stated that "the rights of every journalist and print worker, irrespective of their beliefs, are protected and should be guarded by the state". In reality, however, journalists continue to face assault, harassment, intimidation and even imprisonment for exercising their right to freedom of expression.' (Amnesty International <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/EUR55/004/2009/en>)

British companies enjoy huge oil-related deals, whilst local BP employee suffers in jail

One of the bloggers, Adnan Hadji Zadeh, has worked for BP's public relations team in Baku for several years, which creates a difficult situation for the company who have been making enquiries to the Azerbaijan authorities

since the arrest. BP is one of the largest foreign investors in Azerbaijan and benefit hugely from the naturally oil-abundant country, as does Britain itself. Friends of Azerbaijan believe that BP and Britain therefore have a moral obligation to ensure that they assist the development of free speech in the country and represent an open, democratic agenda by raising awareness of this issue and requesting full evidence of any charge against these men and to help call for a free and fair trial on the 4th September 2009.

We will be holding a DEMONSTRATION to campaign for the release of Emin Milli and Adnan Hajizade on Wednesday 2nd September outside the Embassy of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Kensington, 3pm

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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