



FREEDOM NOW

Honorary Chair
The Most Reverend Desmond M. Tutu

March 19, 2015

Media Release

Azerbaijani Civil Society Leader Bashir Sulemanli Released from Prison

Washington, D.C.: Freedom Now is pleased to announce that Azerbaijani civil society leader Bashir Sulemanli has been released from prison almost two years before the end of his three and one-half year sentence. President Ilham Aliyev pardoned Mr. Sulemanli ahead of the Novruz holiday, which celebrates the coming of spring. His early release occurred after considerable international attention to his case. However, while Mr. Sulemanli has been released, his colleague, Anar Mammadli remains in prison.

“We are relieved to know that Mr. Sulemanli is free—but the international community must not forget the 100+ Azerbaijani prisoners of conscience, such as Anar Mammadli, who are being jailed in violation of international law,” said Freedom Now’s executive director Maran Turner.

Mr. Sulemanli is the head of the Volunteers International Cooperation Public Union, an organization dedicated to protecting democratic rights. He partnered with Anar Mammadli, chair of the Election Monitoring and Democracy Studies Center, to monitor the 2013 presidential election. The activists were arrested in December 2013 after publishing an extensive report alleging widespread electoral irregularities.

Both men were charged with violating a number of Criminal Code provisions, including illegal business activity, tax evasion, abusing official power, misappropriation of funds, and forgery. Similar charges have been used to imprison an increasing number of civil society activists and human rights defenders in Azerbaijan, including Rasul Jafarov and Intigam Aliyev.