



FREEDOM NOW

MEDIA RELEASE

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FREEDOM NOW WELCOMES RELEASE OF BAKHTIYAR HAJIYEV FROM PRISON IN AZERBAIJAN

Washington, DC: Today, the Supreme Court of Azerbaijan ordered that Bakhtiyar Hajiyev be released nine months before the completion of his sentence. The court released Mr. Hajiyev early for good behavior; however, the release is conditional and he may not leave the country for nine months. His release comes two days before U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton is scheduled to meet with Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev in Baku and three weeks after a bi-partisan group of five U.S. Senators urged President Aliyev to facilitate Mr. Hajiyev's release.

"We welcome the government's decision to release Mr. Hajiyev after 15 months of unjust imprisonment," said Freedom Now Executive Director Maran Turner. "We call on the government to fully investigate Mr. Hajiyev's mistreatment while in detention and to allow Mr. Hajiyev to continue his important work promoting the cause of democratic reform in Azerbaijan free from harassment and intimidation."

Mr. Bakhtiyar Hajiyev, 30, is a democracy activist and a former parliamentary candidate in the November 2010 election in Azerbaijan. He is also a recent graduate from the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. Following months of harassment by police and government officials, Mr. Hajiyev was arrested in March 2011 days before a planned peaceful demonstration against the Azerbaijani government that he helped to organize. On May 18, 2011, an Azerbaijani court convicted him of military service evasion and sentenced him to two years in prison. His wrongful arrest, detention, and trial violated Azerbaijani law and Azerbaijan's obligations under international law. Freedom Now served as international *pro bono* legal counsel to Mr. Hajiyev during his detention.

On May 15, 2012 five U.S. Senators issued a bi-partisan letter urging President Aliyev to intervene on behalf of Mr. Hajiyev. The letter concluded that, "In light of the flaws that have come to our attention regarding Mr. Hajiyev's detention and treatment, as well as the fact that he has already served more than half of his sentence in a dutiful manner, we ask that you help facilitate Mr. Hajiyev's immediate release."

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