



FREEDOM NOW

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Media Release

International Bar Association Honors Azerbaijani Lawyer Intigam Aliyev with 2015 Human Rights Award

Vienna, Austria — Today, the International Bar Association presented jailed Azerbaijani lawyer Intigam Aliyev with its 2015 Human Rights Award. Freedom Now, along with Human Rights House Foundation and Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights nominated Mr. Aliyev for this year's award. This distinguished honor is well-deserved recognition of Mr. Aliyev and the instrumental role he has played in promoting human rights and rule of law in Azerbaijan for more than two decades. The presentation of the award comes at a time when Azerbaijan proceeds in its elimination of civil society in the wake of the European Olympic Games.

The award places Mr. Aliyev in the company of other eminent human rights lawyers, including Abdolfattah Soltani and George Bizos. Mr. Soltani, on whose behalf Freedom Now has also advocated, is a human rights lawyer currently serving a 13 year prison sentence on national security-related charges in Iran. Mr. Bizos is a lawyer in South Africa who represented many anti-apartheid activists, including Nelson Mandela.

The award was accepted on behalf of Mr. Aliyev by his children, Necmin and Narmin Kamilsoy. In a letter read by his son, Mr. Aliyev said, "When I heard about this prestigious Award, I felt honor and happiness with sadness at the same time. Today, in my country, my friends, colleagues, conscientious people, are facing prosecutions, pressures, and imprisonments. They deserve this award at least as much as I do. Therefore, I am accepting this award on behalf of them. I share my deep gratitude with the IBA for appreciating my efforts in such a way, as well as with all organizations that nominated me for this award."

"We are so happy that the International Bar Association is honoring Intigam Aliyev with this award," said Freedom Now Executive Director Maran Turner. "It is an acknowledgement of Intigam's tireless commitment to human rights and his unbroken resolve in the face of efforts by the Azerbaijani government to break him."

Mr. Aliyev is the most prominent human rights lawyer in Azerbaijan. He is president of the Legal Education Society, an organization founded in 1998 to provide legal assistance to marginalized populations and civil society organizations in Azerbaijan, engage in strategic litigation, and train lawyers. Mr. Aliyev has represented numerous activists and human rights defenders prosecuted by the Azerbaijan government. After his right to practice law in domestic courts was revoked, Mr. Aliyev turned to international courts and mechanisms. He has frequently submitted petitions to the European Court of Human Rights and, so far, the Court has ruled in favor of his clients in 17 cases.

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Our mission is to free prisoners of conscience through focused legal, political and public relations advocacy efforts.

Police in Azerbaijan arrested Mr. Aliyev on August 8, 2014 on politically motivated charges intended to halt his work as a human rights lawyer and advocate. He was placed in pre-trial detention and charged with illegal business activity, tax evasion, abuse of office, forgery, and embezzlement. He was convicted of these charges on April 22, 2015 and sentenced to seven years and six months in prison. The trial was marred by several irregularities, including attempts by the court to bar independent observers from attending the proceedings and the withholding of key pieces of evidence introduced by the prosecution and relied on by the court. Mr. Aliyev has also been denied proper medical treatment during his detention and suffers from several serious health conditions, including spinal problems which inhibit his movement and cause severe pain.

Azerbaijan has a well documented history of restricting internationally protected civil and political rights. In recent years, the government has gone beyond activities aimed at curtailing the exercise of these rights and hindering the efforts of civil society. Since 2011, President Ilham Aliyev has moved to crush dissent and silence independent voices that expose corruption and human rights violations. Since launching this campaign against its critics, the government has enacted legislation that has successfully closed down independent civil society organizations and authorities have imprisoned approximately 100 prisoners of conscience, including human rights defender Rasul Jafarov, journalist Khadija Ismayilova, and civil society leaders Leyla and Arif Yunus.

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Statement of Intigam Aliyev as delivered by Necmin Kamilsoy

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

I am sincerely greeting all of you and sharing my best wishes. Unfortunately, I can not do it in person, as I have to be in my country for certain reasons. In the country, where a lot of conscientious people – journalists, human rights defenders, public activists live their life as convicts, who were declared as hooligan, drug addict, swindler, traitor by the government of Azerbaijan and who the civil world recognize as political prisoners. The guilt of these people is just their willingness to live in free, democratic and fair society. Unfortunately, in the 21st century, in the old Europe, there are still such countries that, having a dissenting opinion there, expressing it, criticizing government, defending human rights are still considered as a crime.

In 2012, when the well-known organization that I love very much, People in Need awarded me with “The best Human Rights Defender of The Year”, alongside the honor and happiness I felt a little discomfort as well. Back to then, I was free in the world, however, there were quite many people in the prison in my country and I was feeling myself being unfair to them.

That is why, I was objecting following similar initiatives and saying drolly that I can accept these awards in inner peace if I were in the prison. Now, I am in the prison! But when I heard about this prestigious Award, again I felt the honor and happiness with the sadness at the same time. Today, in my country, my friends, colleagues, conscientious people are facing prosecutions, pressures, and imprisonments. They deserve this award at least as much as I do. Therefore, I am accepting this award behalf of them. I share my deep gratitude with IBA for appreciating my efforts in such way, as well as with all organizations that nominated me for this award! Thank you!