



**CRUDE ACCOUNTABILITY**



FREEDOM NOW



### **Azerbaijan: Quash conviction of journalist Khadija Ismayilova**

Washington, DC – On May 26, human rights organizations, journalists, and others will gather in front of the White House as part of a global campaign to highlight the ongoing repression of civil society and independent voices in Azerbaijan. The organizations gather on the occasion of Azerbaijani journalist Khadija Ismayilova’s 40<sup>th</sup> birthday to celebrate her recent release from prison and renew longstanding calls for her wrongful conviction to be quashed.

“Khadija spent nearly 18 months in prison,” said Courtney Radsch, Advocacy Director for Committee to Protect Journalists. “The charges against her were clearly politically motivated, designed to cease her investigation into the overwhelming corruption of Azerbaijan’s ruling elite – corruption that has been verified by the recent release of the Panama Papers.”

On December 5, 2014, prominent investigative journalist Khadija Ismayilova was arrested on charges of inciting a local man to attempt suicide. Two months later, authorities slammed her with additional politicized charges of embezzlement, illegal business, tax evasion, and abuse of power. After eight months in pre-trial detention, her trial started on August 7, 2015.

Khadija referred to the proceedings as an “express trial” and observers noted it was rife with due process violations, with the judges rarely granting any motions made by the defense. During the trial, her accuser publicly told the court that prosecutors forced him to make a statement against Khadija, and withdrew his accusations. Additionally, Khadija’s lawyer told the court that her employer did not report any funds missing, that she was not authorized to hire or dismiss other journalists, and that she was not engaged in any commercial enterprise.

On September 1, 2015, the court convicted Khadija of the charges of embezzlement, illegal entrepreneurship, tax evasion, and abuse of office, and sentenced her to seven and one-half years’ imprisonment. She was acquitted of the charge of inciting an attempted suicide. On November 25, 2015 her conviction was upheld.

On May 25, 2016, the Supreme Court ordered Khadija to be released from prison and commuted her sentence to three and one-half years’ probation. The court acquitted her on charges of abuse of office and embezzlement, but upheld the charges of illegal entrepreneurship and tax evasion. Khadija is also subject to a five year travel ban and prohibited from holding elected office.

Khadija was one of dozens of political prisoners in Azerbaijan. Other prominent individual still imprisoned include journalists Nijat Aliyev, Araz Guliyev, and Seymur Hezi; bloggers Abdul Abilov,

Rashad Ramazanov, and Ilkin Rustamzade; NIDA civic movement activists Giyas Ibrahimov and Bayram Mammadov; and opposition REAL movement chairman Ilgar Mammadov.

“The imprisonment of Khadija and other journalists demonstrates Azerbaijan’s attempts to silence independent voices at an unprecedented rate,” said Delphine Halgand, US Director of Reporters Without Borders. “We call on the authorities to cease the legal and extra-legal harassment of journalists and media outlets immediately.”

Besides politically motivated arrests and imprisonment, the Azerbaijani authorities continue to employ a wide range of tactics as part of an aggressive crackdown to silence the country’s few remaining critical voices. Last month, the Azerbaijani government opened a criminal investigation into independent online television station Meydan TV. At least 15 of the outlet’s local contributors were named by prosecutors and although no arrests were made, the journalists are barred from leaving the country and their homes have been searched. Other independent NGOs and media including the Institute for Reporters’ Freedom and Safety and its online television project Obyektiv TV, as well as Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty’s Baku office, have also been aggressively targeted over the past year. Now, in the run-up to the Formula One European Grand Prix, which will take place in Baku in June 2016, the crackdown shows no signs of relenting.

#### Rally Participants:

Amnesty International USA  
ARTICLE 19  
Belarusan-American Association (BAZA)  
Committee to Protect Journalists  
Crude Accountability  
Freedom House  
Freedom Now  
International Women’s Media Foundation  
McCain Institute for International Leadership  
Reporters Without Borders

#### Further Information

Interviews with Khadija:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UxUgvhds5iA>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VrYz-37YjuE>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-cq1u73jTHg>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4vimW5jyYSo>

#### Background:

<https://cpj.org/campaigns/pressuncuffed/khadija-ismayilova.php>  
<https://www.occrp.org/en/corruptistan/azerbaijan/2015/06/24/the-making-of-an-investigative-reporter.html>  
<http://www.rferl.org/content/azerbaijan-corruption-investigator-khadija-ismayilova/27138496.html>  
<http://www.rferl.org/content/azerbaijan-khadija-ismayilova-year-in-jail-keeps-fighting/27406762.html>  
[http://www.ifex.org/azerbaijan/2015/08/31/profile\\_ismayilova/](http://www.ifex.org/azerbaijan/2015/08/31/profile_ismayilova/)  
[http://www.ifex.org/international/2016/04/29/inspiring\\_response/](http://www.ifex.org/international/2016/04/29/inspiring_response/)