



FREEDOM NOW

Azerbaijani Journalist Khadija Ismayilova Released from Prison

Washington, D.C. – Freedom Now is pleased to announce that journalist Khadija Ismayilova was released from prison today after nearly 18 months of wrongful imprisonment. Ms. Ismayilova was serving a seven and one-half year sentence for alleged crimes related to her work as a journalist. The Supreme Court ordered Ms. Ismayilova to be released and commuted her sentence to three and one-half years' probation.

“Khadija’s imprisonment was the culmination of a long campaign by the Azerbaijani government to punish and silence a courageous reporter,” said Freedom Now Executive Director Maran Turner. “We welcome her release and call for the government to quash her conviction. We also call for the immediate and unconditional release of those who remain wrongfully imprisoned in Azerbaijan, such as opposition politician Ilgar Mammadov.”

Ms. Ismayilova is an award-winning investigative reporter who has served as a contributor and radio host for the Azerbaijani branch of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. She gained international attention for her reporting on the corrupt practices and business dealings of President Ilham Aliyev and his family.

On December 5, 2014, authorities arrested Ms. Ismayilova and accused her of inciting the attempted suicide of a friend and former colleague. The day before the arrest, the Head of the Presidential Administration, Ramiz Mehdiyev, issued a 60-page document that accused Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty employees of treason and specifically singled out Ms. Ismayilova as the “best example.”

Azerbaijani authorities brought additional charges of illegal business activity, tax evasion, abuse of office, and embezzlement on February 13, 2015. On September 1, 2015, Ms. Ismayilova was convicted and sentenced to seven and one-half years in prison. She was acquitted of the charges related to inciting suicide. The trial was marred by several procedural irregularities, including the barring of independent observers and the denial of several defense motions, including a request that the court allow defense counsel more time to prepare for the trial. Numerous human rights organizations and governments criticized the proceedings and the harsh sentence.

Although the Supreme Court acquitted Ms. Ismayilova on the charges of abuse of office and embezzlement, it upheld the charges of illegal entrepreneurship and tax evasion. She is also subject to a five year travel ban and prohibited from holding elected office.

Since 2011, Azerbaijan has detained more than 100 human rights defenders, political opposition leaders, civil society leaders, religious activists, lawyers, and journalists. These cases of political prisoners were monitored by Leyla Yunus and Rasul Jafarov in 2014, shortly before they were arrested. Many of these prisoners have already been convicted and received lengthy prison terms, including opposition politician Ilgar Mammadov. Sentenced to seven years in 2013, he remains in

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

prison despite a judgment by the European Court of Human Rights deeming his detention arbitrary and politically motivated.

In the days leading up to Ms. Ismayilova's 40th birthday on May 27, a series of 40 parallel rallies will be held in 23 countries to call for her conviction to be quashed and for the release of the remaining political prisoners in Azerbaijan. Freedom Now and several other DC-based organizations will be gathering in front of the White House at 12pm on May 26 to participate in this global campaign.