



FREEDOM NOW

*Letter to Vice President Pence Regarding Abducted Azerbaijani Journalist Afgan Mukhtarli*

Vice President Mike Pence  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Ave, NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Vice President Pence,

I write to express deep concern regarding the abduction of journalist Afgan Mukhtarli in Tbilisi, Georgia and his forcible removal to neighboring Azerbaijan. I urge you to raise Mr. Mukhtarli's case when you meet with President Giorgi Margvelashvili and Prime Minister Giorgi Kvirikashvili.

As you may know, Mr. Mukhtarli is an investigative journalist who has lived in Georgia since 2015. He has worked for several independent media outlets, including Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty and is well known for his critical coverage of Azerbaijani authorities.

On the evening of May 29, 2017, Mr. Mukhtarli was abducted three blocks from his home by unidentified men who were reportedly wearing Georgian criminal police uniforms, pushed into a car, beaten and driven to the Azerbaijani border. He was detained at a border checkpoint there for several hours before Azerbaijani authorities transported him to Baku. He was charged with illegal border crossing, violence against police, and smuggling after 10,000 euros were allegedly found on his person. He is being held in pre-trial detention until at least August 2017.

While we appreciate that the U.S. Department of State issued a statement expressing concern over Mr. Mukhtarli's abduction and arrest, further action is needed. Over the last few years, the overall human rights situation in Azerbaijan has rapidly deteriorated. The government has detained over 120 political prisoners and has placed numerous restrictions on internationally-protected civil and political rights, including the rights to freedom of expression, assembly, association, and political participation. The abduction of one of its citizens from a neighboring country is a profoundly disturbing escalation in the government's campaign to silence independent voices and crush dissent. The possibility that the Georgian government may now be complicit in these human rights abuses is very troubling.

I urge you to impress upon the Georgian government that it should undertake a thorough, impartial, and transparent investigation into the circumstances of Mr. Mukhtarli's abduction and bring to justice any government officials who were involved in this shocking abuse of his human rights.

Sincerely,

Maran Turner  
Executive Director  
Freedom Now

cc:

Ambassador David Bakradze  
Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Georgia to the U.S.  
Embassy of Georgia to the U.S.

The Honorable Rex Tillerson  
Secretary of State  
U.S. Department of State

Mr. John Heffern  
Acting Assistant Secretary of the Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs  
U.S. Department of State

Ambassador Ian Kelly  
Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the U.S. to the Republic of Georgia  
Embassy of the U.S. to Georgia

Ms. Fiona Hill  
Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director for European and Russian Affairs  
National Security Council