



Azerbaijan: Investigate Brutal Attack on Journalist

(August 26, 2014) – The brutal attack on journalist Ilgar Nasibov in Nakhchivan, Azerbaijan is an outrage, and Azerbaijan’s authorities should ensure a prompt, effective, and impartial investigation, Front Line Defenders, Human Rights House Foundation, Norwegian Helsinki Committee, Rafto Foundation for Human Rights, People in Need, Human Rights Watch, Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights, International Media Support, Article 19, and Reporters Without borders said today.

The Azerbaijani authorities should ensure that the investigation into the assault is effective, thorough, and impartial, the organizations said. It should examine as a potential motive that the attack was connected to Nasibov’s work as a journalist and human rights defender. The investigation should be capable of identifying and bringing to justice those responsible for this assault. The authorities should ensure that Nasibov gets immediate access to medical treatment as recommended by medical specialists.

On August 21, 2014, several unidentified people attacked Nasibov in the office of the Resource Center for Development of NGOs and Democracy in Nakhchivan, according to the center’s director and Nasibov’s wife, the Rafto Human Rights Laureate Malahat Nasibova. The attackers beat Nasibov unconscious and ransacked the office. Nasibov was seriously injured, including a concussion, broken cheekbones, nose, and ribs, and loss of vision in one eye. After Nasibov received essential first aid at a local hospital, Malahat Nasibova decided to move her husband home for security reasons.

International medical experts consulted by the group said that Nasibov had suffered trauma to his face, chest, and head and needs to be monitored closely to detect dangerous deterioration. The medical documentation and photos provided show that there is an urgent need for further intensive care from specialists who are not available in Nakhchivan.

Nasibova and her family have for years been subjected to physical and psychological pressure because of their human rights work. The Resource Center is the only independent group in Nakhchivan and is working on sensitive cases to restore justice to victims of human rights violations.

Among the cases the group has been involved with is the death of Turaj Zeynalov as a result of police torture. The Resource Center has filed a complaint under the European Convention on Human Rights against Azerbaijan regarding Zeynalov's treatment and death. In July the European Court of Human Rights relayed the case to the Azerbaijani authorities.

Malahat Nasibova and Ilgar Nasibov have received numerous anonymous threats in the past two years. Turan News Agency, to which Nasibov has regularly provided information, has also received threats from unknown people related to its coverage of Zeynalov's death.

This violent attack coincides with a new wave of government repression against civil society and takes place during Azerbaijan's chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe. Leila Yunus and her husband Arif Yunus, Intigam Aliyev, and Rasul Jafarov – some of the country's most prominent activists involved in raising international awareness about human rights violations in Azerbaijan – have recently been put in pretrial detention on trumped-up charges. The office of the Institute for Reporters' Freedom and Safety (IRFS) was closed by law enforcement authorities and its staff is being interrogated, and several other groups have had to suspend their work or close altogether. Several human rights activists face travel bans, are in hiding, or have left the country out of fear for their security.

Front Line Defenders, Human Rights House Foundation, Norwegian Helsinki Committee, Rafto Foundation for Human Rights, Human Rights Watch, People in Need, Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights, International Media Support, Article 19, and Reporters Without Borders call upon the Azerbaijani authorities to:

- Ensure a prompt, effective, impartial, and transparent investigation of the brutal attack on Ilgar Nasibov capable of bringing those responsible to justice;
- Ensure that Ilgar Nasibov is given access to medical expertise, including unobstructed passage to seek medical attention in Baku or abroad;
- Stop the ongoing persecution of human rights defenders, independent journalists, and media activists who operate within the rights guaranteed under the international treaties to which Azerbaijan is a party;
- Ensure that all human rights defenders are protected from violence and harassment, as Azerbaijan has undertaken to do as a party to multiple human rights treaties;
- Immediately and unconditionally release Leyla Yunus, Arif Yunus, Integam Aliyev, Rasul Jafarov, and all other human rights defenders jailed on spurious charges, and drop any such charges held against them.