

4 January 2018

Azerbaijan: New charge against imprisoned human rights defender Mehman Huseynov

On 26 December 2018, a new charge was brought against the imprisoned human rights defender **Mehman Huseynov** two months ahead of his scheduled release from prison. Under the new charge he stands accused of resisting prison authorities and faces a possible sentence of up to seven years.

[Mehman Huseynov](#) is an Azerbaijani human rights defender and journalist who documented corruption and human rights violations in Azerbaijan. He is the editor-in-chief of the socio-political magazine, SANCAQ, and Chairman of the Institute for Reporters' Freedom and Safety (IRFS), an Azerbaijani human rights organisation that campaigns for freedom of expression and freedom of information. Immediately prior to his arrest on 9 January 2017, Mehman Huseynov had worked on the campaign "Hunt for Corrupt Officials", which had exposed corruption in the high echelons of Azerbaijan's ruling establishment.

On 26 December 2018, Mehman Huseynov learned that the charge of "resistance or application of violence concerning the representative of authority" under Part 2 of Article 315 of the Criminal Code of Azerbaijan had been brought against him. On the same day, he started a dry hunger strike to protest the new charge and was put in solitary confinement. Mehman Huseynov's lawyers were refused access to their client and on 28 December were told that they can visit him "after the holidays".

In November 2018, Mehman Huseynov reported that the administration of Prison number 14 where he is serving his sentence was applying psychological pressure on him.

On 3 March 2017, the Surakhansky District Court of Baku found Mehman Huseynov guilty of "slander, which equates to an accusation of committing a very serious crime" under Part 2 of Article 147 of the Criminal Code of Azerbaijan and sentenced him to two years in prison. The charge was brought by the chief of Baku police after Mehman Huseynov accused the police of abducting and beating him.

Mehman Huseynov was arrested on 9 January 2017 when five off-duty policemen in plainclothes forcibly dragged him to an unmarked vehicle where his mouth was sealed with tape, a bag was put over his head and he was beaten and tasered. On 10 January 2017, Mehman Huseynov was tried in a closed hearing in Nasimi District Court of Baku and found guilty of "disobedience of a lawful order by police officers", and handed down a 200 manat fine (approximately €105). The chief of Baku police subsequently filed a lawsuit against Mehman Huseynov accusing him of spreading false information about his abduction and ill-treatment. All the appeals of Mehman Huseynov's lawyers against his sentence were rejected.

Front Line Defenders believes that new charge against Mehman Huseynov is aimed at keeping him in jail in retaliation for his vocal criticism of human rights violations in Azerbaijan. Front Line Defenders is worried about the physical and psychological integrity of Mehman Huseynov while in detention.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Azerbaijan to:

1. Immediately drop all charges against Mehman Huseynov as it is believed that they are solely motivated by his legitimate and peaceful work in defence of human rights;
2. Release Mehman Huseynov and quash his sentence, as it is believed that it was solely motivated by his legitimate and peaceful work in defence of human rights;
3. Ensure that the treatment of Mehman Huseynov, while in detention, adheres to the conditions set out in the *'Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment'*, adopted by UN General Assembly resolution 43/173 of 9 December 1988;
4. Cease targeting all human rights defenders in Azerbaijan and guarantee in all circumstances that they are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions including judicial harassment.