



19 April 2012

**President Ilham Aliyev**  
19 Istiqlaliyyat Street  
Baku 370066  
Azerbaijan

Dear President Aliyev,

**Re: The brutal attack on Idrak Abbasov and assault of four other journalists on 18 April 2012**

The Azerbaijani authorities must launch an immediate, independent and transparent investigation into the brutal attack on investigative journalist Idrak Abbasov and the assault of journalist Gunay Musayeva on Wednesday 18 April 2012 in a village on the outskirts of Baku. The subsequent assaults on three other journalists, Esmira Javadova, Elnur Mammadov and Qalib Hasanov, who tried to report on the attacks against their colleagues, should also be part of this investigation.

The incident was reported to police, who were present at the scene. They failed to intervene to protect the journalists from assault. Gunay Musayeva reports that in the case of Abbasov the officers were themselves involved in the attack. The International Partnership Group for Azerbaijan (IPGA) therefore calls for the role of police in the incident to be examined. Those responsible for this violence against journalists performing their professional activities must be identified and held to account.

**These attacks came less than 24 hours after you guaranteed freedom of expression in Azerbaijan during a quarterly meeting with the cabinet of ministers. This urgent matter requires your immediate attention and reaction.**

Idrak Abbasov, a reporter for newspaper *Zerkalo* and the Institute for Reporters Freedom and Safety (IRFS) was among several journalists reporting on the demolition of houses by the State Oil Company of Azerbaijan Republic (SOCAR) in the Sulutapa settlement, in the Binagady district of Baku, on 18 April 2012. Around 12pm, he was singled out and attacked by SOCAR's security guards. Abbasov was left with severe trauma to his right eye and concussion. He was unconscious for several hours after the incident and remains hospitalised.

Gunay Musayeva, a journalist from the newspaper *Yeni Musavat*, who was with Abbasov at the time of his attack, was also assaulted. Both journalists had been filming SOCAR carrying out the demolitions.

As journalists Esmira Javadova from Radio Azadliq/Radio Liberty and Elnur Mammadov and Qalib Hasanov, IRFS correspondents, subsequently attempted to reach the scene, SOCAR security guards smashed the windscreen of the public taxi they were travelling in. Forced to flee the vehicle, the three reporters and their driver were then pushed around by the guards.

Abbasov, who last month won an Index on Censorship award, has been beaten up several times while carrying out his professional duties. The attacks yesterday on him, and his colleagues, are the latest in a series of attacks on journalists and activists:

- On 1 March 2012, riot police used excessive force to disperse protesters in the Azerbaijani city of Guba, where around 1,000 residents had taken to the streets in protest in response to comments by Governor Rauf Habibov, who called the city's residents "traitors" and "ungrateful" for selling their land. At least two journalists were seriously injured and five others were sprayed with tear gas. Two journalists were later arrested and held incommunicado in detention for over a week over their coverage of the protest.
- On 6 March 2012, four youth activists were beaten, including former political prisoners Jabbar Savalan and Dayanat Babayev, by Baku police officers, who used excessive force to disperse a peaceful demonstration in the city centre. Fourteen protesters were arrested as part of the protest, which called for the release of political prisoners in the wake of reports that two political prisoners – Babek Hasanov and Mahammad Majidli - were attacked by prison officials on 4 March 2012.
- On 17 March 2012, eye witness accounts state that musicians Jamal Ali and Natig Kamilov along with blogger Etibar Salmanli were violently attacked by police officers when they were arrested at a public protest in Baku. During their subsequent detention the three activists were denied access to both their lawyer and family.

We enclose the IPGA's latest report [Running Scared: Azerbaijan's Silenced Voices](#), published in March 2012, which highlights concerns regarding cases where the use of violence has been used to restrict freedom of expression, including the murder of journalist Rafiq Tagi.

In November 2011, Tagi, a writer and journalist who wrote for, among others, *Sanat* newspaper and RFE/RL, was stabbed to death on his way home. Five months later, no-one has been charged with his murder and no potential suspects have been identified as part of an investigation, unfortunately evoking

parallels with the investigation into the murder of Elmar Huseynov whose murderers have still not been found, seven years after his death.

The IPGA calls for the Azerbaijan authorities to end the vicious cycle of violence, publicly condemn attacks against journalists and recognize that they are vulnerable to violence specifically because of the work they do. The authorities should launch immediate, effective and independent investigations in order to bring both the perpetrators and the instigators to justice. When there is a possibility of involvement by local authorities or other government bodies, such an investigation should be moved to a different authority outside of their jurisdiction or sphere of influence.

As a state party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political rights (ICCPR), as well as other international human rights agreements, that enshrine the right to freedom of expression, Azerbaijan should comply with its international human rights obligations under international law, including following up on the implementation of relevant decisions and judgments of international human rights bodies such as the European Court of Human Rights and the United Nations Human Rights Committee.

**We strongly urge you to follow through on your commitments and guarantee that the Azerbaijani authorities will take all possible measures to ensure that these cases are fully, and transparently, investigated, as well as endeavour to create an environment where violence against journalists is not met with impunity.**

Sincerely yours,

**The International Partnership Group for Azerbaijan, as represented by:**

Agnès Callamard, Executive Director, ARTICLE 19

Nina Ognianova, Europe and Central Asia Program Coordinator, Committee to Protect Journalists

Ane Tusvik Bonde, Regional Manager on Eastern Europe and Caucasus, Human Rights House Foundation

Kirsty Hughes, Chief Executive, Index on Censorship

Beth Costa, General Secretary, International Federation of Journalists

Milica Pesic, Executive Director, Media Diversity Institute

Bjørn Engesland, Secretary General, Norwegian Helsinki Committee

Sara Whyatt | Programme Director, Writers in Prison Committee, PEN International

Olivier Basille, General Director, Reporters Without Borders

Alison Meston, Press Freedom Director, World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers

**With support from:**

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The Association of Ukrainian Human Rights Monitors on Law Enforcement

Crude Accountability, United States

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Promo-LEX Association, Moldova  
Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union

CC: Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Azerbaijan  
Inshaatchilar Avenue 1  
Baku, Azerbaijan  
Fax: +994 12 430 0981  
E-mail: [contact@justice.gov.az](mailto:contact@justice.gov.az)