



HUMAN RIGHTS HOUSE
FOUNDATION

**34th session of the United Nations Human Rights Council
Geneva (Switzerland)**

3 March 2017

**Interactive Dialogue with the
Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders**

Delivered by Florian Irminger, Head of Advocacy, Human Rights House Foundation

Check against delivery

Thank you Mr Chairperson,

This morning in Azerbaijan human rights defender Mehman Huseynov was sentenced to 2 years imprisonment on charges of defamation after he complained having been ill-treated and tortured by the police. We call for his immediate and unconditional release.

Mehman Huseynov is a well-known Azerbaijani photojournalist and blogger who has been pivotal in raising awareness of political and social problems in Azerbaijan. He was awarded with the Press Prize Award from Fritt Ord Foundation and the Zeit Foundation in 2013. In November 2016, he was elected as chairman of the Institute for Reporters' Freedom and Safety.

On 9 January, Mehman Huseynov [he] was forcibly dragged into an unmarked vehicle and taken to an unknown destination by unidentified assailants in civilian clothes.¹ He appeared in court the next day, and was sentenced to a fine (200 AZN, around 100 euros) for “disobeying the police.”

“Police forged his signature on documents he refused to sign.”² Signs of ill-treatment and torture were obvious, including blood on his shirt and marks on his legs. The Nasimi district police chief filed a complaint for defamation following Mehman Huseynov’s complaints about this ill-treatment and torture.

Over years, authorities continuously targeted Mehman Huseynov, his family, and his organisation:

- As reported by the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, Mehman Huseynov “was briefly detained and released in June 2012, but the investigation against him is still open. He is banned from travelling abroad³ and his identity card has been confiscated;”⁴

¹ “Mehman Huseynov detained in Azerbaijan,” 10 January 2017, available at <http://humanrightshouse.org/Articles/22150.html>.

² Jane Buchanan, “The Price for Journalism in Azerbaijan,” 11 January 2017, available at <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/01/11/price-journalism-azerbaijan>.

³ “Prize-winning photojournalist denied permission to leave Azerbaijan,” 18 June 2013, available at <http://humanrightshouse.org/Articles/19350.html>.

⁴ Report to the United Nations Human Rights Council of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders on his mission to Azerbaijan, 20 February 2017 (UN Doc: A/HRC/34/52/Add.3), para. 47.

- **The previous chairman of the Institute for Reporters' Freedom and Safety, journalist Rasim Aliyev, died after being violently attacked in August 2015 in Baku;**⁵
- **Before that, Emin Huseynov, Mehman's brother, was President of the Institute. He was forced into hiding and to leave Azerbaijan.**⁶ **Emin Huseynov was himself also tortured when arrested in June 2008, as found by the European Court of Human Rights.**⁷

Azerbaijan reported to the Committee against Torture it did not have one single case of torture. Mehman Huseynov will not appear as a victim of police abuse, but as a criminal, which is characteristic of the way Azerbaijan looks into torture cases.⁸

Mehman Huseynov's case is also emblematic of the abusive and arbitrary methods used by authorities to punish and attempt to silence human rights defenders, journalists and activists in Azerbaijan.

This sentence comes a day after the commemoration of the killing of journalist Elmar Huseynov, founder and chief editor of weekly "Monitor". He was shot seven times by a silencer pistol and killed in the stairwells of his apartment in Baku on 2 March 2005. Mehman Huseynov spoke at a commemorative event on Elmar Huseynov's grave, yesterday in Baku.

Two days ago, Mehman Huseynov published a report on the feelings of people in Azerbaijan about the nomination of the President's wife to the position of first Vice-President, following the constitutional reform significantly increasing presidential powers.⁹

The path followed by Azerbaijan can now be reported as "increasingly authoritarian."¹⁰

Mr Chairperson,

The international community must act, given the continued and increased repression against human rights defenders, journalists and lawyers in Azerbaijan. This dire human rights situation in Azerbaijan deserves the highest attention and action at the Human Rights Council.

– Ends –

⁵ "Journalist Rasim Aliyev murdered as human rights crackdown continues in aftermath of European Games," 11 August 2015, available at <http://humanrightshouse.org/Articles/21105.html>.

⁶ "Emin Huseynov is free and safe," 13 June 2015, available at <http://humanrightshouse.org/Articles/21025.html>.

⁷ "Emin Huseynov about torture," 13 November 2015, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CH3bWbvz3ZU>.

⁸ "CAT raises deep concerns over treatment of human rights defenders in Azerbaijan," 23 December 2016, available at <http://humanrightshouse.org/Articles/21281.html>.

⁹ "Amid Azerbaijan's suppression of public debate, no vote is free and fair," 27 September 2016, available at <http://humanrightshouse.org/Articles/21899.html>.

¹⁰ Report to the United Nations Human Rights Council of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders on his mission to Azerbaijan, 20 February 2017 (UN Doc: A/HRC/34/52/Add.3), para. 7.