



**HUMAN RIGHTS HOUSE
FOUNDATION**

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Urgent appeal for the prompt and impartial investigation, followed by a fair and open trial, of the attack against journalists Idrak Abbasov, Gunay Musayeva and Adalat Abbasov

Mr. President,

On 18 April 2012 in Baku, security guards attacked a prominent Azerbaijani journalist, Idrak Abbasov. This violent assault constitutes another case out of a long list of journalists harassed and attacked in Azerbaijan. The authorities of Azerbaijan bear the international responsibility to fully guarantee and promote the right to freedom of expression, as well as to carry out a prompt and impartial investigation and bring those responsible for these hideous crimes to justice in fair and open trial.

Idrak Abbasov, a reporter of the newspaper *Zerkalo* and of the Institute for Reporters' Freedom and Safety (IRFS), was beaten by security guards of the State Oil Company of Azerbaijan Republic (SOCAR) whilst filming the confrontation between the residents of the settlement of Sulutepe on the outskirts of Baku and SOCAR, which is in charge of demolishing irregular homes in the area.

Idrak Abbasov was wearing clear journalist identification when he was approached by the security guards and consecutively beaten up during 5 to 7 minutes. The journalist – unconscious, coughing up blood, with many bruises and hematomas – was taken to the hospital. According to doctors, his present state of health is very poor and he suffers from serious head and body traumas. His brother, Adalat Abbasov and a female journalist Gunay Musayeva were also assaulted.

Gunay Musayeva, a journalist of *Yeni Musavat* and a witness of this attack on Idrak Abbasov, was also assaulted by SOCAR when she was filming the demolition and when she tried to help Idrak Abbasov. Three other journalists – Esmira Javadova, from *Radio Liberty*, Elnur Mammadov and Qalib Hasanov, both from IRFS – who arrived to the demolition site to report on the attacks against their colleagues, were all attacked by security guards and the windows of their taxi were smashed.

The recent attack on Idrak Abbasov is a continuation of the ongoing pressure against him in Azerbaijan. On 9 September 2011, after he investigated the activities of the same oil company, SOCAR sent bulldozers to his family's home to demolish the building as part of a project to develop local oil resources. His parents and brother were hospitalized after being severely attacked by the company's

security service.

Idrak Abbasov was awarded in March 2012 with the Index on Censorship international prize for his reporting. Working with IRFS, he is well-known and respected for his work covering human rights violations in Azerbaijan. IRFS is member of the Human Rights House Network and the South Caucasus Network of Human Rights Defenders and an internationally respected NGO.

These attacks are the latest in a series of attacks on journalists in Azerbaijan since March 2012, including a smear campaign that was launched against the investigative journalist Khadija Ismayilova, which involves the publication of pictures and a film of intimate nature posted on the Internet on 14 March aiming at intimidating this independent journalist.¹

These cases are not fully investigated by the authorities and those responsible have not been brought to justice. As underlined by the United Nations Human Rights Committee, Azerbaijan has the obligation to effectively protect media workers against attempts against their integrity and life, and to pay special attention and react vigorously if such acts occur.

In its Declaration on freedom of expression, media independence and democracy adopted on 2 July 2010 in Baku, the European Broadcasting Union's General Assembly "calls on authorities to respect the rulings of the ECHR and to resolve all cases against journalists through fair, transparent procedures in line with international legal standards." The fact that independent journalists are being attacked one month before the Eurovision is going to take place in Baku, and that attacks on journalists remain uninvestigated and unpunished, raises questions about Azerbaijan's commitments to freedom of expression and media independence, particularly as host of the 2012 Eurovision Song Contest.

We therefore urge the authorities of the Republic of Azerbaijan:

- **To conduct a full, transparent and impartial investigation into the attack against Idrak Abbasov as well as into other cases of harassment and attacks against journalists in Azerbaijan;**
- **To bring authors of harassment and attacks against journalists to justice in fair and open trials;**
- **To take effective measures to protect journalists and media workers;**
- **To create an environment in which journalists can fulfil their work without persecution and harassment.**

Signatories:

- Armenian Helsinki Association
- The South Caucasus Network
- Human Rights House Baku
 - Association for the Protection of Women's Rights after D. Aliyeva (APWR)
 - Azerbaijan Lawyers Association
 - Human Rights Centre of Azerbaijan (AHRC)

 - Institute for Reporters' Freedom and Safety (IRFS)
 - Legal Education Society
 - Media Rights Institute
 - Society for Humanitarian Research

¹ See: <http://humanrightshouse.org/Articles/17783.html>.

- Women's Association for Rational Development (WARD)
- Institute for Peace and Democracy
- Human Rights House Belarus in exile (Vilnius)
- Human Rights House Sarajevo
 - Association of Female Citizens "Renaissance"
 - Foundation CURE
 - Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Bosnia and Herzegovina
 - Regional Co-ordinator for Youth Groups
 - Serb Civic Council - Movement for Equality - The Council of the Sarajevo Canton
 - Woman and Society Centre
- Human Rights House Zagreb
 - APEO/UPIM Association for Promotion of Equal Opportunities for People with Disabilities
 - B.a.B.e.
 - CMS - Centre for Peace Studies
 - Documenta - Centre for Dealing with the Past
 - GOLJP - Civic Committee for Human Rights
 - Svitanje - Association for Protection and Promotion of Mental Health
- Human Rights House Oslo
 - Human Rights House Foundation

Copies have been sent to:

- Directorate General of Human Rights and Legal Affairs of the Council of Europe, Strasbourg
- Office of the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe, Strasbourg
- UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders, Geneva
- UN Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression, Geneva
- UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights to Peaceful Assembly and Association, Geneva
- UN Special Rapporteur on the Independence of Judges and Lawyers, Geneva
- Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE ODIHR), Baku
- Delegation of the European Union in Azerbaijan
- Subcommittee on Human Rights of the European Parliament, Brussels
- International diplomatic community
- European Broadcasting Union

About the Human Rights House Network (www.humanrightshouse.org)

The Human Rights House Network (HRHN) is a forum of cooperation between established and emerging Human Rights Houses, uniting 70 NGOs in 15 countries in Western Balkans, Eastern Europe and South Caucasus, East and Horn of Africa, and Western Europe. HRHN's aim is to protect, strengthen and support human rights defenders and their organizations. Based in Oslo (Norway) and Geneva (Switzerland), the Human Rights House Foundation (HRHF) is the secretariat of the Human Rights House Network.

Established as an international branch of HRHF, the Azerbaijan Human Rights House opened in 2009. In accordance with the order of the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Azerbaijan of 10 March 2011, the Azerbaijan Human Rights House ceased its activities.