

President Ilham Aliyev
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Dear Mr President,

We are writing to express our deep concern about the critical condition, imprisonment, psychological pressure and new criminal charges pursued against photojournalist, video blogger, and human rights defender Mehman Huseynov. We appeal for your personal intervention in his case.

Mehman Huseynov began a hunger strike on 26 December 2018 in protest against facing further criminal charges – charges that we and many others, including the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, consider to not be credible. Since 2012, Mehman Huseynov has been subject to a travel ban and without identification and official documentation, preventing him from accessing public services such as healthcare and education. He has also faced harassment and pressure, but actions against him have escalated dramatically in the past two years, beginning with reports that he was abducted and tortured in police custody on 9 January 2017.

Following this abduction, Mehman Huseynov reported that he was tortured – which is consistent with the findings of an examination by an independent team of medical doctors, sent from Front Line Defenders and the Georgian Centre of Psychological and Medical Rehabilitation for Torture. He was sentenced to two years in prison for defamation on 3 March 2017 for stating that he was tortured. We regret that he was imprisoned when he should have received support and his allegations of abduction and torture investigated. Still in prison, he now faces new criminal charges for alleged violence against a member of prison staff. We are particularly concerned about the credibility of this allegation, in context of previous arbitrary actions against Mehman Huseynov – and indications that since August 2018 he has been under psychological pressure in prison and the basis laid for further charges against him.

The actions taken against Mehman Huseynov appear to be politically motivated and strongly linked to his legitimate work raising awareness of human rights and issues related to corruption. These actions have led directly to his current severe condition, as with seemingly no access to justice and arbitrary restriction of his freedom, Mehman Huseynov saw no other option than to go on hunger strike on 26 December 2018. Further contributing to his condition, we note that while Mehman Huseynov was allowed to attend his late Mother's funeral in August 2018, he was prevented from visiting her while she was alive and ill in hospital – on accusations that he has not participated in "corrective work", namely the prison's "social life", "cultural events", and "maintenance work." These accusations also surfaced during Mehman Huseynov's hearing on application for parole in August 2018. During the hearing, Mehman Huseynov told that he had been summoned by the prison administration and made to understand that he could be punished for explaining rights to other prisoners. He explained that he decided to stay apart from others for this reason. We worry that the decision by authorities to prevent Mehman Huseynov from visiting his dying mother has taken its toll on him.

Years of escalating pressure by authorities has forced an ambitious young man wanting to improve Azerbaijani society to now be in a critical condition in prison. This is a situation that has gone too far, for both Mehman Huseynov and for Azerbaijan.

With urgency, we appeal for you to take the following actions to ensure Mehman Huseynov's life, health, and rights:

- Ensure that he is transferred to a civilian hospital to be examined by independent medical professionals – with treatment of his health taking utmost priority.
- Guarantee his rights in relation to access and visits by his lawyers and his family members, and to allow members of the international community to visit him.

With regard to the charges against Mehman Huseynov, we urge you to intervene to ensure:

- The prosecution service drops new criminal charges put forward under 317.2 of the Azerbaijan Criminal Code.
- Mehman Huseynov is released from prison at the latest when his sentence for defamation ends on 2 March 2019.

Best regards,



Maria Dahle,

Director of Human Rights House Foundation