

Georgia: Urgent Appeal to Halt the Extradition of Azerbaijani Journalist Afgan Sadigov

The undersigned organisations call on the Georgian authorities to immediately halt the extradition of journalist Afgan Sadigov to Azerbaijan, and uphold his fundamental rights in accordance with Georgia's international obligations.

Afgan Sadigov, editor-in-chief of the independent outlet Azel.TV, has long faced politically motivated persecution for his reporting on corruption and social injustices in Azerbaijan.¹ His investigative work has made him a target of state repression, leading to repeated arrests on charges he has consistently denied, including extortion and assault.²

After fleeing Azerbaijan in December 2023 to escape harassment, Sadigov sought refuge in Georgia. In July 2024, Afgan Sadigov was joined by his family members—his wife, who is also a correspondent, and their two young daughters. However, he was arrested in Tbilisi on 3 August 2024 on the basis of an extradition warrant issued by Azerbaijan and has since been held in Gldani Prison.³ On 28 November 2024, the Tbilisi City Court ruled to approve his extradition to Azerbaijan.⁴ Sadigov's lawyers have already filed an appeal with the appellate court, with the possibility of further challenging the decision in the Supreme Court, the final instance. Additionally, the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia and the first-instance court denied Afgan Sadigov international protection, which could have provided grounds to prevent his extradition.

This decision is also appealed. The family remains in Tbilisi to this day and is in a very vulnerable situation. They constantly receive threats from individuals connected to the Azerbaijani authorities.

By extraditing Sadigov to Azerbaijan, Georgia would violate its responsibilities under Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), of which Georgia is a member. Article 3 of the ECHR prohibits states from extraditing foreign nationals to a country where there are substantial grounds for believing that a person in question might face a real risk of torture or ill-treatment.⁵

His extradition would also be contrary to the principle of non-refoulement, enshrined in the UN Convention against Torture (article 3), which prohibits returning individuals to a country where they are likely to face persecution or harm.⁶

1 <https://www.freiheit.org/east-and-southeast-europe/prisoner-conscience-afgan-sadygov-azerbaijan>

2 <https://www.occrp.org/en/news/georgia-court-orders-extradition-of-azerbaijani-journalist-drawing-condemnation>

3 <https://oc-media.org/tbilisi-court-rules-in-favour-of-extraditing-jailed-azerbaijani-journalist/>

4 <https://oc-media.org/tbilisi-court-rules-in-favour-of-extraditing-jailed-azerbaijani-journalist/>

5 <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng?i=001-198760>

6 https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/HRBodies/CAT/CAT-C-GC-4_EN.pdf

Extraditing Sadigov to Azerbaijan would place him at significant risk of torture and ill-treatment, given the recently documented rise in politically motivated arrests, credible allegations of physical and judicial harassment against journalists with impunity,⁷ and the Azerbaijani government's suspension of cooperation with the Council of Europe's Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT).⁸ It is well-documented that torture in Azerbaijan is systemic and widespread.⁹ Human Rights Watch, meanwhile, recently added Azerbaijan to a list of governments targeting their nationals abroad for transnational repression.¹⁰

In addition, the Tbilisi City Court's decision undermines Georgia's commitments to press freedom and other fundamental rights.

The international community, including the OSCE's Representative on Freedom of the Media, Teresa Ribeiro, has repeatedly raised concerns about Sadigov's case, warning of the life-threatening consequences he would face upon return to Azerbaijan.¹¹

We are also seriously concerned about Sadigov's well-being. During his detention, he staged a hunger strike lasting more than 70 days to protest the extradition order. His deteriorating health was evident during his court appearance, where he had to be brought in in a wheelchair.¹²

Against this background, we urge the Court of Appeal to thoroughly and impartially review the decision to approve the extradition of Afgan Sadigov to Azerbaijan, taking into account the credible, real and substantial risks of persecution, torture, and inhumane treatment he faces if returned. The court must prioritise Georgia's international obligations, in particular the prohibition of torture and ill-treatment under ECHR Article 3 and the principle of non-refoulement under the UN Convention against Torture and overturn the extradition order to ensure Sadigov is not subjected to further harm.

We urge the Georgian government to ensure his protection and provide him and his family with safe haven, consistent with Georgia's international obligations to uphold human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Signatories:

- International Partnership for Human Rights (IPHR)
- Open Contracting Partnership (OCP)
- Crude Accountability
- Human Rights House Foundation

7 <https://docstore.ohchr.org/SelfServices/...>

8 <https://www.coe.int/en/web/cpt/-/council-of-europe-anti-torture-committee-issues-public-statement-on-azerbaijan>

9 <https://rm.coe.int/1680b0ccc5>; <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/country-chapters/azerbaijan#fd2631>; <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/07/25/torture-systemic-and-endemic-azerbaijan>; <https://www.ohchr.org/en/news/2024/04/examen-de-lazerbaidjan-au-comite-contre-la-torture-les-allegations-associees-au>

10 <https://www.hrw.org/report/2024/02/22/we-will-find-you/global-look-how-governments-repress-nationals-abroad>

11 <https://turaz.az/en/politics/osce-representative-concerned-about-afgan-sadygovs-arrest-in-georgia-783324>

12 <https://civil.ge/archives/638799>