

30 Days for Freedom

4 April - 3 May 2014

#FreethePress

WAN-IFRA www.worldpressfreedomday.org

His Excellency Ilham Aliyev
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Your Excellency,

We are writing as part of the global online campaign '30 Days for Freedom' to call for the release of Avaz Zeynally and all journalists imprisoned in Azerbaijan.

Mr. Zeynally, chief editor of the independent daily *Khural*, was arrested and imprisoned in October 2011 after a parliament member accused him of demanding money in return for not publishing critical reports. Sixteen months later, he was sentenced to nine years in prison.

Mr. Zeynally has denied all charges against him and believes his imprisonment is reprisal for his critical reporting. In the month prior to his arrest, Mr. Zeynally published a very different encounter with ruling party member Gyuler Akhmedova, claiming it was she who had offered him a bribe in exchange for favourable reporting. During this time, *Khural* had also published critical commentaries of the administration. Mr. Zeynally's defence said the court failed to present any credible evidence against him, while the parliamentary member was herself later charged with fraud after a video emerged of her allegedly selling a seat in parliament for a million dollars.

Your Excellency, as Azerbaijan prepares to assume the chairmanship of the Council of Europe, we are appalled that journalists who report on government corruption and human rights abuses remain in prison. Mr. Zeynally is just one of many journalists targeted in an increasingly severe crackdown on those exercising their right to peaceful freedom of expression. At least seven other journalists and bloggers are also currently behind bars. We respectfully remind you of your country's obligations to uphold international human rights standards, particularly in relation to Article 19 – guaranteeing freedom of expression – of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which Azerbaijan is a signatory and that is further guaranteed by the country's constitution.

We therefore call on you to release Avaz Zeynally and all journalists imprisoned in Azerbaijan for their work.

Sincerely,

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The 30 Days for Freedom campaign

Organised by the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers (WAN-IFRA) and the World Editors Forum, the '30 Days for Freedom' campaign aims to highlight the plight of imprisoned journalists worldwide in the 30 days leading up to 3 May, World Press Freedom Day.

www.wan-ifra.org / www.worldpressfreedomday.org

