

PRESS RELEASE - THE OBSERVATORY

Azerbaijan: Dismay as Rasul Jafarov is sentenced to 6 years and 3 months imprisonment in appeal

Paris-Geneva, July 31, 2015 – The sentencing of human rights defender Rasul Jafarov to six years in prison was confirmed today by the before the Baku Court of Appeal. Arbitrarily detained since August 2, 2014, the conviction of Mr. Rasul Jafarov is based on trumped-up charges and aims at preventing him from carrying out his legitimate human rights activities, the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders said today.

On July 31, 2015, the Baku Court of Appeal sentenced Mr. **Rasul Jafarov** to 6 years and 3 months imprisonment. Founder and Chairman of the Human Rights Club and an active member in the “Sing for Democracy” and the “Art of Democracy” movements ahead of the Eurovision song contest in Baku in May 2012, Mr. Jafarov was planning a campaign called “Sports for Human Rights” prior to the Baku European Games when he was arrested. Mr. Rasul Jafarov was sentenced in first instance on April 16, 2015, on spurious charges of “illegal entrepreneurship”, “tax evasion”, “abuse of office”, “embezzlement” and “forgery”¹. No evidence whatsoever of Mr. Jafarov's guilt was provided.

“Since the end of the Baku Games in June 2015, two human rights defenders have already been sentenced in appeal to long prison terms. It sadly paves the way to further harassment against other defenders whose trials are presently ongoing”, said FIDH President Karim Lahidji.

A trial observer from the Human Rights Centre in Georgia (HRIDC) represented the Observatory during the July-31 hearing, which failed to meet international fair trial standards. Mr. Jafarov was placed in a cage and the motion raised by the defence to let the accused sit by his lawyers was denied.

Initially sentenced to 6 and a half years in prison, the Court of Appeal dismissed the charge of tax evasion and thus reduced his sentence by three months. In an attempt to open a dialogue with the authorities, and although he does not plead guilty, Mr. Jafarov paid the taxes.

“Azerbaijan's current policy follows a very simple and sinister logic: if you can't beat them, jail them. This latest sentence calls for a strong reaction from the international community. Azerbaijan cannot get away with its crackdown any longer.”, added OMCT Secretary General Gerald Staberock.

Mr. Rasul Jafarov is the second human rights defender to be sentenced in appeal among all those targeted since the 2014 crackdown, which has witnessed the harassment, arrest and detention of all prominent human rights defenders in the country. The trials of Ms. **Leyla Yunus** Director of the Institute for Peace and Democracy (IPD) and member of OMCT General Assembly, Mr. **Arif Yunusov**, Chief of IPD's department of conflictology, and of Ms. **Khadija Ismayilova**, award-winning investigative journalist and well-known independent reporter, are currently ongoing.

The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders (OBS) was created in 1997 by FIDH and the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT). The objective of this

¹ See The Observatory's trial observation report, "Azerbaijan: "If you can't beat them, jail them": The case of Human Rights Defender Rasul Jafarov", June 2015. Available at <https://www.fidh.org/International-Federation-for-Human-Rights/eastern-europe-central-asia/azerbaijan/if-you-can-t-beat-them-jail-them-the-case-of-human-rights-defender> and <http://www.omct.org/human-rights-defenders/reports-and-publications/azerbaijan/2015/06/d23196/>

programme is to intervene to prevent or remedy situations of repression against human rights defenders.

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