

# URGENT ACTION

## POLICE HARASS ACTIVIST WORKING FOR PEACE

**Azerbaijani human rights defender Leyla Yunus is being harassed by police. She and her husband are under surveillance and being subjected to regular interrogations, and have had their passports confiscated.**

The Azerbaijani authorities are harassing **Leyla Yunus**, who is the president of Azerbaijani NGO the Institute for Peace and Democracy, and her husband **Arif Yunus**. The couple is under surveillance and their passports were confiscated on 28 April. The authorities have regularly summoned her to the prosecutor's office and interrogated her in connection with the criminal proceedings against an independent Azerbaijani journalist Rauf Mirgadirov, who has been arrested on what appear to be trumped-up charges of spying for Armenia. Leyla Yunus had been collaborating with him on joint reconciliation projects with Armenian NGOs.

Leyla Yunus believes some officials are trying to have her provoked into getting detained.

Leyla and Arif Yunus were briefly detained on 28 April at Baku's Heydar Aliyev International Airport, as they prepared to board a flight to Brussels. The police showed no court order for their detention, but said they were witnesses in the criminal case against Rauf Mirgadirov. They questioned the couple at the airport and searched their belongings.

The next day, officials searched the couple's home and the office of the Institute for Peace and Democracy. Leyla Yunus accused officials of threatening to rape her and forcing their way into a toilet while she was using it. When a colleague of hers asked whether it was acceptable for a male police officer to force his way into a toilet a woman was using, an official replied, "She is not a woman. She is not an Azerbaijani woman. She is Armenian".

### **Please write immediately in Azeri, English, Russian or your own language:**

- Calling on the authorities to put an immediate stop to the intimidation and harassment of Leyla and Arif Yunus and return their passports;
- Calling for an immediate and impartial investigation into the threats, intimidation, harassment and alleged ill-treatment suffered by Leyla and Arif Yunus, and bring all those responsible to justice;
- Insisting on full respect for, and protection of, the right to freedom of expression in Azerbaijan.

### **PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 29 AUGUST 2014 TO:**

#### **President**

Ilham Aliyev  
Office of the President of Azerbaijan  
19 Istiqlaliyyat Street  
Baku AZ1066, Azerbaijan  
**Fax: 011 994 12 492 0625**  
**Email: [office@pa.gov.az](mailto:office@pa.gov.az)**  
**Salutation: Dear President Aliyev**

#### **Prosecutor General**

Zakir Qaralov  
7 Rafibeyli Street  
Baku AZ1001, Azerbaijan  
**Fax: 011 994 12 492 3230**  
**Salutation: Dear Prosecutor General**

### **Also send copies to:**

Ambassador Elin Suleymanov, Embassy of Azerbaijan  
2741 34<sup>th</sup> Street NW, Washington DC 20008  
**Telephone: 202 337 3500 | Fax: 202 337 5911 | Email: [Azerbaijan@azembassy.us](mailto:Azerbaijan@azembassy.us)**

Please check with the AIUSA Urgent Action Office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY**  
**INTERNATIONAL**



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### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Azerbaijan is locked in a dispute with its neighbor, Armenia, over the ethnic Armenian-populated region of Nagorno-Karabakh, which declared unilateral independence from Azerbaijan in 1991. Armenia and Azerbaijan fought a war over the region in the early 1990s, which left thousands dead and hundreds of thousands displaced. The local de facto authorities in Nagorno-Karabakh have maintained an effective independence, with a fragile ceasefire coming into effect in 1994. Both Azerbaijani and Armenian governments often fuel nationalist sentiments against each other for political reasons.

Amnesty International has longstanding concerns about the Azerbaijani authorities' failure to respect their international obligations to protect the rights to freedoms of expression, association and assembly. Dissenting voices in the country frequently face trumped-up criminal charges, physical assault, harassment, blackmail and other reprisals from the authorities and groups associated with them. Law-enforcement officials regularly use torture and other ill-treatment against detained civil society activists, with impunity.

Amnesty International has documented dozens of cases like that of Leyla and Arif Yunus, and has recognized at least 19 people prisoners of conscience in Azerbaijan, jailed solely for their peaceful attempts to exercise their right to freedom of expression. For more information, see: *Behind bars: Silencing dissent in Azerbaijan* (<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/EUR55/004/2014/en>).

**Names:** Leyla Yunus (f), Arif Yunus (m)

**Issues:** Harassment, Human rights defender, Fear for safety

**UA:** 182/14

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**Country:** Azerbaijan