

URGENT ACTION

ACTIVISTS DENIED VITAL MEDICAL TREATMENT ABROAD

Azerbaijani human rights defenders and former prisoners of conscience Leyla Yunus and Arif Yunus are being prevented from leaving the country for urgent medical treatment abroad as their health continues to deteriorate. On 4 March the Appeals Court will consider their request for their travel ban to be lifted.

Prominent human rights defenders **Leyla Yunus** and **Arif Yunus** were convicted to eight and seven-and-a-half years, respectively, on 13 August 2015 for their human rights work. The charges against them were fabricated and they were recognized as prisoners of conscience.

Arif Yunus and Leyla Yunus were finally released conditionally on medical grounds on 12 November and 9 December, respectively. As part of the conditions they were placed under a travel ban. Leyla Yunus and Arif Yunus also face separate fabricated charges of "high treason", yet to be heard in a different court.

In a conversation with Amnesty International on 29 February, the couple explained that their health is worsening daily and that they are not receiving adequate medical care in Azerbaijan. Arif Yunus suffered two strokes in April 2014 and needs regular medical check-ups on his heart. He has also developed a lump on his head, which could not be diagnosed by doctors in Azerbaijan. Leyla Yunus has hepatitis C, diabetes and urgently needs to be operated to treat gallstones. The couple said doctors in Azerbaijan have previously refused them treatment out of fear of reprisals from the authorities. Leyla Yunus also explained that she has been humiliated by Azerbaijani doctors in the past whenever she complained of her deteriorating health, with a reminder that she was "an Armenian spy and deserved no less".

In February Leyla Yunus and Arif Yunus filed a request to the Court in Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan, to have their travel ban lifted on humanitarian grounds. The Court rejected their request on 11 February and the couple appealed the decision to the Appeals Court. The Appeals Court will consider the case on 4 March and it can revoke the decision of the lower court and grant them the right to leave Azerbaijan for medical treatment abroad.

Please write immediately in Azerbaijani, English or your own language:

- Calling on the authorities to quash Leyla Yunus and Arif Yunus's convictions and drop all outstanding charges as Leyla Yunus and Arif Yunus were charged and convicted solely for their legitimate human rights work and their exercise of the right to freedom of expression;
- Urging them to remove all conditions attached to the release of Leyla Yunus and Arif Yunus and to allow them to travel abroad urgently to receive medical treatment.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 12 APRIL 2016 TO:

President Ilham Aliyev

Office of the President of Azerbaijan

19 Istiqlaliyyat Street

Baku AZ1066, Azerbaijan

Fax: + 994 12 492 0625

Email: office@pa.gov.az

Salutation: Dear President

Prosecutor General Zakir Garalov

7 Rafibeyli Street

Baku AZ1001, Azerbaijan

Email: info@prosecutor.gov.az

Salutation: Dear Prosecutor General

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please insert local diplomatic addresses below:

Name Address 1 Address 2 Address 3 Fax Fax number Email Email address Salutation Salutation

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the eighth update of UA 182/14. Further information:

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/EUR55/2275/2015/en/>

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Leyla Yunus is a prominent, possibly the most prominent, human rights defender in Azerbaijan. Along with her husband, Arif Yunus, she has been actively involved in civil activism. Since 1995 she has been the President of the Azerbaijani NGO the Institute for Peace and Democracy. Both Leyla and Arif are historians by training and their human rights activism originates from their attempts to push for a peaceful solution of the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict, which killed and displaced hundreds of thousands in the early 90s. Along with being outspoken in favour of reconciliation, Leyla has also emerged as the fierce critic of the repressive domestic policies of the Azerbaijani government. Leyla has received several high-ranking awards for her human rights work, including the Knight of the French Order of the Legion of Honor and the Theodor Haecker Prize. She was also the finalist of the prestigious Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought and has been nominated for the 2015 Nobel Peace Prize.

According to the information available to Amnesty International, the charges of treason are related to Leyla and Arif Yunus' engagement in peace and reconciliation projects with Armenian NGOs. The charges of tax evasion, forgery, fraud, and illegal business were related to the activities of the Institute for Peace and Democracy, which the Azerbaijani officials had prevented Leyla from registering. The authorities have been denying registration of NGOs in Azerbaijan arbitrarily, later using this as a basis for criminal prosecution of NGO leaders.

Amnesty International has longstanding concerns about the Azerbaijani authorities' failure to respect their international obligations to protect the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful 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 recognized 18 people as prisoners of conscience in Azerbaijan, jailed solely for peacefully exercising their right to freedom of expression. For more information, see *Critical human rights situation in Azerbaijan further worsening ahead of 2015 election* (<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur55/2787/2015/en/>), *Azerbaijan: the Repression Games: The voices you won't hear at the first European Games* (<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur55/1732/2015/en/>), *Azerbaijan: Guilty of Defending Rights: Azerbaijan's human rights defenders and activists behind bars* (<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur55/1077/2015/en/>) and *Behind bars: Silencing dissent in Azerbaijan* (<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/EUR55/004/2014/en>).

Independent monitoring of human rights in Azerbaijan is increasingly difficult. Representatives of Amnesty International, as well as several other international human rights organizations and international media, were barred from entering Azerbaijan in 2015. Amnesty International's delegation was refused entry into Azerbaijan and deported from Baku Heydar Aliyev International Airport on 7 October 2015.

Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan, hosted the inaugural European Games in June 2015. The 2015 European Games was the first major multi-sport event for Europe and involved around 6,000 European athletes. Shortly before her arrest, on 25 July 2014, Leyla Yunus organized a press conference at which she called for an international boycott of the European Games because of Azerbaijan's dire human rights record.

Name: Leyla Yunus (f), Arif Yunus (m).
Gender m/f: both

Further information on UA: 182/14 Index: EUR 55/3552/2016 Issue Date: 1 March 2016