



For immediate release – 13 July 2009

**PRESS RELEASE**

**Azerbaijan: ARTICLE 19 Deplores Harassment of Internet Journalists**

**ARTICLE 19 calls on the Government of Azerbaijan to immediately drop the politically-motivated charges of hooliganism against two journalists, Emin Milli and Adnan Hajizade, who are currently being held in pre-trial detention.**

Milli, who works for ANTV Online, and Hajizade, a video blogger, were detained on 8 July 2009, after they reported being assaulted in a Baku restaurant to police. They were allegedly attacked in a restaurant by two individuals who demanded that they stop discussing politics; Milli and Hajizade had been sitting with a group of young people, discussing the activities of their youth organisations. When Milli and Hajizade appealed to police at the Sabail District Police Department and requested medical assistance, they were instead detained under charges of “hooliganism” (under Article 221.2.1 of the Azerbaijani Criminal Code). On 10 July, the Sabail District Court ordered Milli and Hajizade to be detained for two months in pre-trial detention.

ARTICLE 19 is concerned that these events are another measure by the Azerbaijani authorities to silence independent and opposition journalists.

This is not the first time the Azerbaijani authorities have used criminal charges, such as “hooliganism” to intimidate journalists in cases considered to be politically motivated. In November 2007, the editor-in-chief of opposition newspaper *Azadliq*, Ganimat Zahid, was arrested and sentenced to four years in prison in March 2008. A similar charge was used in the case of *Yeni Musavat* columnist Mahal Ismayilglu, who was convicted on 1 July 2009 and received a two-year suspended sentence.

*“It is unacceptable that these two men, who were subjected to an unprovoked attack, should now face criminal charges,”* comments Dr Agnès Callamard, ARTICLE 19 Executive Director. *“The authorities are persecuting the victims, rather than the perpetrators, in a manner which looks entirely politically motivated.”*

Milli and Hajizade’s detention happens against a backdrop of other disturbing actions by the Azerbaijani authorities, which have had a negative impact on freedom of expression in the country. For example, on 10 May 2009, police used physical force against four journalists who were covering events related to the annual Flower Holiday, as well as beating members of the public and detaining approximately 50 demonstrators. In addition, the Azerbaijani authorities have yet to disclose the findings of their investigation into the killing of 13 people at the State Oil Academy in

Baku on 30 April 2009. Journalists attempting to investigate these killings were prevented by authorities from accessing information.

The Government of Azerbaijan has ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, and ARTICLE 19 calls on the authorities to respect its commitments under international law. We also request the authorities to immediately release Emin Milli and Adnan Hajizade without charge, and to thoroughly investigate and prosecute those responsible for assaulting them.

**NOTES TO EDITORS:**

- For more information, please contact Nathalie Losekoot, Senior Programme Officer, Europe, [nathalie@article19.org](mailto:nathalie@article19.org); tel +44 20 7324 2509.
- ARTICLE 19 is an independent human rights organisation that works around the world to protect and promote the right to freedom of expression. It takes its name from Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which guarantees free speech.
- The “Flower Holiday” is an annual celebration of the birthday of former President Geydar Aliyev on 10 May. This year students called for it to be cancelled, to commemorate 13 people killed at the State Oil Academy in Baku on 30 April 2009.