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PRESS RELEASE

Azerbaijan: Bloggers Should be Released on Appeal

ARTICLE 19 calls on the Azerbaijani government to ensure that the Court of Appeal is independent and impartial in the case of two bloggers, Emin Milli and Adnan Hajizade. Their imprisonment is widely believed to be on politically motivated charges of “hooliganism”.

The Court of Appeal will hear the bloggers’ case tomorrow 22 December to determine whether the decision of the court of first instance stands.

On 8 July 2009, Emin Milli and Adnan Hajizade were physically attacked, apparently unprovoked, in a Baku restaurant. Following the attack, Milli and Hajizade filed reports as victims of an assault with the police and requested medical assistance. The police did not provide them with medical assistance. Instead they proceeded to interrogate the youths for five hours without their attorneys being present. Milli and Hajizade were later charged with “hooliganism” as well as “deliberately causing minor serious bodily harm”.

On 11 November 2009 the Sabail District Court in Baku sentenced Emin Milli to two and a half years’ imprisonment, while Adnan Hajizade received a sentence of two years. The criminal investigation and trial proceedings have been widely criticised by international and national observers as flawed and pre-determined.

“Emin Milli and Adnan Hajizade’s sentences should be overturned to show that the Azerbaijani government is truly committed to freedom of expression,” comments Dr Agnès Callamard, ARTICLE 19 Executive Director.

The persecution of Milli and Hajizade, who used online blogging to further civic debate, is particularly troubling in light of deteriorating media freedoms in the country. ARTICLE 19 notes with concern that journalists and media workers continue to be harassed, threatened, and attacked for their professional activities, and defamation and other spurious criminal charges are used to prosecute opposition and independent journalists.

NOTES TO EDITORS:

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- 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.