

Political prisoners started a hunger strike ahead of COP29

The head of the Salyan district organization of the Azerbaijan Popular Front Party (APFP), political prisoner Zamin Salayev, began a hunger strike on October 30 at the Penitentiary Service's medical facility where he is being held. He is protesting the failure to release individuals recognized as political prisoners ahead of the COP29 conference.

Due to his severe health condition, he was transferred to the Penitentiary Service's medical facility.

His family reported that Zamin Salayev has serious heart and liver problems. He experiences shortness of breath, is unable to breathe properly, his legs are swollen, and he cannot walk.

Zamin Salayev was detained on February 7, 2023.

He was found guilty under Article 221.3 of the Criminal Code (hooliganism – use of weapons or items used as weapons to apply force to the victim). On May 22, 2023, the Garadagh District Court, presided over by Judge Rufan Mursalov, sentenced Zamin Salayev to 4 years of imprisonment.

Salayev believes his imprisonment was orchestrated and has previously gone on a hunger strike in protest of the court's verdict.

The imprisoned head of the Xeberman.com website, journalist Polad Aslanov, has also begun a hunger strike at Baku Prison No. 1, demanding the release of political prisoners ahead of the COP29 conference. Two other inmates held at the same prison, Vali Yagubov and Ramal Huseynov, have joined Aslanov's hunger strike.¹

After Polad Aslanov declared a hunger strike, he was transferred from Prison No. 1 to Prison No. 15.² His wife stated that the conditions in that prison are worse.

It is reported that after being transferred to Prison No. 15, Polad Aslanov was placed in a punishment cell ("karser"). His wife, Gulmira Aslanova, shared this information.

"The Penitentiary Service informed me that Polad was put in 'karser' due to his hunger strike and the need for isolation, explaining that there was no space in the sanitary unit. In reality, they just punished him," Aslanova told local media.

On the morning of November 6, she went to the prison to check on her husband's condition. However, she said she was not allowed to meet with him or have a phone conversation.

Polad Aslanov was charged with espionage in favor of Iran on June 12, 2019, under Article 274 (treason) of the Criminal Code. He was sentenced to 16 years in prison.

Aslanov denies all the charges and claims he was persecuted for exposing corruption among intelligence officers.

¹ <https://turan.az/en/politics/polad-aslanov-starts-hunger-strike-demanding-release-of-political-prisoners-786509>

² <https://turan.az/en/politics/polad-aslanov-forcibly-transferred-to-penitentiary-service-hospital-786558>

Human rights defenders have recognized him as a political prisoner

International organizations have condemned Aslanov's imprisonment and called for his release.

Later, the Supreme Court reduced Aslanov's prison sentence to 13 years.

The state is indifferent to the issues of political prisoners who have health problems

Attorneys and public defenders are currently sounding the alarm about the health of political prisoner Anar Mammadli, the head of the Elections Monitoring and Democracy Studies (EMDS) Center, who is in prison.

Attorney Javad Javadov is urging relevant authorities not to be indifferent to the issue of the person's health.³

In early October, when his attorneys met with Anar Mammadli at the Baku Investigation Detention Center, he stated that the numerous health problems he was facing had started to seriously concern him, and he needed a thorough examination.

The attorneys, in addition to making this issue public, have decided to appeal to the relevant state authorities.

"On that same day, I sent a letter written by Anar himself in his handwriting to the Ministry of Justice's Medical Department, the Penitentiary Service, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and the Ombudsman. We requested that he undergo a comprehensive examination at a civilian hospital (including ultrasound and other necessary tests). There are serious and concerning issues with his health that we do not wish to disclose. A day after the applications, another attorney, Elchin Sadigov, met with Anar and found out that no one had shown any interest in this request. Therefore, we had no choice but to make this public," said attorney Javad Javadov.

The attorney says that Anar Mammadli, who has family members in the medical field, requested treatment for the health issue that concerns him.

The attorney believes that bureaucratic obstacles are being created in matters that should be handled promptly.

"The medical care of prisoners and convicts was taken out of the jurisdiction of the Penitentiary Service and handed over to the Ministry of Justice's Medical Department. As a result, significant bureaucratic hurdles arise in a matter that should be resolved swiftly. This issue must be addressed," Javad Javadov added.

The attorneys' appeal to the court regarding this issue has also been unsuccessful.⁴ So that, the Baku Court of Appeal reviewed the complaint filed by the attorneys regarding Anar

³ <https://turan.az/en/politics/state-bodies-not-responding-to-deteriorating-health-of-anar-mammadli-785810>

⁴ <https://turan.az/en/politics/anar-mammadli-denied-examination-in-civilian-clinic-786432>

Mammadli's examination at a civilian hospital under judicial oversight and did not grant the request.

It should be noted that the complaint was returned by the Khatai District Court.

Anar Mammadli participated in the court hearing. He stated that he could not stand the pain, had serious health problems, and was not receiving adequate examination and treatment. He even asked the convoy unit to return him to the Baku Investigation Detention Center as soon as possible.

Anar Mammadli was detained on April 29. On April 30, he was charged under Article 206.3.2 of the Criminal Code (smuggling committed by a group of persons acting in concert).

Several international organizations, including the U.S. State Department and the U.S. Embassy, have called on the Azerbaijani government to immediately release Anar Mammadli and other detained individuals.

Anar Mammadli is the head of a non-governmental organization in Azerbaijan specializing in electoral rights. He is the author of critical reports on elections.

Previously, on December 17, 2013, Anar Mammadli was arrested. He was charged with tax evasion and abuse of official authority in relation to falsifying election and referendum results.

The Baku Serious Crimes Court sentenced Anar Mammadli to 5 years and 6 months in prison. Mammadli denied the charges and was declared a prisoner of conscience by Amnesty International.

On September 29, 2014, Anar Mammadli was awarded the Václav Havel Human Rights Prize at the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) autumn session.

The political prisoner and activist, Famil Khalilov, who is a Group I disabled person, has lost the use of his legs.⁵ His wife has informed the local media about this.

"Famil's leg numbness has increased. He cannot move. He has lost 36 kilograms, and now weighs 82 kilograms (he was 118 kilograms when he entered the detention facility). The doctors took a blood test from him," said his wife, Kichikhanim Khalilova, after meeting with the public activist on October 29 at the medical unit of the Baku Pretrial Detention Center.

According to her, Famil Khalilov suffers from severe pain in his stomach and head. Additionally, Famil Khalilov has stated that he will continue his hunger strike until the end.

Attorney Bahruz Bayramov said that despite his severe condition, Famil Khalilov's trial has been postponed until November 28, after COP29.

Activist Famil Khalilov is conducting a hunger strike to protest his unlawful imprisonment.

⁵ <https://turan.az/en/politics/activist-on-hunger-strike-in-detention-has-lost-his-legs-786264>

Famil Khalilov, fearing for his life, stated that he was forced to ask for asylum in Sweden in 2015. He lived there with his wife and children for nearly eight years before being readmitted to Azerbaijan in 2023.

On May 2 of this year, Khalilov was arrested and charged under Article 234.4.3 of the Criminal Code (preparing, transporting, and storing a large amount of narcotics for sale). A detention order was issued for him. The article provides for a prison sentence of 5 to 12 years.

His family insists on his innocence, claiming that he is being punished for his social media posts.

His wife, Kichikkhanim Khalilova, stated that Khalilov was arrested due to his activism on social media and his efforts to demand rights for the people.

On August 29, the trial of Khalilov began at the Baku Serious Crimes Court, chaired by Judge Azar Taghiyev.

Khalilov, who suffers from cerebral palsy and has impaired use of his arms, participated in the hearing with his hands tied behind his back with cloth. His arms are so stiff that he is unable to maintain his balance while standing.

The serious health problems of Alasgar Mammadli, the founder of "Toplum TV" and media expert, who is being held in Baku Investigation Detention Center, persist⁶

Alasgar Mammadli was again subjected to an ultrasound examination in the detention center on October 25. During the examination, kidney stones were found again, and growths were discovered in his pancreas and liver.

Alasgar Mammadli's brother, Nasimi Mammadli, stated that the thyroid nodules in Alasgar Mammadli's thyroid gland remain large.

"The doctor has said that the nodules in the thyroid gland must be surgically removed. However, there is no facility for surgery in the detention center because it is a high-precision surgical process," he added.

According to him, an appeal will be made to the court again for Alasgar Mammadli's release on house arrest.

Between March 6-8, nine employees of "Toplum TV" and its partner organization, the Institute for Democratic Initiatives, were detained. They are accused of foreign currency smuggling. Seven individuals were placed under arrest, while two were placed under police supervision.

Alasgar Mammadli, the founder of "Toplum TV," is also accused of currency smuggling.

⁶ <https://turan.az/en/politics/alaskar-mammadlis-health-deteriorates-in-detention-center-786340>