

Azerbaijan: Lengthy sentences for Anar Mammadli and other independent voices point to the shocking scale of the crackdown on dissent

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Reacting to the 13-year prison sentence handed down to prisoner of conscience and human rights defender Anar Mammadli, following the lengthy prison sentences imposed on nine defendants in the Toplum TV case, Marie Struthers, Amnesty International's Eastern Europe and Central Asia Director, said: "Anar Mammadli has been condemned to spend thirteen years behind bars for 'crimes' he did not commit. His conviction follows an unfair trial in which his rights were brazenly violated, mirroring the treatment of the nine defendants in the Toplum TV case, who were also handed lengthy prison sentences."

"These convictions demonstrate that journalists and other critics who expose government abuses and challenge the interests of President Ilham Aliyev's family are severely punished.

"Since 2009, the Azerbaijani authorities have increasingly tightened restrictions on critical NGOs and independent media outlets. Many have been arbitrarily denied registration. To continue operating amid deteriorating respect for the right to freedom of expression, many have adopted strategies that the authorities have sought to criminalize through impossible tax, currency and other regulatory requirements designed to obstruct their legitimate work.

"Azerbaijan's international partners must not turn a blind eye to this escalating crackdown. Energy and economic cooperation cannot and should not come at the expense of human rights. The Azerbaijani authorities must immediately and unconditionally release Anar Mammadli and all others imprisoned solely for peacefully exercising their human rights. They must end the persecution of independent media, civil society and other dissenting voices."

Background

On 7 September 2026, the Baku Court on Grave Crimes sentenced Anar Mammadli to 13 years in prison on charges including "currency smuggling," "illegal entrepreneurship," "tax evasion," "money laundering" and "document forgery." The court sentenced his co-defendant Anar Abdullayev to 12 years' imprisonment.

In July, the same court sentenced Akif Gurbanov, Ruslan Izzetli, Alasgar Mammadli, Ali Zeynalov, Ramil Babayev, Mushfig Jabarov, Ilkin Amrahov, Farid Ismayilov and Elmir Abbasov, associated with Toplum TV, the Institute for Democratic Initiatives and the Third Republic Platform, to prison terms ranging from 12 to 15 years on similar charges.

In both cases, the prosecution failed to present credible evidence establishing that the alleged offences had been committed. The courts arbitrarily rejected numerous requests by defence lawyers, including requests to examine all the prosecution's evidence, question key witnesses in open court and address manifest inaccuracies and inconsistencies in the case materials. The defendants were also arbitrarily denied bail and subjected to lengthy pretrial detention. Anar Mammadli spent 27

months in detention between his arrest and conviction. This is his second unjust imprisonment, following his conviction in 2014 on similarly trumped-up charges. In 2018, the European Court of Human Rights found that his detention had violated Article 5 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

<https://www.amnesty.nl/actueel/azerbaijan-lengthy-sentences-for-anar-mammadli-and-other-independent-voices-point-to-the-shocking-scale-of-the-crackdown-on-dissent>