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**Azerbaijan: Human rights defender Anar Mammadli arrested and detained in Baku**

On 30 April 2024, Khatai District Court of Baku ruled to place human rights defender **Anar Mammadli in pre-trial detention until the end of August 2024**. He faces charges of conspiracy to unlawfully bring money into the country, an offense outlined in Article 206.3.2 of the Criminal Code of Azerbaijan. If convicted, the human rights defender could face up to eight years in prison. Anar Mammadli's lawyer will appeal the decision to place human rights defender in pre-trial detention.

[Anar Mammadli](#) is the chairperson of the Election Monitoring and Democracy Studies Centre (EMDS), an organization that has been conducting independent election monitoring in Azerbaijan since 2001. He has faced systemic persecution for his work, including detention. In 2014, Anar Mammadli received the Václav Havel Human Rights Prize from the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) for his outstanding contributions to civil society in the defense of human rights. Due to his imprisonment at the time, Anar Mammadli could not personally accept the award.

On 30 April 2024, Khatai District Court of Baku ruled to place human rights defender **Anar Mammadli in pre-trial detention until the end of August 2024**. Human rights defender is being accused of to unlawfully bring money into the country, an offense outlined in Article 206.3.2 of the Criminal Code of Azerbaijan. The Court alleged that in the period of 2021-2024 human rights defender imported foreign currency that he failed to declare with the customs at the Baku airport. However, according to Anar Mammadli lawyer, the Court failed to specify the exact dates and amounts, placing human rights defender in pre-trial detention on what appears to be bogus charges. Anar Mammadli is now in Baku Detention Center #1. Anar Mammadli's lawyer will appeal the decision to place human rights defender in pre-trial detention; he states there are no reasonable grounds to assume that he will flee Azerbaijan throughout the ongoing investigation.

On 29 April 2024, law enforcement officers arrested Anar Mammadli on a street in Baku, Azerbaijan and forced him into a car. On the same day as his arrest, authorities raided both Anar Mammadli's house and his parents' house simultaneously. The human rights defender's sister reported that law enforcement officers seized old documents, receipts, laptops, and flash drives from both locations. She also believes the authorities may have planted and pretended to seize unidentified amounts of money, noting a rubber band that was left behind after the raid. The law enforcement officers prevented lawyers to offer support to Anar Mammadli's relatives during the raid.

The arrest and detention of Anar Mammadli are part of a broader crackdown on human rights defenders and journalists in Azerbaijan. Since October 2023, the authorities have detained thirteen independent journalists, including those from the [Abzas media outlet](#). The human rights defenders are being investigated for "conspiring to bring money into the country unlawfully," as described in Article 206.3.2 of the Criminal Code of Azerbaijan. If convicted, they face up to eight years in prison.

Anar Mammadli has already faced persecution for his human rights work. In the month leading up to his arrest, prior to the so-called "presidential elections" in Azerbaijan, Anar Mammadli faced [defamation in the press](#), with pro-government media outlets labeling him as part of the civil society

sector that uses foreign funding to work against the country. In 2013, he conducted independent presidential election observations and reported widespread irregularities and fraud during the voting and counting processes. In retaliation for his legitimate and peaceful human rights work, Azerbaijani authorities detained him in December 2013 and later sentenced him to 5.5 years in prison in May 2014, charging him with running "business activity without registration," an offense under Article 192.2.2 of the Criminal Code of Azerbaijan. In March 2016, the President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, issued a presidential pardon to 148 prisoners, including Anar Mammadli.

Front Line Defenders is deeply concerned by the unjustified arrest and pre-trial detention of Anar Mammadli, based on fabricated charges that, this organization believes, are being used to target him for his legitimate and peaceful human rights work. Front Line Defenders condemns this repression of human rights defenders, which intensifies the chilling effect on civil society, undermining hopes for a safe and enabling environment for human rights work in Azerbaijan.

**Front Line Defenders calls upon the authorities in Azerbaijan to:**

1. Immediately and unconditionally release Anar Mammadli from pre-trial detention and ensure his physical and psychological well-being;
2. Drop all charges against him;
3. Cease harrasment against Anar Mammadli family members;
4. Guarantee that all human rights defenders in Azerbaijan can carry out their legitimate activities without fear of reprisal and free from all restrictions, including judicial harassment.

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