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Written statement* submitted by Institute for Reporters' Freedom and Safety, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[23 August 2023]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



The Unjust Detention of Azerbaijani Outspoken Scholar: A Threat to Freedom of Expression in Azerbaijan

Institute for Reporters Freedom and Safety are particularly concerned of a politically motivated detention of Gubad Ibadoglu - a prominent opposition leader, economist and scholar.

Professor of Economy Dr. Gubad Ibadoglu, a brave critic of kleptocracy and nepotism, was detained on July 23 2023 in Baku, Azerbaijan's capital, shortly after returning from a two-year tenure as a senior visiting fellow at the London School of Economics in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland[1].

"In May 2020, he inaugurated BİZ TV, a social media initiative where he and other experts regularly addressed and illuminated socio-economic challenges and inefficiencies within the public administration of Azerbaijan [1].

Gubad Ibadoglu is a widely recognized figure for those who have delved into the economic dynamics of post-Soviet nations. His name has featured prominently in numerous reports, assessments, and editorial pieces concerning the pervasive issues of economic opacity, fiscal responsibility, and the problematic economic strategies adopted by the leadership within the extractive industry sector across the region. Throughout his extensive career, he has dedicated himself to the principles of effective governance and the study of "petro-capitalism," scrutinizing the impact of oil and gas revenues on fostering corruption and authoritarianism within the post-Soviet states. He was a visiting fellow and professor at numerous universities, including at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Duke University, the Institute for Advanced Studies in Princeton, NJ, and Rutgers University, where he was a visiting post-doc fellow at the Center for European Studies and taught courses in the Department of Political Science and Economics.

Additionally, being an outstanding scientist, he played a pivotal role in the opposition movement, specifically within the "Azerbaijani Party of Democracy and Welfare and established the Azerbaijani Youth Education Foundation in London, which was supposed to return assets stolen through government's corruption [1].

Thus, Ibadoglu's consistent work towards democratic changes both within and without Azerbaijan has attracted a considerable attention from the officials, including the President of Azerbaijan himself [2]. The main reason behind this suppression on freedom of expression and assembly in Azerbaijan is the regime's deep-seated intolerance towards the emergence of new political organizations. The authorities view the arrest of individuals like Gubad Ibadoglu as a strategic political move, using it as an opportunity to stifle dissent and maintain their grip on power.

Azerbaijan is well-known for its over restrictive regulations when it comes to enjoyment of guaranteed rights and freedoms. Azerbaijan has a long history of suppressing new political movements, spanning from grassroots youth initiatives to established political parties. This relentless crackdown on political diversity and dissent has been a persistent feature of the country's political landscape.

A glaring illustration of this repression is the enactment of the Law on Political Parties signed into force on 11 January, 2023. The amendments of the Law contain changes to the conditions under which a political party may be established, the possibility for a political party to operate without a registration, the control over political parties exercised by state authorities, the rules on funding of political parties and the cases in which a political party may be dissolved. The Law widely limits the rights to free association and free expression, as well as diminishes the possibility for political parties to operate in an extensive manner. According to the Venice Commission's decision "[...] new law has introduced a number of new highly problematic provisions which risk having further chilling effects on pluralism in the country" [3].

On the very same day of the detention, the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Azerbaijan has claimed that Gubad Ibadoglu's detention is linked to operations targeting supporters of Fethullah Gülen, a cleric residing in the United States of America.

The Ministry of Internal Affairs of Azerbaijan has supplemented its statement by indicating that they conducted operational measures against individuals believed to be associated with members of FETÖ (Fethullah Terrorist Organization) in the country. This action was taken in response to information received from the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Türkiye [4]. Though, the Narimanov District Court of Baku charged Mr. Ibadoglu of production, acquisition, or sale of counterfeit money by an organized group and issued a preventive measure in a form of four-month pretrial detention [5].

The arrest occurred during a car ride with Mr. Ibadoglu's wife - Irada Bayramova, when they were pulled over and forcibly detained by the Baku police officers. Later, Ms. Bayramova, displaying bruises on her legs and shoulders, alleged that both she and her husband had suffered physical abuse in police custody. Additionally, she reported that authorities had refused her from delivering her husband's essential medications to him. She expressed grave concern about her husband's health, emphasizing that he relies on daily medications for his illness [6].

Given the background of a detainee and the circumstances of the arrest, Institute for Reporters' Freedom and Safety condemns the detention of Mr. Gubad Ibadoglu and considers the charges against him being completely trumped up.

The international community has already expressed its concern and increased attention to Ibadoglu's detention and investigation. Namely, the UN Human Rights Office, the official Representative of the European Union (EU) for International Relations and Security Policy, Embassies of the United States of America, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, France and Germany, additionally to prominent non-governmental organizations as OMCT, Human Rights Watch, Freedom Now, Swedish OSCE-network, Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights, Norwegian Helsinki Committee as well as the World Movement for Democracy urged Azerbaijani government for immediate and unconditional release of Gubad Ibadoglu [7].

Now, according to Mr. Ibadoglu's lawyers and family, his physical condition considerably deteriorated during the last month. Ibadoglu's health, already fragile due to diabetes and high blood pressure, is at immediate risk as he has been denied regular access to his medication, which is critical to his health.

Institute for Reporters' Freedom and Safety, in a context of various human rights violations yet to be discussed during the 54th Session of the Human Rights Council, would like to call upon the Member States to promptly and resolutely take steps to ensure that the government of Azerbaijan is held responsible for this flagrant breach of human rights and encourage immediate release of Mr. Gubad Ibadoglu.

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1. <https://www.irfs.org/news-feed/irfs-condemns-the-politically-motivated-arrest-of-dr-gubad-ibadoglu-and-calls-for-his-immediate-release/>
 2. <https://www.balcanicaucaso.org/eng/Areas/Azerbaijan/Azerbaijan-official-Baku-goes-after-its-well-known-economist-226409>
 3. [https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/?pdf=CDL-AD\(2023\)007-e](https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/?pdf=CDL-AD(2023)007-e)
 4. <https://jam-news.net/azerbaijani-politician-arrested-on-suspicion-of-counterfeiting/>
 5. <https://www.irfs.org/news-feed/the-court-arrested-gubad-ibadoglu-for-4-months/>
 6. <https://www.omct.org/en/resources/statements/azerbaijan-urgent-call-for-the-release-of-gubad-ibadoglu-renowned-academic-and-politician>
 7. <https://www.irfs.org/news-feed/international-civil-society-calls-for-the-immediate-and-unconditional-release-of-professor-gubad-ibadoglu-in-azerbaijan/>