

Network of Concerned Historians				NCH
Campaigns				
Year original	Year follow-up	Circular	Country	Name
2024		110	Azerbaijan	Igbal Abilov

Announcement

Amnesty International has recently launched an urgent action for **Igbal Abilov**, a historian and ethnographer of the Talysh people (a Persian-speaking minority in Azerbaijan), who was detained on fabricated charges in a crackdown on dissidents in the lead-up to the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP29), scheduled for 11–22 November 2024 in Baku.

Please send a letter of appeal to President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev. We kindly ask you to use Amnesty International’s letter, available in [English](#), [French](#) and [Spanish](#), as a format for your own letter.

Please note that there is a pattern of persecution of Talysh intellectuals in Azerbaijan. For example, Talysh historian Fakhraddin Abbasov was killed in prison on 9 November 2020.

Below is a NCH summary of the case, followed by the English text of the open letter and some background.

Please take action now. Please remember to write in your professional capacity.

NCH SUMMARY

On 22 June 2024, Igbal (Iqbal) Abilov (1989–), a historian and ethnographer of the Talysh people (a Persian-speaking minority in Azerbaijan) and lecturer in international relations at Belarusian State University, Minsk, was arrested by the State Security Service in Masalli during a family visit to southern Azerbaijan, and on 24 July 2024 remanded to four months in pre-trial detention in the capital Baku on charges of high treason, foreign-agent-instructed public appeals against the state, and incitement of ethnic hatred. He faced a prison sentence of up to twenty years. The charges were reportedly fabricated in

retaliation for his research on the history and culture of ethnic minorities in the South Caucasus, Turkey, and Iran, including the Talysh, and his collaboration with Armenian scholars. An ethnic Talysh, he had co-founded the Talysh National Academy in Belarus. One of his publications was *Essays on the History and Ethnography of the Talysh* (2011). Abilov's arrest was part of a crackdown on dissidents who had criticized the September 2023 Azerbaijani offensive against Nagorno-Karabakh, during the lead-up to the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP29), scheduled for 11–22 November 2024 in Baku.

Sources: “[Appeal for Igbal Abilov](#),” *International Talysh Foundation* (no date [July] 2024); Academic Freedom Monitoring Project, “[Igbal Abilov](#),” *Scholars at Risk* (22 July 2024); “[Azerbaijan: Academics Arrested on Fabricated Charges: Igbal Abilov and Bahruz Samadov](#),” *Amnesty International* (23 September 2024); “[Azerbaijan: Academics Face Up to 20 Years in Prison for Speaking Out](#),” *Amnesty International* (23 September 2024); “[The Persecution of Iqbal Abilov Undermines Academic Freedom–SAR](#),” *Turan* (6 October 2024); Anton Troianovski, “[Repression Intensifies in the Country Hosting a Major Climate Meeting](#),” *New York Times* (1 November 2024).

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur55/8554/2024/en/>

URGENT ACTION: ACADEMICS ARRESTED ON FABRICATED CHARGES

President of Azerbaijan

Ilham Aliyev

Office of the President of Azerbaijan

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Dear President Aliyev,

I am writing to demand the release of academics Bahruz Samadov and Igbal Abilov who have been detained on spurious charges.

On July 22, 2024, Igbal Abilov, an ethnic Talysh scholar and minority rights researcher and advocate, who has lived in Belarus since he was a child, was arrested while visiting Azerbaijan. He was charged with

treason, sedition and incitement of ethnic hatred. On 21 August 2024 Bahruz Samadov, another political scientist, was arrested on charges of treason while staying in Azerbaijan during a break from his doctoral studies. Both have been remanded in pre-trial detention. Neither is allowed contact with their families.

There is no official public information regarding the grounds for the charges against Bahruz Samadov and Igbal Abilov. Their trials are closed and lawyers are not allowed to share information about their cases, but have reported that they deny the charges. According to the media reports, they stand suspected of treason for having communicated with fellow researchers and activists in Armenia, including during meetings and conferences held under the auspices of European institutions.

Their families believe that they have been arrested because of their critical academic research and activism. Bahruz Samadov has spoken publicly against the use of military force in Nagorno-Karabakh in 2020, and Igbal Abilov has been a vocal advocate for the rights of the national minorities, including the Talysh of Azerbaijan. Their arrests follow a pattern of abuse of the criminal justice system by the government of Azerbaijan to silence its critics.

I urge you to take immediate action to end all politically motivated prosecutions, release Bahruz Samadov, Igbal Abilov and all persons arbitrarily detained or imprisoned for their dissenting or critical views in Azerbaijan including academics, political and civic activists, journalists and human rights defenders.

Yours sincerely,

[signed; name and institutional address; country]

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Azeri, English, Russian. You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 12 November 2024. Please check with the Network of Concerned Historians if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PRONOUN: Igbal Abilov (He/Him); Bahruz Samadov (He/Him).

Additional Information

Igbal Abilov is a researcher and academic specializing in history and ethnography. He lectures on international relations at the Belarusian State University and is also an author of several academic publications on ethnic minorities of the South Caucasus, Turkey, and Iran. An ethnic Talysh himself, he is also a co-founder of Talysh National Academy in Belarus. According to media reports, he has lived in Belarus since he was a child.

Igbal Abilov was detained by Azerbaijani security forces while visiting his family and relatives in Azerbaijan. On 22 June he was taken for questioning by the security forces and released after six hours. On 27 June, he attempted to return to Belarus, but was prevented from boarding the plane and had his passport confiscated. He was detained and transferred to a detention center in Baku on 22 July. His family was not notified of his detention. On 24 July a court in Baku remanded him to four-month detention on charges of “high treason (Article 274 of the Criminal Code), “foreign-agent-instructed public appeals against state” (Article 281.3), and “incitement of ethnic hatred” (Article 283.1) He has not been allowed to meet his family members or communicate any information about his case to them. On 31 August, his lawyer Fariz Namazli, lawyer was also detained, questioned for three hours, and released without charges.

The Azerbaijani authorities have a history of prosecuting the Talysh people, particularly those who advocate cultural or political autonomy. Two prominent Talysh activists imprisoned under trumped up and politically motivated charges have died in custody after being reportedly subjected to torture and ill-treatment and denial of medical treatment.

Bahrüz Samadov, is a postgraduate student of political science at Charles University in Prague, Czechia. He is the author of several academic and media publications on current political issues in Azerbaijan, including critical articles and opinions about the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict over Nagorno Karabakh, and has taken part in academic conferences and meetings on promoting dialogue and peace in region.

Bahrüz Samadov was detained on 21 August by Azerbaijan’s State Security Service while visiting the country on a break from doctoral studies. The police searched his house and confiscated laptops, mobile devices and passport. He has been charged with high treason (Article 274). Police in Baku also detained and questioned two of Bahrüz Samadov’s colleagues, journalists Samad Shikhi and Cavid Ağa in connection with the case and placed them under a travel ban. Azerbaijani authorities have in the past

targeted peace activists who advocated for a peaceful settlement of the conflict with Armenia over Nagorno Karabakh.

The Azerbaijani have long abused the criminal justice system to silence any critical opinion or research. The crackdown on critical voices has recently intensified, especially ahead of the 2024 United Nations Climate Change Conference COP29, scheduled in Baku November 2024.