

## **Azeri Journalist Beaten Unconscious**

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Police in Nakhichevan shrug shoulders as calls for accountability mount.

An assault in which an Azerbaijani journalist and NGO activist was badly beaten is being seen as the latest in a series of attempts to silence government critics.

Ilgar Nasibov's wife Malahat blames the local authorities in Nakhichevan, an exclave region separated from the rest of Azerbaijan by Armenian territory. She believes they were annoyed by his work on a controversial case involving a death in custody.

On August 21, Nasibov was attacked by several people inside the Resource Centre for NGO Development and Democracy which he heads.

"He was called from home to go the office in the evening," Malahat Nasibova told RFE/RL radio's Azerbaijani service. "They said some petitioners had come. They attacked him suddenly in the office and inflicted numerous injuries."

Nasibov was found unconscious, with his jaw, cheekbone and nose broken. He had suffered concussion and had been stabbed with scissors several times, requiring stitches when he was taken to hospital.

Malahat Nasibova links the attack to her husband's work on the case of Turaj Zeynalov, a man who died while being held by the security service on an allegation of spying for neighbouring Iran. Nasibov had helped Zeynalov's family, who believe he was murdered, bring a complaint at the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) in Strasbourg.

"After the communications phase [between court and state] of the Turaj Zeynalov case began at the ECHR, the authorities began being even more aggressive towards us," Malahat said. "About a month-and-a-half ago, Ilgar was knocked down by a car. He was only slightly injured so we didn't publicise it. In our view, the latest attack on Ilgar was pre-planned... and designed to kill him."

International watchdogs have urged the Azerbaijani government to find and punish the perpetrators.

"I call on the authorities to conduct a swift and thorough investigation of this brutal attack on Nasibov and bring those responsible to justice," OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media Dunja Mijatović said in a statement. "This criminal act has an enormous chilling effect on free expression and free media and it could inspire future crimes against members of the media."

The secretary-general of Reporters Without Borders, Christophe Deloire, said that if it turned out that the authorities were behind the attack, "an unacceptable threshold will have been crossed in their attempts to silence the last critical voices in Azerbaijan".

For their part, the authorities are either ignoring or dismissing the issue.

Neither the regional government nor the security service in Nakhichevan has commented on allegations of official involvement.

The regional interior ministry branch did put out a statement saying its police had investigated the case and offering a completely different account.

It quoted a witness statement from a man called Farid Askarov, who told police that on the night in question, he met up for a few drinks with Nasibov, an "old friend". One thing led to another, and they had a fight.

Malahat Nasibova disputes that her husband was friendly with Askarov, and points out that there were not one but several attackers present, who ransacked and smashed the office as well as carrying out the assault.

Mehman Aliev, the head of Turan, an independent news agency for which both Ilgar and Malahat Nasibov have written, sees the attack as part of a wider pattern of repression.

"The arrests of Emil Mammadov in Salyan, Hasan Huseynli in Ganja, rights defenders Leyla and Arif Yunusov, Rasul Jafarov, Intiqam Aliyev, journalist Rauf Mirqadirov and others, plus the enforced closure of NGOs is all part of Azerbaijan government policy," he said "It's just that in Nakhichevan, the process is rougher." (**Azerbaijan Tidies Away Human Rights Critics** is IWPR's most recent round-up of the wave of detentions.)

A leading media watchdog in Azerbaijan, the Institute for Reporters' Freedom and Safety, asked why the Council of Europe (CoE) was doing nothing about the situation.

"This attack is a wake-up call to all those who value freedom of expression, in particular the Council of Europe," it said in a statement.

Azerbaijan is a member of the council, which calls itself Europe's "leading human rights organisation". At the moment, it also holds the six-month rotating chair of the CoE's Committee of Ministers.

The group accused the CoE of continuing to "turn a blind eye to a brutal human rights crackdown coinciding with Azerbaijan's chairmanship", and failing to condemn the government "for a series of outrageous crimes against human rights"

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**Location:** [Azerbaijan](#)

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