

25 September 2013

Maran Turner  
Executive Director  
Freedom Now  
[www.freedom-now.org](http://www.freedom-now.org)

OSCE: Day three, Fundamental Freedoms

I speak today on behalf of my org that works on behalf of individual prisoners of conscience, and our partner organizations in the countries of Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan, two member states in the OSCE region that use arbitrary detention to silence individual expression, most often of activists and journalists. I call on these countries to comply with their binding obligations under international law, such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and to comply with judgments issued by the European Court, the UN Human Rights Committee, and the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, all of which call for the immediate release of countless individuals who have been imprisoned as a result of their exercise of a fundamental right.

The Government of Uzbek engages in a systematic harassment of civil society, and has traditionally used arbitrary arrest and detention to silence all criticism against the Uzbek government and those who seek to root out corruption at the local, regional and national level. Fabricated charges are the norm and mistreatment by police is routine. Prison conditions, where hard labor is prescribed, are considered inhumane. My organization has observed a decrease in the number of new arrests in recent years, however, we have observed a rooting out of civil society by other means. Nevertheless, there are numerous human rights defenders who remain in prison, and on whose cases various UN bodies, such as the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, have called for their release and has deemed the Uzbek Government in violation of its commitments under international law. We especially call on the government of Uzbekistan to release the following four human rights defenders and journalists: Akzam Turgunov, Dimurod Saidov, Salijon Aburakhmanov and Azam Farmanov.

I note comments made today by the representative from Uzbekistan who said laws have been enacted to support free expression and media. However, these laws are meaningless if they are not put into action on the ground. I hope very much that these new laws might be the impetus to usher in greater respect for independent voices. But the first step must be the release of individuals imprisoned because of their expression, and I call on the government to review such cases.

Separately, and I echo concerns already cited by my colleagues, the use of arbitrary detention by the government of Azerbaijan to silence activists and journalists is widespread, systematic, and well documented. While there are too many cases to cite, and I note with concern the increasing use of short term administrative detention as a means to punish individual expression, I want to draw the OSCE's

attention to the case of Hilal Mammadov, who in recent years has been harassed and imprisoned. A prominent Talish journalist who is editor of the only minority Talish-language newspaper in Azer. Mr Mammadov is currently on trial on charges of inciting religious hatred, and drug possession widely observed to be baseless, and deemed as such by my own org. We call on the government to review Mr. Mammadov's case and help facilitate his release and the dismissal of charges.

Thank you.