

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 24, 2011

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Clinton,

I am writing on behalf of a constituent to request information about the status of youth activist and blogger, Bakhtiyar Hajiyev, who was recently detained in Azerbaijan. It appears Mr. Hajiyev's rights were abused in violation of both the Azeri constitution and the International Bill of Human Rights.

Mr. Hajiyev, a graduate of the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, stood as a parliamentary candidate in Azerbaijan's 2010 elections. He was first detained on November 18, 2010, by the Azeri government for allegedly evading military service. On March 4, 2011, Mr. Hajiyev was arrested again in Ganja, Azerbaijan after using Facebook to help organize protests on March 11, 2011.

Official accusations claim that Mr. Hajiyev violated an order not to leave the city of Ganja while previous charges were investigated. However, I understand Mr. Hajiyev requested to perform alternative service instead, as permitted by the Azeri constitution.

While in detention, police officers reportedly tortured Mr. Hajiyev and threatened him with sexual assault. Mr. Hajiyev carried out a hunger strike to draw attention to this abuse.

This case typifies the State Department's alarming assessment of human rights in Azerbaijan. The Department's 2009 Report notes "numerous instances of violations of arrest and detention procedures," and cases in which detainees died in police and military custody due to "alleged abuse and mistreatment."

I appreciate the statement from the U.S. Embassy on March 7, 2011, and subsequent action to raise this issue with the Azeri government, but my concerns remain. Over two weeks later, Mr. Hajiyev remains in pre-trial detention, facing up to two years in prison.

Therefore, I respectfully request that you continue to urge the government of Azerbaijan to follow the international standards of due process, in accordance with the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Azerbaijan's accession to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, particularly Articles 9, 10 and 19. Mr. Hajiyev should be released before his trial begins and allegations of mistreatment should be investigated expeditiously.

Thank you for your prompt attention and response to this urgent human rights matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Mark Kirk". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the left.

Mark Kirk
United States Senator

CC: The Honorable Matthew Bryza, United States Ambassador to Azerbaijan