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12 May 2025

## **Azerbaijan: Woman human rights defender and journalist Ulviyya Ali arrested and denied proper medical treatment in detention**

On 7 May 2025, following a house raid, Azerbaijani authorities arrested woman human rights defender Ulviyya Ali, placing her in Baku Pre-trial Detention Centre (Bakı İstintaq Təcridxanası) for a duration of one month and 29 days. Ulviyya Ali is suspected of smuggling money into Azerbaijan and, if found guilty, she could face up to eight years in prison. Several days after her arrest, friends of the woman human rights defender reported that her health had deteriorated while in pre-trial detention.

Ulviyya Ali (Guliyeva) is an Azerbaijani woman human rights defender, journalist, and photographer. She has collaborated with various independent media outlets as a freelance journalist and photographer. Since 2016, Ulviyya Ali's journalistic work has documented issues of social injustice, regardless of individuals' religion, ethnicity, political views, gender or sexuality. She is one of the few journalists who continued to work in Azerbaijan despite the ongoing crackdown against independent media. Her work has been featured in a number of independent media platforms, including Voice of America, RFE/RL and OC Media.

On 9 May 2025, friends of Ulviyya Ali reported that her health deteriorated in pre-trial detention after the physical violence she experienced from the law enforcement authorities. She is reportedly experiencing systemic vomiting after sustaining head injuries during her arrest. The woman human rights defender has a pre-existing medical condition and underwent long-term treatment in 2017. As of 9 May she had not received any medical support, raising concerns about her access to necessary healthcare while in custody.

On the night of 7 May 2025, Azerbaijani authorities raided Ulviyya Ali's apartment, alleging that they recovered more than 6000 EUR during the search. The authorities claimed that she had smuggled this money into the country during her last trip abroad in December 2024. Many of her personal items and furniture were damaged during the raid. Friends of Ulviyya Ali reported that she was subjected to both physical and psychological violence during the raid, with officers hitting her on the head multiple times and pulling her hair. The officers also threatened the woman human rights defender with psychological violence to compel her to unlock her phone, and they confiscated her laptop.

Following the raid, Ulviyya Ali was arrested, handcuffed, and taken to Khatai District Court in Baku, Azerbaijan, where she learned she was being accused of smuggling money by a group of persons through prior conspiracy, a criminal offence under Article 206.3.2 of the Criminal Code of Azerbaijan. A state-appointed lawyer represented the woman human rights defender, but she refused to testify during the court hearing. The Court ruled to place Ulviyya Ali in Baku Pre-trial Detention Centre for one month and 29 days. The woman human rights defender's mother has yet to receive permission to visit her, and was only able to pass Ulviyya Ali some food and water while in detention.

Ulviyya Ali is the 11<sup>th</sup> journalist detained in connection with the case of Meydan TV, an independent TV channel operating in Azerbaijan, in relation to alleged smuggling of funds. On 16 January 2025, the Baku City Police Department subjected her to questioning and enforced a travel ban. In a letter shared with media outlets after her arrest, Ulviyya Ali stated that she had no professional ties to Meydan TV. However, she noted that even if she did, cooperating with them is not a crime. She also asserted that she didn't engage in any smuggling of funds into Azerbaijan. Ulviyya Ali's friends believe she wrote this letter in anticipation of further persecution.

Front Line Defenders is deeply concerned by the unjustified arrest and pre-trial detention of Ulviyya Ali, based on what it believes to be fabricated charges aimed at targeting her for her legitimate and peaceful human rights work. The organisation condemns the use of physical and psychological violence against the woman human rights defender. Front Line Defenders condemns this violent repression of human rights defenders in Azerbaijan, which may create a chilling effect on civil society and undermine hopes of a safe environment for human rights defenders to carry out their work.

**Front Line Defenders calls upon the authorities of Azerbaijan to:**

1. Immediately and unconditionally release Ulviyya Ali and ensure her physical and psychological integrity;
2. Provide Ulviyya Ali with access to independent medical care;
3. Drop all charges against woman human rights defender and journalist Ulviyya Ali;
4. Carry out an immediate, thorough, and impartial investigation into the allegations of physical violence against Ulviyya Ali, with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
5. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Azerbaijan are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisal and free from all restrictions, including judicial harassment.

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