



Religious and Human Rights Organizations Respond to Sheikh Mirtag Asadov's detention in

Azerbaijan

We, the signatory organizations, express our concern about the arbitrary detention of Sheikh Miratag Asadov, the chairman of the Supreme Religious Administration of Georgia's All Muslims, by the local police on the territory of Azerbaijan, and call on the authorities of Georgia and Azerbaijan, to take timely and effective measures to restore the rights of the detained cleric.

Sheikh Mirtag Asadov is a citizen of Georgia and, together with religious and charity-related activities, is actively working to support the protection of rights and equality of the religious and ethnic minorities in Georgia. Sheikh Mirtag Asadov is especially critical of the state policy, focused on the control and intervention with regard to Muslim religious organizations in Georgia. He frequently expresses the discontent and needs of the Azeri community in Georgia and thus, creates an important experience in terms of the fight for civil rights in the region

According to the information received from Sheikh's family members, on November 7, 2018, around 14:00, he crossed the Georgian state border from the customs point of the red bridge and entered the territory of the Republic of Azerbaijan. His detention was carried out by local law enforcement officers immediately after crossing the border of the Republic of Azerbaijan. M. Asadov traveled to the Republic of Azerbaijan in a taxi. The taxi driver later informed his family members that Mirtag Asadov was taken away after crossing the border of the Republic of Azerbaijan, and after waiting for about an hour, a policeman approached him and told him to leave and informed him they would take Asadov to Baku themselves.

The family members knew nothing about the location and fate of the detained for almost 4 days after November 7. Within the first few days, lawyers of Mirtag Asadov applied to the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Public Defender and requested the information about the detained cleric. However, we have not received an official answer yet. Only after engaging a private attorney in Azerbaijan, it became possible for the family members to receive information about the reasons for the detention of Asadov. According to the information shared by the attorney and the court decision, Mirtag Asadov has been sentenced to 30 days administrative imprisonment because of an alleged petty hooliganism and disobedience to the lawful claims of the police. The decision suggests

that the administrative offense was committed on November 8, 2018, in the Nakimanov district in Baku, Aliyadee Street, allegedly he was shouting in the streets, and after the police call, he showed their resistance. First, it should be said the factual circumstances presented in the decision do not correspond to reality, because both family members and other witnesses say that Asadov's detention took place on November 7, right after the border crossing, and he was taken to Baku only after his detention. The factual circumstances stated in the decision are wrong and arouse suspicion of arbitrary detention. The local attorney will appeal the court decision in the coming days and present additional evidence to the court of appeals. Up to now, Mirtagi's local lawyer and wife, who lives in Baku, could not visit him. Unfortunately, we still know nothing about his health or the treatment at the time of detention or afterward. Considering numerous international reports on systematic practices of inhuman and degrading treatment and impunity in Azerbaijan prisons, this situation is alarming and extraordinary.

We, the signatory organizations express our concern about the incident and we hope that the detention of Sheikh Mirtag Asadov in the territory of Azerbaijan is not connected to his activities in Georgia. Illegal and anti-human rights practices between the Georgian and Azerbaijan authorities have shown in the cases of the kidnapping of Azerbaijani journalist Afgan Mukhtar from Georgia and other dissidents from Azerbaijan. The lack of grounds for the allegations against Mirtag Asadov further strengthens doubts about possible political interests.

Taking into the consideration the above-mentioned, we, the signatory organizations, call on:

The State of Georgia

Immediately take all measures to protect the rights of its citizen Mirtag Asadov, including, the promotion of conditions for realization of the right to a fair trial in his case and to protect him from possible humiliating and inhuman treatment. It is important that the Georgian Embassy in Azerbaijan visit Mirtag Asadov, to check his health condition and provide information to the members of the family.

The Government of Azerbaijan

Immediately ensure the right to a fair trial for Mirtag Asadov, and, the right of the family members and lawyer to visit him on a timely basis in the detention facility.

International organizations and Diplomatic corps accredited in Azerbaijan:

Under their mandate, to take measures to protect the rights and security of Mirtag Asadov and influence the Azeri government to avoid further violations.

In case of availability of credible data with regard to the detention of Asadov, we will provide additional information to the public.

The Human Rights Education and Monitoring Center (EMC)

Georgian Young Lawyers' Association (GYLA)

Tolerance and Diversity Institute

Georgian Muslims Union

Evangelical-Baptist Church of Georgia

Tbilisi human rights house

Human rights center

Union Sapari

Georgian democratic initiative (GDI)

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Foundation of Civil integration

Media Development foundation

Equality movement

Women initiative supporting group (WISG)

Multinational Georgia