

## Media oppression persists in Azerbaijan

The World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers (WAN-IFRA), the World Editors Forum and the International Association of Sports Newspapers have protested against the jailing of four journalists in Azerbaijan for defamation. President Ilham Aliyev's administration had previously promised that measures were being taken to decriminalise the offense.



"We are astonished that four journalists have been jailed for defamation only two weeks after an official in your administration, Ali Hasanov, assured a WAN-IFRA delegation that serious measures were being taken to improve the situation of the independent press, including the decriminalisation of defamation and libel," the three organisations said in a letter to President Aliyev.

"The jailing of four journalists in one day for carrying out their profession which brings the total number of journalists currently held in prison to seven only confirms the findings of our delegation that there is a 'pervasive climate of intimidation and fear' in the Azeri media."

On 8 October 2009, a court sentenced Natig Mukhtari, a writer for online sports portal [fanat.az](http://fanat.az), and Zahir Azamat, the website's director, a one-year and six-month prison term respectively for insulting the president of a local football club. They were sentenced for "criticising the financial management and leadership decision-making" of Mais Masimov, president of Khazar-Lankaran Football Club. They were also ordered to pay Masimov 20% of their salaries for the duration of their imprisonment.

On the same day, the Baku Court of Appeals upheld the sentencing of Sardar Alibeili, editor-in-chief of the weekly *Nota*, and reporter Faramaz Novruzoglu, to three months in jail, and the conditional sentencing of journalist Ramiz Tagiyev to six months of corrective labour, for defamation.

A delegation from WAN-IFRA visited Azerbaijan in late September this year to assess the press freedom situation and called on the government to introduce "drastic reforms" to create full media freedom.

[Read the full letter.](#)