

## PRESS RELEASE - THE OBSERVATORY

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### **Azerbaijan: Extreme concern about Ms. Leyla Yunus' deteriorating health. The international community must react before it is too late!**

**Geneva-Paris, November 27, 2014 – The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, an OMCT-FIDH joint programme, is extremely concerned by recent information on Ms. Leyla Yunus' deteriorating health, which poses a serious threat to her life. The Observatory calls on the international community to strongly react in order to save her life.**

Following seven months of ongoing and increasing harassment against Ms. **Leyla Yunus**, member of the OMCT General Assembly, including arbitrary detention, judicial harassment, denial of medical care, attacks in prison and a temporary transfer to the Investigative Prison of the Ministry of National Security<sup>1</sup>, her health has been rapidly deteriorating, and is now posing a serious threat to her life<sup>2</sup>. Ms. Yunus is no longer able to eat, can hardly move and recent blood tests have revealed her liver was decaying. Moreover, Ms. Yunus has lost significant weight, from 61 kg before her arrest to 48 kg presently. Nils Muižnieks, the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, managed to meet Ms. Leyla Yunus in prison in late October, and confirmed that her state was extremely serious and that she cried throughout the meeting.

Ms. Leyla Yunus was arrested on July 30, 2014, and has remained in pre-trial detention since then, on charges of "high treason" (Article 274 of the Criminal Code), "large-scale fraud" (Article (178.3.2), "forgery" (Article 320), "tax evasion" (Article 213), and "illegal business" (Article 192) (for more information, see in particular the Observatory Urgent Appeal AZE 002 / 0414 / OBS 031.3 of September 12, 2014). High treason can trigger 12 to 20 years' imprisonment for women, and 12 to 20 years' or life imprisonment for men. On August 5, 2014, the court eventually decided to also place Mr. **Arif Yunusov** in pre-trial detention for three months. Their detention was subsequently extended to February 2015. Although the health of Ms. Leyla Yunus has deteriorated while in detention, the prison authorities in Kurdakhany detention facility did not allow her to receive parcels with medication she needs for her diabetes and kidneys problems. Following a visit from delegates of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) on August 12, 2014, she finally got her painkiller-injections, but was not allowed to be hospitalised.

On September 6, 2014, Ms. Leyla Yunus was attacked and verbally harassed by her cellmate. However, no measure was taken to either punish the cellmate nor to ensure the protection of Ms. Leyla Yunus.

The Observatory calls upon the authorities in Azerbaijan to ensure Ms. Leyla Yunus' physical and psychological integrity by immediately putting an end to her pre-trial detention and by providing her with immediate and adequate medical care. The Observatory further requests that Ms. Yunus be immediately and unconditionally released, as her detention seems to only aim at sanctioning her activities amidst a wave of increasing repression against civil society organisations and representatives in Azerbaijan.

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<sup>1</sup> The Investigative Prison is the only remaining prison which is not subordinated to the Ministry of Justice, reason for which this prison has been under criticism from various international human rights bodies such as the UN Committee Against Torture (CAT) or the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT). This measure came soon after the United Nations Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture (SPT) took the unprecedented decision of suspending its visit to Azerbaijan due to obstructions it encountered in carrying out its mandate under the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OPCAT), to which Azerbaijan is a party.

<sup>2</sup> The metrics of sugar in her blood are currently 240-248, and her blood pressure reaches 180-100, 220-130 bpm.



The Observatory  
for the Protection  
of Human Rights Defenders

Finally the Observatory calls on the international community to take immediate action and to increase the pressure on the Azeri authorities in order to save the life of Ms. Leyla Yunus.

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