

Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/azerbaidjan-despicable-campaign-to-smear-woman-15-03-2012,42117.html>

Europe/Ex-USSR - Azerbaijan

Blackmail attempt

"Despicable" campaign to smear woman investigative reporter

15 March 2012

[Read the joint statement released today by the International Partnership Group for Azerbaijan \(IPGA\)](#)

Reporters Without Borders firmly condemns a despicable week-old smear campaign against **Khadija Ismayilova**, a journalist who works as the correspondent of *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's* local service and as regional coordinator of the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP).

"Ismayilova is one of most brilliant and courageous independent journalists currently working in Azerbaijan," Reporters Without Borders said.

"This is not the first time she has been the target of threats designed to silence her. This campaign to humiliate her publicly has received extensive support from the pro-government press. It recalls the methods employed a few years ago to discredit the investigative work of other independent journalists. Such actions are quite revolting and must stop at once."

On 8 March, Ismayilova received a letter posted in Moscow containing six photos of her engaged in sexual relations. They were accompanied by a warning that she would be "extremely embarrassed" if she did not abandon her work.

Ismayilova responded by publishing an open letter, which has circulated widely online, in which she said she had been expecting such threats and was ready to assume the consequences. At the end of the letter, she added links to the main reports she has written, several of which concern President Ilham Aliyev's family.

Today, a video of a similar nature to the photos was posted online on a fake mirror site of the opposition website Musavat.com. Both the leaders of the opposition party Musavat and the editors of the newspaper *Musavat* had denied any link with the mirror website. The fact that those behind this smear campaign were able to film the video shows that they have exceptional resources and are ready to stop at nothing.

Similar methods were used in 2005 against **Ganimat Zahid**, the editor of the opposition newspaper *Azadlig*, and one of his colleague, **Azer Ahmedov**. Five years later, Ahmedov and two of his *Azadlig* colleagues, **Gan Turali** and **Natig Gulah Medoghu**, were targeted.

Ismayilova has received many prizes for her investigative reporting, especially her coverage of corruption.

According to a [US embassy cable leaked by WikiLeaks](#), President Aliyev complained about Ismayilova at a meeting with Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Matthew Bryza on 19 January 2009. He described her as a "long-time opposition activist who considers herself to be an enemy of the government" and said he was hoping for a "change of direction" in *RFE/RL's* coverage of Azerbaijan.

Reporters Without Borders encourages everyone to sign a [petition supporting Ismayilova](#).

The Azerbaijani government is meanwhile tried to hide the continuing serious press freedom violations in the run-up to the May 2012 Eurovision Song Contest, which Baku is hosting. Azerbaijan was ranked 162nd out of 179 countries in the 2011/2012 Reporters Without Borders press freedom index.

Other images



JPEG - 21.6 kb
400 x 300 pixels

You can download those documents on our website :

- IPGA statement - 15.03.2012, (PDF - 330.8 kb)
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