

Network of Concerned Historians				NCH
Campaigns				
Year original	Year follow-up	Circular	Country	Names
2015		79	Azerbaijan	<i>Leyla and Arif Yunus</i>

#### *Announcement*

On 13 August 2015, after a trial marred by irregularities and due process violations, Leyla and Arif Yunus, both historians and human rights defenders, were sentenced to 8.5 and 7 years' imprisonment respectively on politically motivated charges in Baku, Azerbaijan (for background, see below).

Please send:

- \*\* a letter of protest to the Azerbaijani President (sample letter below);
- \*\* a postcard to Leyla and Arif Yunus in prison (sample postcard below);

preferably in your professional capacity. Many thanks.

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#### **BACKGROUND COMPILED BY NCH**

On 30 July 2014, the authorities charged **Leyla Yunus** ([1956]–), director of the Institute for Peace and Democracy (IPD; established 1995), and her husband, **Arif Yunus** ([1955]–), an expert adviser for the IPD, with treason, tax evasion, and illegal entrepreneurship. Both are historians by training and authors of many historical works. Many believed that the real reason for the arrests were the fact that Leyla Yunus had called for peaceful relations with Armenia and for a boycott of the European Games to be held in Baku in June 2015.

A court sent Leyla Yunus to pretrial custody for three months but Arif Yunus was released under police supervision because of his poor health. But on 5 August 2014, police re-arrested him as he was on his way to deliver food and medication to his wife in the Kurdakhany investigative detention unit. Despite his health concerns, the court sent him also to pretrial detention in a Ministry of National Security investigative prison for three months for allegedly violating the terms of his house arrest. The Prosecutor's Office also sealed the office of Leyla Yunus's organization.

On 28 April 2014, the Azerbaijani authorities had prevented the Yunuses from boarding a flight to attend a conference in Brussels, confiscated their passports, questioned them at length, and searched their home and office. The authorities told them that they were barred from traveling abroad because they were witnesses in a criminal investigation against journalist Rauf Mirgadirov.

On 13 August 2015, after a trial marred by irregularities and due process violations, the Baku Court of Grave Crimes sentenced Leyla Yunus to eight-and-a-half years' and Arif Yunus to seven years' imprisonment on politically motivated charges of illegal entrepreneurship, tax evasion, and fraud for running two unregistered human rights groups through a registered organization from 2006 through 2014. They would be tried later on the treason charge. Both suffer from serious health problems.

In the 1980s, the Yunuses compiled a list of political prisoners in Azerbaijan and disseminated it worldwide. In 2012, they helped create a joint Azerbaijani-Armenian website, where representatives of civil societies of both countries engaged in public dialogue.

**Sources:** [“Leyla Yunus Beaten in Detention,”](#) (1 September 2014); [“Letter from Leyla Yunus in Prison to Arif Yunus in Prison”](#) (in Dutch); [“Deeply Distressing”—UN Experts Condemn Latest Prison Sentencing of Rights Defenders in Azerbaijan,”](#) (Geneva: United Nations, 20 August 2015); Rachel Denber, [“Dispatches: Towering Figures, Silenced in Azerbaijan’s Crackdown”](#) (Human Rights Watch, 5 August 2014); Giorgi Gogia, [“Dispatches: Azerbaijan Jails Yet Another Rights Defender”](#) (Human Rights Watch, 8 August 2014); Human Rights Watch, [“Azerbaijan: Government Repression Tarnishes Chairmanship: Council of Europe’s Leadership Should Take Action”](#) (28 September 2014); Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2015* (Washington: Human Rights Watch, 2015), 80; Human Rights Watch, [“Azerbaijan: Ailing Rights Defenders Convicted in Political Trial”](#) (13 August 2015); [“Rights Defenders Leyla and Arif Yunus Get Severe Jail Sentences,”](#) *Ifex* (14 August 2015); Veronika Szente Goldston, [“‘Dark Times’ in Azerbaijan,”](#) (Human Rights Watch, 7 October 2014); Amnesty International (Dutch Section), [Sample Letter](#) (2015).

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## **SAMPLE LETTER TO THE PRESIDENT**

His Excellency Ilham Aliyev  
Office of the President of the  
Republic of Azerbaijan  
19 Istiqlaliyyat Avenue  
Baku, AZ 1066  
Azerbaijan

Dear President Aliyev,

Please allow me to express my grave concern about the situation of prisoners of conscience Arif and Leyla Yunus, who are facing trumped-up criminal charges stemming from their legitimate human rights work.

Leyla Yunus and Arif Yunus’s health has been deteriorating in detention.

I call on you to immediately and unconditionally release Arif Yunus and Leyla Yunus, and to drop all charges against them.

I also urge you to ensure that Arif Yunus and Leyla Yunus urgently receive all the necessary medical treatment, and, pending their release, are transferred to hospital if required.

Thank you for your attention in this matter.

Yours sincerely,

(name, address)

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## **POSTCARD TO LEYLA AND ARIF YUNUS**

*address:*

Leyla Yunus / Arif Yunus  
Baku Investigation Isolator  
(Kurdakhany Detention Facility)

Sabunchu District  
Zabrat 2 settlement  
AZ1104  
Azerbeidzjan

*text:*

Biz sizinleyik  
(We think of you.)

Möhkem ol  
(Be strong.)

(name, address)