

Paris, 15 May 2008

Dear Mr. President

Reporters Without Borders, an international press freedom organisation and winner of the European Parliament's Sakharov Prize in 2005, urges you to intercede and put a stop to the physical attacks and intimidation attempts against journalist Agil Khalil of the daily newspaper *Azadlig*, lest they end in tragedy.

Mr. Khalil was stabbed as he was returning home on 13 March in an attack he believes was linked to the publication that day of an article by him accusing officials of involvement in illegal land transactions. Three weeks earlier, on 22 February, he was attacked and beaten by several men employed by the national security ministry after photographing them carrying out such a transaction.

Since then, he has been the target of attempts to discredit and intimidate him. The security forces have pressured him to accuse his colleagues of stabbing him and to say the attacks against him were linked to his homosexuality. Finally, on 7 May, an attempt was made to murder him in the Baku metro and he was attacked by two men in the street. He has also been banned from leaving the country and yesterday, the prosecutor general's spokesman, Vugar Aliyev, warned that if he did not respond of his own accord to summonses for questioning by the police, he would be made to do so by force.

Mr. Khalil is an outspoken journalist who has been the victim of several serious physical attacks. We do not understand why he is being treated as a public enemy. We are even more worried about what could happen to him next. It seems clear to us that his safety is not guaranteed. We have not forgotten the very violent attacks on journalists in the past, and the murder of journalist Elmar Husseynov, which we found particularly shocking. We fear that Mr. Khalil may be the next journalist to meet a tragic end.

If this were to happen, we would hold the Azerbaijani authorities responsible. Mr. Khalil is a victim and plaintiff in a serious case of attempted murder, and he continues to be the target of physical attacks and a harassment. As the security forces are themselves implicated in this case, we are concerned about their passivity and their ability to protect Mr. Khalil.

We therefore urge you to use your prerogatives in order to ensure that the harassment of Mr. Khalil is stopped and his security is no longer threatened. It is also imperative that he retain his freedom of movement.

The national security ministry employees involved in the 22 February attack on Mr. Khalil should also, as a matter of urgency, be the subject of a criminal investigation and should be suspended as long as the investigation continues.

These are the basic measures to be adopted in a case such as this in which a citizen is threatened and the security forces that are supposed to protect him are themselves implicated.

I trust you will give this matter your careful consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Ménard', with a horizontal line underneath it.

Robert Ménard
Secretary-general