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## PRESS RELEASE

### **Azerbaijan: International Organisations Condemn Abduction and Beating of Journalist Seymur Khaziyev**

**London 29.03.11:** The International Partnership Group for Azerbaijan condemns the 26 March 2011 abduction and beating of journalist Seymur Khaziyev. The group is deeply concerned by the cycle of violence against journalists and impunity for those who commit such attacks in Azerbaijan, and calls on the authorities to immediately and impartially investigate all instances of violence against journalists and bring the perpetrators to justice.

*"The latest attack against Khaziyev is another disturbing example of retaliation against journalists who express critical opinions in Azerbaijan. The authorities must take immediate steps to put an end to this alarming trend",* said ARTICLE 19 Executive Director Agnès Callamard.

On 26 March 2011, *Azadliq* newspaper correspondent Seymur Khaziyev was abducted by six masked assailants who forced him into a bus, drove him to an unknown location and beat him, warning him to "be clever" and not mention Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev in his articles. The abduction and beating of Khaziyev follows many similar attacks against journalists since the March 2005 murder of editor Elmar Huseynov, virtually all of which remain unsolved. The incident also follows a recent wave of arrests of bloggers and youth activists in connection with a series of pro-democracy protests in the country.

*"Khaziyev is the latest victim of the poisonous climate that has developed over the past few weeks. Far from fulfilling their obligations to protect media professionals, the Azerbaijani authorities seem so scared by the prospect of a potential popular uprising that they have launched a campaign against oppositionists and free-thinkers, which is starting to produce violent results",* said Reporters Without Borders Secretary-General Jean-François Julliard.

Khaziyev was previously beaten in May 2010 by unidentified officials in a police detention facility after he was arrested during an unsanctioned opposition political protest. During the incident, Khaziyev's attackers questioned him about his criticism of President Aliyev. The officials responsible have not been identified or prosecuted.

The International Partnership Group for Azerbaijan condemns the use of violence to restrict freedom of expression and the climate of impunity for those who wish to

silence critical voices in Azerbaijan. The group calls on the Azerbaijani authorities to immediately and impartially investigate the attack against Khaziyev and all instances of violence against journalists and prosecute those responsible.

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**NOTES TO EDITORS:**

- For more information on the cycle of violence against journalists and impunity for their attackers in Azerbaijan, see the joint report *Free Expression Under Attack: Azerbaijan's Deteriorating Media Environment* available at <http://www.article19.org/pdfs/publications/free-expression-under-attack.pdf>.
- The International Partnership Group for Azerbaijan is a coalition of 20 international NGOs working to promote and protect freedom of expression in Azerbaijan. For more information about the Partnership, please contact Rebecca Vincent at ARTICLE 19 on +44 (0)207 324 2500 or [rebecca@article19.org](mailto:rebecca@article19.org).