



[Demands Mount For Hunger-Striking Azerbaijani Blogger's Release Amid New Charges](#)

An Azerbaijani media-rights group has added its name to the list of organizations urging the government to release a hunger-striking blogger who was targeted with a new charge just .weeks before his expected release from prison

Arannews-Members of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), Human Rights Watch (HRW), and other watchdog groups, and [The Washington Post's](#) editorial board have also demanded that 26-year-old Mehman Huseynov be freed. Huseynov has been on a hunger strike for 13 days, his lawyer says, amid suspicions that the administration fabricated its latest accusation against the former anticorruption blogger and media activist. The Institute for Reporters' Freedom and Safety, which Huseynov once led, says the new charge against him stems from the "criminal and corrupt nature" of Azerbaijan's ruling regime. It urged the British government to pressure Baku into ensuring Huseynov gets proper medical care and to cancel any anticipated "high-level visits, meetings, and strategic deals" with its Azerbaijani counterpart

We call on [U.K. authorities] to act NOW to Save Mehman Huseynov's life," the Azerbaijani NGO said in a tweet late on January 6. Prison authorities refuted the claim that Huseynov was on a hunger strike. "As far as I know, Mehman is accepting water as well as food. That man is not hungry," Mehman Sadiqov, head of the public-relations department for the prison service, told RFE/RL, adding that medical officials "immediately" attend to any prisoner who experiences health problems. Huseynov is already serving a two-year prison sentence after being convicted of libel for saying he had been mistreated by police in January 2017. Just weeks earlier, he had posted photographs of luxury homes he alleged belonged to government officials and lawmakers and had been critical of Mehriban Aliyeva's eventual appointment to the post of first vice president by her husband, President Ilham Aliyev. Huseynov has maintained his innocence and called the original case against him politically motivated. In late December, about two months before the end of his sentence, Huseynov was charged with "resisting a representative of the authorities with the use of violence dangerous to [the representative's] health and life." His lawyer, Shahla Humbatova, said Huseynov could face up to seven years if convicted on the charge. She also told RFE/RL's Azerbaijani Service on January 4 that the fresh charge had prompted Huseynov to refuse all liquids and solids from December 26 to December 30. After that, he began taking water, she said, but nothing else. "He says he is determined to continue the hunger strike, and he emphasized that this is the only means of struggle against injustice that he has at this time," Humbatova said. Human rights groups accuse Aliyev's government of fabricating criminal cases to stifle dissent and media freedom in the oil-producing Caspian country of around 10 million people. Giorgi Gogia, associate director of HRW's Europe and Central Asia division, and Ane Tusvik Bonde, a senior adviser at Human Rights House Foundation, have also called for Huseynov's release and for the new charges to be dropped. "Unfortunately, there are justified grounds for the assumption that these new charges [against Huseynov] are clearly politically motivated and clearly designed to further silence a prominent human rights activist whom we consider a political prisoner," said the PACE co-rapporteurs for the monitoring of Azerbaijan, Sir Roger Gale (United Kingdom) and Stefan Schennach (Austria). "Furthermore, we are alarmed by the fact that Mehman Huseynov has embarked upon a hunger strike as the

only means available to him to protest about his plight. We call upon the Azerbaijani authorities to review his case as a matter of absolute priority," they added in the January 5 statement. Huseynov's case is reminiscent of blogger and activist Mehman Qalandarov, who died on April 2017 in Azerbaijani custody following his arrest on drug-trafficking charges that rights activists contend were fabricated. Qalandarov, a government critic who had repeatedly called for the release of imprisoned opposition activists, was said to have hanged himself, though critics of the Azerbaijani government have said the circumstances of his death were murky. A Committee To Protect Journalists [report](#) in December listed Azerbaijan among the world's most egregious jailers of reporters.