

## **10 December 2014 – Human Rights Day**

We, participants in the Black Sea NGO Forum in Kyiv, call for the immediate release of award-winning Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty journalist Khadija Ismayilova, arrested on 5 December in Baku.

Ismayilova is a highly respected journalist, who has received the Courage in Journalism Award from the IWMF, the Gerd Bucerius prize from the ZEIT Foundation, and most recently the Global Shining Light Award for her work uncovering the questionable dealings of the Azeri government. The arrest culminates a series of disturbing efforts to intimidate her.

Ismayilova is just the latest in an increasing number of cases of journalists and civil society leaders imprisoned for their critical views. Currently, tens of them are imprisoned under various charges. Among them journalists Tofiq Yagublu, Rauf Mirkadirov, Hilal Mammadov, Avaz Zeynalli, Parviz Hashimli and civic rights activists Ilgar Mammadov, Intigam Aliyev, Rasul Jafarov, Anar Mammadli and Bashir Suleymanli, Leyla Yunus, Arif Yunus

We urge the democratic governments in our region, the Council of Europe, the European Commission and other international organizations to urgently raise this issue with their Azerbaijani counterparts, urging for the speedy release of Khadija Ismayilova, so that she can answer the charges brought to her in court at the appointed time.

We are also asking the Azerbaijani authorities to stay true to the support for a free speech that they profess and allow for the development and functioning of a vibrant and active civil society in Azerbaijan.