

## Press release

Hamburg, February 2, 2026

### **New guest of the foundation: Islam Shikhali Journalist from Azerbaijan**

The Hamburg Foundation for Politically Persecuted Persons has accepted Azerbaijani journalist Islam Shikhali as a guest of the foundation. The foundation supports people around the world who courageously raise their voices against injustice and offers them protection and peace in Hamburg for a certain period of time.

Since 2011, Islam Shikhali has been working as an independent journalist and media trainer, reporting on socio-economic, political, human rights, and conflict issues. He has collaborated with several local and regional media outlets that suffer from ongoing and intensified oppression of independent editorial offices and critical journalists, and is himself persecuted by the authorities.

In Azerbaijan, the crackdown on anyone who plays an important monitoring role in society, - human rights defenders, activists, journalists, and independent media -has intensified significantly over the past two years. During an unannounced house search on September 26, 2015, the police took his equipment: computer, video camera, microphone, and cell phone, without ever returning it to him.

He was repeatedly interrogated and mistreated for his reports. Most recently, in November 2023, he was taken to a police station during the trial of Abzas Media employees. There, the police chief declared that from then on, it would no longer be possible for him and his colleagues to work in Azerbaijan.

Following this incident, Islam Shikhali temporarily left the country in December 2023.

Today, there are very few independent media outlets left in Azerbaijan. All other media organizations that are able to work freely in the country follow the government's instructions directly. More than ten bloggers and social media activists are currently imprisoned. Representatives of civil society and researchers have been detained for financial misconduct and on charges of acting as agents in the service of foreign interests. The few remaining independent journalists in the country now work under constant pressure and harassment. Many of them are frequently summoned to the police station for questioning, often in connection with ongoing proceedings, and their freedom to travel abroad is restricted, their bank accounts frozen. Several journalists have left the country, including Islam Shikhali.

*I am trying to fill at least some of the gaps left by my imprisoned colleagues, while also supporting the already severely weakened media by producing materials that help them stay afloat.*

He can now work safely in Hamburg.

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