Peaceful Religious Protesters Arrested in Azerbaijan for Declaring Their Faith

Tuesday 22 April, 2025

BAKU, Azerbaijan — April 21, 2025 Six members of the Ahmadi Religion of Peace and Light were arrested today in Baku after peacefully proclaiming their faith in Jafar Jabbarly Square. The group raised banners linking to the official AROPL Youtube Channel, a public act of faith that was met with forceful repression by Azerbaijani law enforcement.

The individuals—Hasan Javadov, Sani Hasanov, Fagan Rahimov, Sahib Mirzayev, Teymur Aliyev, and Konul Demirova—were quickly confronted by plainclothes officers, followed by the arrival of two uniformed police who tore down the banners and violently detained the participants.

The entire event was **live-streamed on TikTok Live**, including the moment of the arrests. A bystander video also captured one of the members being **forcefully dragged, carried away, and stuffed into a police van**. The livestream has since spread among members of the Ahmadi Religion of Peace and Light (AROPL), sparking **outrage and widespread concern** over the treatment of peaceful believers.

This latest crackdown is part of a growing pattern of religious persecution in Azerbaijan. In 2024, 11 Azeri members of the Ahmadi Religion of Peace and Light were arbitrarily detained in Fountain Square while peacefully preaching about their faith. Two of them—Rustam Gasimli and Neriman Shabanzade —were **subjected to enforced disappearance, brutal beatings, and sexual assault while in detention**. Both were sentenced to 30 days in prison on fabricated charges of “hooliganism” and “disobedience to a police officer,” despite video evidence showing peaceful conduct. Their arrest sparked international demonstrations, including protests by AROPL members in **Poland** and **Germany**, as well as legal appeals to the **European Court of Human Rights**.

These incidents, among others, were **cited by the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF)** in its 2025 report, which raised serious concerns over Azerbaijan’s treatment of religious minorities, particularly members of the Ahmadi Religion of Peace and Light.

> “We strongly condemn this blatant violation of our members’ fundamental rights to freedom of religion and expression,” said Hadil El-Khouly, Human Rights Outreach Coordinator for the organization. “Our members were dragged off the streets and silenced simply for proclaiming their faith. The use of force, public humiliation, and the continued detention are deeply concerning.”

As of now, the six members arrested today remain in custody, and their **whereabouts are unknown**. The Ahmadi Religion of Peace and Light urges international human rights organizations and the global community to intervene and demand their immediate release.

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