

The Hague, 3 December 2014

Dear Leyla,

"Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly" - Martin Luther King jr.

More than 120 days ago, we received the news you were, again, arrested and detained for your work for peace and justice in Azerbaijan. For more than 120 days, and counting, you and your husband Arif have to face in detention the injustices you have been addressing in your human rights activism for so long. But for more than 120 days, the Azerbaijani government has not been able to silence you, Arif and the 96 other political prisoners in Azerbaijan, with a big national and international community working hard to have your voices for peace and justice heard.

This 120-day period has been filled with alarming messages about your well-being, the lack of access to proper health care and judicial support, with your lawyers being targeted by the Azerbaijani government as well. These alarming messages were accompanied with a worrying silence about the well-being of Arif. For the last 120 days, we here at the Women Peacemakers Program (WPP) have been advocating for your immediate release, accompanied with calls for your dignified and human treatment, and we will continue doing this throughout the period you remain detained.

Over the years, we came to know you as a passionate and dedicated human rights defender and a protagonist of women's leadership for justice and peace. From our close contact with your daughter Dinara, from whom we receive first hand updates about your well-being and your health condition, we see the same passionate activism and perseverance reflected. It is inspiring to see these qualities passing on to the next generation.

It is a cruel irony that you and Arif are now on the same list of Azerbaijani political prisoners, that you yourself initiated to compile to highlight the worrying human rights situation in Azerbaijan. The list now contains a shocking number of 98 political prisoners, including youth activists, journalists writing for free speech and democracy and human rights activists. As fellow human rights and peace activists, we find it disturbing that the space for civil society working to uphold human rights and democracy is shrinking rapidly, with worrying efforts to silence you all completely. We keep raising our joint voices for justice and call for the release of all political prisoners.

Next year, all eyes are on the High-Level Review of UN Security Council Resolution 1325, the first resolution ever recognizing women as active agents of peace, unanimously adopted in 2000. Already long before the existence of Resolution 1325, you were a leading example of women's leadership for justice and peace. You have

been at the forefront of attempts to work for democracy and to bridge people and regions divided by conflict through people-to-people dialogue. You have shown everyone that women can be transformative actors for justice and peace. Work for justice and peace requires courage and dedication. As most female pioneers, you often had to face severe repercussions for taking the first steps for dialogue and reconciliation. Your 'unique' case, being the only woman among the 98 political prisoners in Azerbaijan, illustrates the harsh repercussions women human rights activists have to face. Given the constant threats you have been facing over the years, the dedication and courage that you have shown makes you a role model for us all.

This all has not gone unnoticed. This year you were awarded the Polish Prize of Sérgio Vieira de Mello. On November 13, the Norwegian Helsinki Committee awarded the Andrei Sakharov Freedom Award to all political prisoners of Azerbaijan. In addition, with the support of WPP and many others, you were nominated for the Dutch Human Rights Tulip, the European Sakharov Prize, and have been nominated for the upcoming Noble Peace Prize. These awards and nominations are glimmers of hope, a result of people coming together who care about you, Arif, a democratic Azerbaijan and a more just world.

The best prize of course will be that you and Arif will be released and can be reunited with your daughter Dinara. Our thoughts are always with you, especially during the upcoming holiday season, during which we will keep on beating the drum for your release. Martin Luther King reminded us that we are all responsible for justice, and you and Arif's release will be the first step into the right direction.

Lots of love and support,

Isabelle, Merle, Sophie and Lisanne
The WPP team