

Azerbaijani pastor on trial released to house arrest

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(ABP) — A jailed Baptist pastor in Azerbaijan was released Nov. 6 until Nov. 17, when his trial on what supporters say are bogus charges was scheduled to resume.

Mission News Network [reported](#) the release of Hamid Shabanov, 52, leader of the Baptist community in the village of Aliabad in Azerbaijan's Zakatala district as "good news."

Shabanov's attorney had tried unsuccessfully to get the pastor out of jail since his arrest in June on what defenders have characterized as trumped-up charges aimed at intimidating religious minorities.

Shabanov's family [told](#) Azeri Press Agency the Zakatala Region Court commuted his sentence to 14-day house arrest, citing lack of evidence.

According to the agency, police found a Makarov semi-automatic pistol and spare parts during a raid of his residence June 20. He is charged with violating a law banning the purchase, transfer, selling, storage, transportation and carrying of firearms or accessories.

Shabanov's family and friends say he doesn't own a weapon and allege police planted the evidence. Police also confiscated 37 banned religious books found in the house.

According to the Christian news service Forum 18, members of Shabanov's church welcomed his release — 20 weeks after his arrest and 15 weeks since his trial began.

"The police and prosecutor still cannot prove Pastor Hamid's guilt," the

Baptists [told](#) Forum 18. "As he has been in prison for five months already, we want to have him released even from house arrest."

Shabanov said he was glad to be free and welcomed the transfer to house arrest. He said he hopes the judge will exonerate him completely Nov 17. He said he didn't know how long the new hearing would last, but he believes it will be the last in his long-running trial.

No update on Shabanov's trial was available as of press time Nov. 17.

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