

PUBLIC

AI Index: **MDE 13/019/2008**
30 January 2008

Further Information on UA 137/07 MDE 13/068/2007, 7 June 2007 and follow-up (MDE 13/106/2007, 23 August 2007) - Concern for safety/Torture, Ill-Treatment

**IRAN Sa'id Metinpour (m), journalist, Azerbaijani cultural rights activist
and Elirza Metinpour (brother)**

Sa'id Metinpour was arrested on 25 May 2007, in the north-western city of Zenjan, and is held in Section 209 of Evin prison, Tehran. In attempts to obtain a videotaped confession the authorities tortured him. On 28 August, the Ministry of Intelligence summoned and arrested his brother, Elirza Metinpour, who was also transferred to Evin prison and subsequently tortured. The brothers are not known to have been formally charged with any offence.

Atiye Taheri, Sa'id Metinpour's wife, visited him on 17 December. She described his health as being very poor and said that he had lost a lot of weight and that much of his hair had fallen out. He has been in solitary confinement for most of his detention. His bail has been set at the equivalent of approximately US \$540,000, a sum which his family cannot afford.

Amnesty International believes that Sa'id and Elirza Metinpour are prisoners of conscience, held solely on account of their peaceful activities on behalf of the Iranian Azerbaijani community. The brothers had previously been arrested for taking part in protests against the restrictions imposed by the authorities on education being delivered in Azerbaijani Turkic. Sa'id Metinpour is an advocate of linguistic and cultural rights for Iranian Azerbaijanis and has criticized the Iranian authorities' repression of the Azerbaijani minority in articles published in the daily newspaper *Merdom-e-nov* and other local publications.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Iranian Azerbaijanis speak a Turkic language and are mainly Shi'a Muslims. As the largest minority in Iran, they make up 25-30% of the population; they live mainly in the north and north-west of the country and in Tehran. They are demanding greater cultural and linguistic rights, including implementation of their constitutional right to education in Azerbaijani Turkic. Article 15 of Iran's Constitution states that Persian is the official language of Iran and that "official documents, correspondence, and texts, as well as textbooks, must be in this language and script." It adds that "the use of regional and tribal languages in the press and mass media, as well as for teaching of their literature in schools, is allowed in addition to Persian."

A small minority want Iranian Azerbaijani provinces to break away from Iran and join with the Republic of Azerbaijan. In recent years the authorities have grown increasingly suspicious of Iran's minority communities, many of which are situated in border areas, and have accused foreign powers such as the US and UK of stirring unrest among them. Those who seek to promote Azerbaijani cultural identity and linguistic rights are often charged with vaguely worded offences such as "acting against state security by promoting pan-Turkism".

In May 2006, there were massive demonstrations in towns and cities in north-western Iran in protest at a cartoon published on 12 May by the state-owned daily newspaper *Iran*, which many Iranian Azerbaijanis found offensive. Hundreds were arrested during and after the demonstrations. Other waves of arrests have occurred around dates significant to the Azerbaijani community, such as a boycott of the start of the

academic year in September 2006; after demonstrations in February 2007 on the occasion of International Mother Tongue day; and on the anniversary of the May 2006 demonstrations.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in English, French, Farsi, Arabic or your own language:

- calling on the authorities to release Sa'id and Elirza Metinpour immediately and unconditionally, as they are prisoners of conscience, held solely on account of their peaceful activities on behalf of the Iranian Azerbaijani community;
- calling on the authorities to allow Sa'id and Elirza Metinpour immediate and regular access to their family and a lawyer of their choice, and to any medical treatment they may require.
- calling on the authorities to order an immediate investigation into reports that Sa'id and Elirza Metinpour have been tortured, and for anyone found responsible for abuses to be brought to justice;
- reminding the authorities that the use of confessions extracted under duress is prohibited by Article 38 of the constitution of Iran.

APPEALS TO:

Leader of the Islamic Republic

His Excellency Ayatollah Sayed 'Ali Khamenei, The Office of the Supreme Leader
Islamic Republic Street - Shahid Keshvar Doust Street
Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran

Email: info@leader.ir

Salutation: Your Excellency

Minister of Intelligence

Gholam Hossein Mohseni Ejeie
Ministry of Intelligence, Second Negarestan Street, Pasdaran Avenue, Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran

Salutation: Your Excellency

Head of the Judiciary

Ayatollah Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi
Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Justice Building, Panzdah-Khordad Square, Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran

Fax: +98 21 3390 4986 (please keep trying)

Email: info@dadgostary-tehran.ir (In the subject line write: FAO Ayatollah Shahroudi)

Salutation: Your Excellency

COPIES TO:

President

His Excellency Mahmoud Ahmadinejad
The Presidency, Palestine Avenue, Azerbaijan Intersection, Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran

Email: dr-ahmadinejad@president.ir

via website: www.president.ir/email

Salutation: Your Excellency

Speaker of Parliament

His Excellency Gholamali Haddad Adel
Majles-e Shoura-ye Eslami, Baharestan Square, Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran

Fax: +98 21 3355 6408

Email: hadadadel@majlis.ir

and to diplomatic representatives of Iran accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 11 March 2008.