



To: Health Professionals
From: Medical Office/Middle East Program
Date: 19 July 2005

MEDICAL ACTION

Akbar Ganji Iran

Summary

Investigative journalist Akbar Ganji, 45 years old, has been on hunger strike for over five weeks in protest at being denied access to medical care for chronic asthma, despite a specialist's recommendation that he be treated outside the prison. Amnesty International considers him a prisoner of conscience, detained solely for his peaceful criticism of the authorities and is calling for his release. In the mean time it is seeking assurances that he will receive whatever medical care his doctors prescribe.

Background

Akbar Ganji was granted one week's leave to seek medical treatment on 30 May 2005. He was then assessed by a specialist, who confirmed that he required extended leave from prison to receive specific treatment, and doctors' certificates were submitted to the Judiciary. On 7 June, the Judiciary spokesperson confirmed that Akbar Ganji's leave was being extended on medical advice. However, on the same day Tehran's Chief prosecutor reportedly ordered that Akbar Ganji be arrested and returned to prison, following interviews he had given on his release from prison.

On 11 June, Akbar Ganji was returned to Evin prison without receiving the medical treatment recommended. He was reportedly immediately put into solitary confinement and was not allowed to receive any visits. In order to secure his freedom, he went on hunger strike and his weight reportedly dropped from 77 to 55 kilograms in the first month of his strike. He is reportedly only drinking two to three glasses of water and eating a few sugar lumps a day. His health is reportedly seriously deteriorating.

His wife, Massoumeh Shafii, was allowed to visit him on 1 July and has reportedly said that he has been transferred to a public section of the prison. She was able to visit him on 11 July and reports that he was weak, finding it hard to speak and was extremely pale. She has also reportedly added: "His physical condition is not good, but he is in excellent spirits". Akbar Ganji's lawyer, Shirin Ebadi, last saw him briefly on 3 July. She reportedly said recently:

“When I saw him for about one minute, 10 days ago, he was very weak and had lost a lot of weight, but was in good spirits and was very determined.”

According to press reports, on 12 July, following a call for support from 400 intellectuals, hundreds of demonstrators gathered outside Tehran University calling for the release of political prisoners, including Akbar Ganji. Several demonstrators were reportedly beaten and arrested by the police. In a statement on 13 July, President Mohammad Khatami reportedly said that the law provided a right for prisoners, including Akbar Ganji, to present a request for conditional release to the head of the Judiciary. President Mohammad Khatami also reportedly added: “I use this opportunity to ask His Excellency Mr Shahroudi that Mr Ganji is allowed to take advantage of his conditional release so that he is freed and this problem is resolved.” Despite this, the final decision remains with the Judiciary.

Medical care

Akbar Ganji suffers from chronic asthma though AI does not have details of any treatment he is receiving for this. It was the refusal to allow his continued treatment outside the prison for this condition that prompted his hunger strike. The deputy prosecutor of Tehran, Mohammad Salarkia, was quoted by the IRNA agency as saying: “He is under special medical care... and the prison physicians examine him two or three times a day”. It is believed that there is daily monitoring of Akbar Ganji’s blood pressure and weight, but there is no information available concerning other treatment being made available. He recently underwent an MRI scan in relation to back pain, according to a press report of comments by Mohammad Salarkia, but the outcome of the scan is not known to Amnesty International.

Recommended Actions

Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in English, Persian, Arabic or your own language:

- expressing concern for the health of Akbar Ganji, who has reportedly been denied medical treatment recommended by his doctor and who is also suffering from the effects of a hunger strike;
- expressing concern that Akbar Ganji was returned to prison on 11 June, despite the reported instructions of medical specialists that his medical leave be extended so that he could receive necessary medical treatment;
- urging the authorities to grant Akbar Ganji immediate access to the specialist medical treatment that he requires, as provided for by article 291 of Iran’s Code of Criminal Procedure, which allows courts to order that inmates receive medical treatment outside prison;
- calling for Akbar Ganji to be granted regular access to his family and confidential meetings with his lawyer as provided by paragraph 8 of the UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers;
- urging the authorities to end the practice of solitary confinement, in line with the recommendations made by the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention following its visit to Iran in February 2003;
- calling for Akbar Ganji to be released immediately and unconditionally, as he is a prisoner of conscience, arrested solely for the peaceful expression of his beliefs.

Addresses

Leader of the Islamic Republic

His Excellency Ayatollah Sayed 'Ali Khamenei
The Presidency,
Palestine Avenue, Azerbaijan Intersection,
Tehran,
Islamic Republic of Iran
Fax: + 98 21 649 5880 (please mark 'For the attention of the Office of His Excellency,
Ayatollah al Udhma Khamenei)
Email: info@wilayah.org
Salutation: Your Excellency

Head of the Judiciary

His Excellency Ayatollah Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi
Ministry of Justice
Park-e Shahr
Tehran
Islamic Republic of Iran
Email: irjpr@iranjudiciary.org (mark 'Please forward to HE Ayatollah Shahroudi')
Salutation: Your Excellency

Please send copies to:

Speaker of Parliament

Gholamali Haddad Adel
Majles-e Shoura-ye Eslami (Parliament)
Imam Khomeini Avenue,
Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran
Fax: + 98 21 646 1746
Salutation: Dear Sir

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 25 August 2005.

Please send copies of any replies you do receive to the International Secretariat (att: health and human rights team, medical@amnesty.org).