

UA 58/08 Fear of TortureIRAN Reza Daghestani (m), aged 27, Azerbaijani rights activist, student, journalist

Azerbaijani rights activist Reza Daghestani was arrested on 21 February 2008 at his family's house in the city of Oroumiye. His house was searched and his computer, CDs, papers and books were confiscated, along with printouts of his newsletters. He is in danger of torture.

He called his family the following day to tell them he was being held in a detention centre belonging to the Ministry of Intelligence in Oroumiye. He may have been tortured to force him to provide information, as security forces searched his house a second time on 26 February and appeared to know where to find other papers and books. Reza Daghestani has had no access to a lawyer. His family, who are very religious, have been told he is accused of defamation of the Prophet. It is not clear what this accusation relates to, and there are fears that his family may have been told this so that they would withdraw their support for him. Amnesty International believes he is a prisoner of conscience held solely on account of his peaceful activities on behalf of Iranian Azerbaijanis.

His family tried to visit him on 25 February, but were not allowed. They have been told that Reza Daghestani will not be allowed to receive visits until at least 10 March.

Reza Daghestani is the editor of a student newsletter, *Chamlibel*, published in both Azerbaijani Turkic and Persian and he has written for several other publications. His other activities have included starting a series of Azerbaijani Turkic classes in the town of Naghadeh and establishing groups to organize peaceful demonstrations in the province of West Azerbaijan in connection with International Mother Tongue Day, 21 February.

He was a member of the committee of a campaign group called *Urmu Azerbaijan Sesi*, which actively supported several would-be candidates from Oroumiye who all were disqualified from standing for the *Majles* (parliament) elections to be held on 14 March. *Urmu Azerbaijan Sesi* issued a public statement objecting to the "unfair and undemocratic disqualification of its candidates". Amnesty International believes his arrest is connected to some or all of these peaceful activities.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Iranian Azerbaijanis speak a Turkic language and are mainly Shi'a Muslims. The largest minority in Iran, they live mainly in the north and north-west of the country, and in the capital, Tehran. Many Iranian Azerbaijanis demand 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".

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

- calling on the authorities to release Reza Daghestani immediately and unconditionally, as Amnesty International believes he is a prisoner of conscience, held solely on account of his peaceful activities on behalf of the Iranian Azerbaijani community
- seeking assurances that Reza Daghestani is not being tortured;

- urging the authorities to allow Reza Daghestani immediate and regular access to his family and a lawyer of his choice, and to any medical treatment he may require;
- 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

Salutation: Your Excellency

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 17 April 2008