

PUBLIC

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UA 158/08 Fear for safety / Fear of torture and other ill-treatment / Possible prisoners of conscience

IRAN Hasan Asadi, (or Hesên Esendi) (m), aged 30]
Ali Sadeqi (or, Eli Sediqi) (m), aged 35]
Hojjat Tarverdian (m) aged 40]
Akbar Hosseinzadeh (m), aged 34]
Ahad Razavi (or, Ehed Rezevi), (m) aged 20] Azerbaijani cultural rights activists
Amir Mohammad Bana'i Sadeq (m)]
And hundreds of others

The men named above are among hundreds of people detained since 16 May. There have recently been widespread demonstrations marking the anniversary of demonstrations against the publication in May 2006 of a cartoon in a state-run newspaper, which was considered offensive to a great many Azerbaijanis. They are at risk of torture or other ill-treatment. Amir Mohammad Bana'i Sadeq and Ahad Razavi (also spelled as Ehed Rezevi) are said to have been tortured in recent days.

Azerbaijani rights activist Hasan Asadi (also spelled as Hesên Esendi) disappeared several days before 22 May 2008, the anniversary of the demonstrations. Family members are reported to have no information regarding his whereabouts and have been threatened if the authorities were to learn of attempts to bring his case to public attention. Nevertheless, they have decided to seek publicity. Hasan Asadi previously spent several months in detention in 2007, during which time he was tortured.

Ali Sadeqi (also spelled as Eli Sediqi) was arrested by security officials at his place of work in the city of Tabriz around midday on 16 May. Searching his place of work, security officials found leaflets about demonstrations marking the anniversary of the original 2006 demonstrations against the publication of the cartoon. The officials then searched Ali Sadeqi's house without a warrant, and removed personal items including computer, books, CDs and posters. According to the Canada-based Association for the Defence of Azerbaijani Political Prisoners in Iran (ADAPP), searches of his house continued until 22 May. On 22 May, Ali Sadeqi's family discovered that he is being held incommunicado at the Ministry of Intelligence's Bagh-e Shomal facility in Tabriz. It is not known whether he has been charged with any offence.

Hojjat Tarverdian was arrested at the start of a demonstration held in Tabriz on 21 May. Demonstrators were attacked by security officials and beaten. Officials sprayed an eye irritant into the faces of demonstrators and while many participants fled, Hojjat Tarverdian was taken away. On or around 27 May family members were informed that he is held at the Ministry of Intelligence's Bagh-e Shomal facility in Tabriz. There are no known charges against him.

Amir Mohammad Bana'i Sadeq, and Ahad Razavi (also spelled as Ehed Rezevi) were arrested at their homes while printing leaflets related to the anniversary of the publication of the cartoon. According to detainees recently released from detention centres under control of the Ministry of Intelligence in Tabriz, Amir Mohammad Bana'i Sadeq and Ahad Razavi have been tortured and are in immediate need of medical treatment. The continual beating of Amir Mohammad Bana'i Sadeq has aggravated an existing leg injury. The released detainees claim that he is in severe pain, and that Ministry of Intelligence officials have refused him access to medical treatment.

Akbar Hosseinzadeh was arrested in the evening of 19 May at his shop in Tabriz. Witnesses reported to the ADAPP that four members of the intelligence services of the Revolutionary Guard entered the shop, ordered

customers out and proceeded to search the premises. They took at least four computers, various CDs, books and papers, arresting Akbar Hosseinzadeh at the same time. Following his arrest, family members attempted to locate him, without success.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Iranian Azerbaijanis, who are mainly Shi'a Muslims, are recognized as the largest minority in Iran and are generally believed to constitute between 25-30 percent of the population. They are located mainly in the north and north-west of Iran. Although generally well-integrated into society, in recent years, they have increasingly called for greater cultural and linguistic rights, such as the right to education through the medium of the Azerbaijani Turkic language, which they believe is provided for under the Constitution, and to celebrate Azerbaijani culture and history at cultural events. However, these demands have often been suppressed by the Iranian authorities.

In May 2006, widespread demonstrations took place in mainly Azerbaijani north-western towns and cities of Iran in protest at the publication in a state run newspaper of a cartoon offensive to Azerbaijanis. Hundreds, if not thousands, were arrested and scores reportedly killed by the security forces, although official sources downplayed the scale of arrests and killings. On the anniversaries of the 2006 demonstrations, hundreds of Azerbaijanis have taken to the streets to emphasise and assert their cultural identity as Azerbaijanis.

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

- urging the authorities to ensure that Azerbaijani rights activists Hasan Asadi, Ali Sadeqi, Hojjat Tarverdian, Akbar Hosseinzadeh, Ahad Razavi and Amir Mohammad Bana'i Sadeq are not facing torture or ill treatment;
- urging the authorities to allow the six individuals immediate and regular access to their family and a lawyer of his choice, and to any medical treatment they may require;
- reminding the authorities that the use of confessions extracted under duress is prohibited by Article 38 of the constitution of Iran
- calling on the authorities to release all those detained since 16 May unless they are to be charged with a recognizably criminal offence and given a prompt and fair trial. If held solely on account of their peaceful activities organizing demonstrations or supporting greater cultural rights for Iranian Azerbaijanis, then they should be released immediately and unconditionally.

APPEALS TO:

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

Howzeh Riyasat-e Qoveh Qazaiyeh / Office of the Head of the Judiciary

Pasteur St., Vali Asr Ave., south of Serah-e Jomhuri, Tehran 1316814737, Islamic Republic of Iran

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

Salutation: Your Excellency

COPIES TO:

Parliamentary representatives for Tabriz, Azar Shahr and Oskou

Ali Reza Manadi Safidiyan, Shoukour Akbarnejad and Masoud Pezeshkiyan

Majles-e Shoura-ye Eslami, Baharestan Square, Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran

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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 July 2008.