

PUBLIC

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UA 183/08 Fear of torture or other ill-treatment/Medical concern/Prisoner of conscience

IRAN Arzhang Davoodi (m), aged 56, teacher and writer

Political activist Arzhang Davoodi has been prevented from appealing to the Supreme Court against a 15-year sentence handed down as punishment for the peaceful exercise of his right to freedom of expression. He has been tortured.

Arzhang Davoodi, a writer and the Director of the Parto-e Hekmat Cultural Education Center in Tehran, was arrested in October 2003 for being involved in the production of a TV documentary called *Forbidden Iran* in which he spoke out about human rights violations in Iran. He was held in a detention facility run by the Revolutionary Guards until March 2004, spending over three months in solitary confinement. He was then moved to Evin Prison in Tehran, where he was severely beaten and tortured: his jaw and shoulder were broken. Arzhang Davoodi was not charged for at least a year. In a letter from prison dated July 2005, he said that he had been sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment and 70 lashes by a Revolutionary Court, which deals with crimes against national security. His appeal was rejected. He was convicted on charges of establishing and directing an organisation opposed to the government; writing and publishing a book opposed to Iran's system of government, called *Manifesto for a Secular Iran*; organizing action to undermine the state; and involvement in the production of the TV documentary. On 20 September 2005 he was sent into internal exile in Bandar Abbas Prison, Hormozgan Province, 1500 km south of his home in Tehran.

He was told of his sentence, but never given a written copy of his sentencing order, though this is required by law. His sentence was passed behind closed doors and his lawyers, who have yet to see the court's sentencing order, were not allowed in. Arzhang Davoodi's appeal is now due to be heard by the Supreme Court, but this cannot be done without the sentencing order, which he is also obliged to sign.

Arzhang Davoodi was sent back to Evin Prison in December 2007, for questioning. On 14 April 2008 he was put into solitary confinement, for reasons unknown, and began a hunger strike on 18 April. Ten days later he was transferred to Section 6 of Reja'i Shahr Prison in the city of Karaj, 20 km west of Tehran; this section of the prison is for violent criminals, including murderers. In a radio interview with German broadcaster Deutsche Welle his wife, Nazanin Davoodi, said that she had last been allowed to visit him in May 2008, when he was in Reja'i Shahr Prison. On 6 June she had spoken to him by phone, and found that he was too weak to talk for long. The Evin prison authorities have threatened to move Arzhang Davoodi back to Bandar Abbas unless he stops his hunger strike.

The TV documentary *Forbidden Iran* was filmed secretly and illegally. It was widely broadcast in northern Europe in December 2003 and in North America in January 2004. Arzhang Davoodi had assisted in the making of the documentary and was one of those interviewed on film. During his interview he spoke about political prisoners and the death in custody of Canadian-Iranian photojournalist Zahra Kazemi. The documentary can be seen at <http://www.pbs.org/frontlineworld/stories/iran>.

Arzhang Davoodi was the subject of UA 87/04 (MDE 13/016/2004, 27 February 2004 and follow-ups).

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Iranian legislation severely restricts freedom of expression and association, and human rights defenders often face harassment, imprisonment and torture. The Iranian Constitution protects freedom of expression: Article 24 provides for freedom of expression in press and publications. Iran is a state party to international human rights treaties that enshrine these rights, notably the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

The Penal Code contains a number of vaguely worded provisions relating to association and "national security" which prohibit a range of activities, many of them connected with journalism or public discourse, which are permitted under international human rights law. Human rights defenders are often imprisoned on politically motivated criminal charges. Many are subject to travel bans that prevent them from leaving the country.

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

- urging the authorities to ensure that Arzhang Davoodi is not facing torture or ill treatment;
- urging the authorities to grant him immediate and regular access to his family and a lawyer of his choice, and to any medical treatment he may require;
- calling on them to release Azhang Davoodi immediately and unconditionally, as he is a prisoner of conscience, held solely for the peaceful exercise of his right to freedom of expression.

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

Head of the Judiciary

His Excellency 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:

President

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

Fax: + 98 21 6 649 5880

Email: dr-ahmadinejad@president.ir

via website: <http://www.president.ir/email/>

Director, Human Rights Headquarters of Iran

His Excellency Mohammad Javad Larijani
C/o Office of the Deputy for International Affairs, Ministry of Justice
Ministry of Justice Building, Panzdah-Khordad (Ark) Square,
Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran

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 7 August 2008.