

PUBLIC

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UA 246/06 Fear for safety/ Unfair trial/ Possible prisoner of conscience

IRAN Reza Abbasi (m), human rights defender

Human rights defender Reza Abbasi, a member of the Azeri Turkish minority in Iran (who sometimes refer to themselves as Iranian Azerbaijanis), has been detained in the city of Zenjan in northwestern Iran since 27 June, and is at risk of torture or ill-treatment. His trial, which does not appear to comply with international fair trial standards, is in progress. He may be a prisoner of conscience, detained solely on account of the peaceful exercise of his right to freedom of expression, including his human rights work.

Reza Abbasi is a member of ASMEK (Association for the Defence of Azerbaijani Political Prisoners) and of the Alumni Association of Iran (*Sazman-e Danesh Amukhtegan-e Iran-e Eslami [Advar-e Tahkim-e Vahdaf]*), an organization which has been active in promoting democracy and human rights. He was reportedly arrested on 27 June, after he refused to comply with a verbal summons to attend an Intelligence Ministry facility for interrogation. He is believed to be held in the Central Prison in Zenjan. According to reports, the Zenjan office of the Ministry of Intelligence has been harassing Reza Abbasi's family, including by repeatedly summoning his elderly parents for interrogation.

On 5 September, Reza Abbasi reportedly appeared before Branch One of the Revolutionary Court in Zenjan, in a closed session without the presence of his defence lawyer or his family. A second closed session was held on 11 September, this time in the presence of his lawyer, who afterwards reportedly stated that Reza Abbasi had been questioned about his activities in various student organizations and for ASMEK. The charges against him reportedly include "insulting the Leader [of the Islamic Republic of Iran]" and "propaganda against the system". The Court is expected to deliver its verdict during the next week.

Reza Abbasi's arrest followed widespread demonstrations in predominantly Azeri Turkish areas in May 2006 in protest at a cartoon published on 12 May by the state-owned daily newspaper *Iran*, which many Azeri Turks found offensive. The arrest was in advance of the annual Babek Castle gathering on 30 June, at which thousands of Azeri Turks gather to celebrate the birthday of Babek Khorramdin, who lived in the ninth century and is regarded as a hero by Iranian Azeri Turks. These gatherings have frequently met with repression on the part of the Iranian authorities, and this year the security forces were reported to have carried out arrests prior to the event, possibly to prevent certain people attending (for further information see AI Public Statement: <http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGMDE130742006?open&of=ENG-IRN>).

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Hundreds of people were reportedly arrested during or following the May 2006 demonstrations (see UA 151/06, MDE 13/055/2006, 26 May 2006 and UA 163/06, MDE 13/063/2006, 8 June 2006). Some of those detained have allegedly been tortured, with some requiring hospital treatment. Publication of the newspaper was suspended on 23 May and the editor-in-chief and the cartoonist were arrested. Azeri sources have claimed that dozens were killed and hundreds injured by the security forces. The security forces have generally denied that anyone was killed, although on 29 May a police official acknowledged that four people had been killed and 43 injured in the town of Naqada.

ASMEK was reportedly founded in 2002. Four of its founding members, including Reza Abbasi, are said to have been detained in April 2004 in connection with their activities.

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

- expressing concern that Reza Abbasi may have been detained solely in connection with his work as a human rights defender;
- calling on the authorities to ensure that he is not tortured or ill-treated, and to allow him immediate access to a lawyer of his own choosing, and to any medical treatment he may require;
- calling on the authorities to release him immediately and unconditionally unless he is to be promptly charged with a recognizably criminal offence and given a prompt and fair trial.
- asking the authorities for information about the reasons for his arrest, including any charges brought against him;
- expressing concern for the safety of his family, who have reportedly been harassed and intimidated by the authorities, and calling for them to be given all necessary protection to ensure their safety.

APPEALS TO:

Leader of the Islamic Republic

His Excellency Ayatollah Sayed Ali Khamenei

The Office of the Supreme Leader, Shoahada Street, Qom, Islamic Republic of Iran

Fax: + 98 251 774 2228 (mark "FAO the office of His Excellency, Ayatollah al Udhma Khameni")

Email: Info@leader.ir
istiftaa@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: Please send emails via the feedback form on the Persian site of the website

<http://www.iranjudiciary.org/contactus-feedback-fa.html>

The text of the feedback form translates as:

1st line: name, 2nd line: email address, 3rd line: subject heading

then enter your email into the text box

Salutation: Your Excellency

Ministry of Intelligence

Gholam Hossein Mohseni Ejeie

Ministry of Intelligence, Second Negarestan Street

Pasdaran Avenue, Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran

Email: iranprobe@iranprobe.com

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

Speaker of Parliament

His Excellency Gholamali Haddad Adel

Majles-e Shoura-ye Eslami, Imam Khomeini Avenue, 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 24 October 2006.