

PUBLIC

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Fear of Torture and other ill treatment/Incommunicado detention

IRAN

Alireza (Elirza) Serrafi (m), aged 53, civil engineer, journalist and cultural activist
Akbar (Ekber) Azad (m), writer
Hassan (Hesen) Rashidi (m), engineer, writer and lecturer
Sa'id (Seid) Mohammadi (Mehemmedi) Mughanli (m), poet and journalist
Hassan (Hesen) Rahimi (Rehimi) Bayat (m), civil engineer, human rights activist
Hossein Haydari (alias Huseyn Heyderi) (m), student
Abbas Na'imi (Neimi) (m), cultural activist
Mehdi Na'imi (Neimi) (m), poet and university lecturer
Sayyad Mohammadian (alias (Seyyad Mehemedian) (m), activist

The nine Azerbaijani activists named above have been held incommunicado since their arrest on 10 September. They are being held in solitary confinement in the Ministry of Intelligence-run Section 209 of Evin prison in Tehran, and are at risk of torture and other ill treatment. It is believed that authorities may have arrested these activists to pre-empt any protests or planned boycotts of schools on 1 Mehr (23 September). Amnesty International believes they may be prisoners of conscience, held solely for the peaceful expression of their right to freedom of expression and association.

In the late afternoon of 10 September, plain clothed officers, believed to be Ministry of Intelligence officials, arrested at least 18 Iranian Azerbaijanis who were gathering to break the Ramadan fast. The gathering was held in the house of Sayyad Mohammadian, an Azerbaijani activist, who is one of those detained. No warrant was produced at the time of arrests. Those detained are prominent activists in the Iranian Azerbaijani community. They included writers, journalists and human rights defenders.

Among the 18 arrested were women and children, who were later released. The women and men who were released were freed on bail after being interrogated. They included Ruqeyye Elizade Lisani, the wife of prisoner of conscience Abbas Lisani (see UA 163/06, MDE 13/063/2006, 08 June 2006, and follow-ups). The couple's three children were also held briefly.

The families of the nine who are still being held have been unable to obtain any information about the charges brought against them. On 15 September, a Tehran court official told Vejihe Fukur Serrafi, the wife of one of the detainees, Alireza Serrafi, that the nine individuals were held in solitary confinement in Section 209 of Evin Prison and that their interrogation would take some weeks.

Vejihe Fukur Serrafi later appeared on the Persian-language Radio Farda, which broadcasts from outside Iran, and spoke about the arrests. On 18 September, the authorities forcibly entered her home, searched it and confiscated personal property, including laptops, handwritten notes belonging to Alireza Sarrafi, all the books in the house that were in the Azerbaijani Turkish language, CDs, and all family personal identification documents, including passports. The officers produced a handwritten note stating "for confrontation with pan-Turkist and pro-identity individuals permission has been granted to make forced entries, arrest and eliminate physical obstacles" but it is not clear to Amnesty International whether this constitutes a warrant.

In previous years, Iranian Azerbaijani activists had called for a boycott of the first day of the school year, and for demonstrations to be held calling for Iranian Azerbaijani children to be allowed the opportunity to be educated in their own language (see AI Public Statement at

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/MDE13/108/2006/en/dom-MDE131082006en.html>). This year the start of the new academic year in Iran falls on 1 Mehr (23 September), and it appears that the current arrests are part of the authorities' efforts to pre-empt protests or boycotts.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Iranian Azerbaijanis, who are mainly Shi'a Muslims, are recognized to be the largest minority in Iran and are generally believed to constitute between 25-30 percent of the total 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.

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

- urging the authorities to ensure that Azerbaijani rights activists Alireza Serrafi, Akbar Azad, Hassan Rashidi, Sa'id Mohammadi Mughanli, Hassan Rahimi Bayat, Hossein Haydari, Abbas Na'imi, Mehdi Na'imi, and Sayyad Mohammadian are not facing torture or ill treatment;
- urging the authorities to allow the nine individuals immediate and regular access to their family and a lawyer of their choice, and to any medical treatment they may require;
- calling on the authorities to release all those detained on 10 September unless they are to be charged with a recognizably criminal offence and given a prompt and fair trial;
- noting that if they are held solely on account of their expression of their right to freedom of expression and assembly, then they are prisoners of conscience, and should be released immediately and unconditionally.

APPEALS TO:

Minister of Intelligence

Gholam Hossein Mohseni Ejeie
Ministry of Information
Second Negarestan Street
Pasdaran Avenue
Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran

Email: iranprobe@iranprobe.com

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 subject line write: FAO Ayatollah Shahroudi)

Salutation: Your Excellency

COPIES TO:

Director, Human Rights Headquarters of Iran

His Excellency Mohammad Javad Larijani
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

Fax: +98 21 3390 4986 (please keep trying)

Email: int_aff@judiciary.ir (In the subject line: FAO Mohammad Javad Larijani)

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 3 November 2008.