

URGENT ACTION

PRISONER OF CONSCIENCE RISKS DEATH SENTENCE

Mohammad Ali Taheri, who has spent four years in solitary confinement in Tehran's Evin Prison for "insulting Islamic sanctities" through his spiritual beliefs and teachings, is now on trial for an additional charge of "spreading corruption on earth", for which he may be sentenced to death.

Mohammad Ali Taheri was tried before Branch 26 of the Revolutionary Court in Tehran in two sessions on 11 March and 29 April, for "spreading corruption on earth" (*efsad-e fel arz*) by establishing a new spiritual group called *Erfan-e-Halgheh*. This trial has begun when Mohammad Ali Taheri is a year from completing his five-year sentence. He has been in solitary confinement since he was arrested, on 4 May 2011.

The same court had convicted Mohammad Ali Taheri on 30 October 2011 of several offences including "insulting Islamic sanctities", "committing a religiously forbidden act", which included touching "non-relatives of the opposite sex" (*namahram*), "unlawful involvement in the medical treatment of patients" and publishing "misleading" (*zalleh*) writings, and sentenced him to five years' imprisonment, 74 lashes and a fine of nine billion rials (about US\$315,000). At the time, the court acquitted Mohammad Ali Taheri of the capital charge of "denigrating Prophet Mohammad" (*saab ul-nabi*) but allowed the prosecutorial authorities to conduct further investigations into the activities for which he was sentenced to five years and seek to convict him of an additional charge of "spreading corruption on earth".

Mohammad Ali Taheri has undertaken 12 hunger strikes and attempted suicide four times in protest at his prolonged solitary confinement, lack of access to his family and lawyer and repeated threats to kill him and his wife and children.

Please write immediately in Persian, Arabic, English or your own language:

- Calling on the Iranian authorities to release Mohammad Ali Taheri immediately and unconditionally, as he is a prisoner of conscience, held solely for the peaceful exercise of his rights to freedoms of belief, expression and association;
- Reminding them that under international human rights law, the death penalty may only be used for "the most serious crimes", which international bodies have interpreted as being limited to crimes involving intentional killing;
- Calling on them to ensure that Mohammad Ali Taheri is protected from torture and other ill-treatment, including prolonged solitary confinement, which violates the prohibition of torture and other ill-treatment.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 24 JUNE 2015 TO:

Leader of the Islamic Republic
Ayatollah Sayed 'Ali Khamenei
The Office of the Supreme Leader
Islamic Republic Street- End of Shahid
KeshvarDoust Street,
Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran
Twitter: @khamenei_ir
Email (via website):
[http://www.leader.ir/langs/en/index.php?
p=suggest](http://www.leader.ir/langs/en/index.php?p=suggest)
Salutation: Your Excellency

Head of the Judiciary
Ayatollah Sadegh Larijani
c/o Public Relations Office
Number 4, 2 Azizi Street intersection
Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran
(Subject line: FAO
Ayatollah Sadegh Larijani)
Salutation: Your Excellency

And copies to:
President of the Islamic Republic of Iran
Hassan Rouhani
The Presidency
Pasteur Street, Pasteur Square
Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran
Email: media@rouhani.ir
Twitter: @HassanRouhani (English)
@Rouhani_ir (Persian)

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please insert local diplomatic addresses below:

Name Address 1 Address 2 Address 3 Fax Fax number Email Email address Salutation Salutation

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the fifth update of UA 5/14. Further information:

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/MDE13/047//2014/en/>

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



URGENT ACTION

PRISONER OF CONSCIENCE RISKS DEATH SENTENCE

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

After Mohammad Ali Taheri's 12th hunger strike, from 6 to 26 December 2014, the authorities granted him access to a lawyer of his own choosing. He has since been allowed two meetings with his lawyer and weekly meetings with his wife.

The Iranian authorities and state-associated media, including Fars News Agency, Raja News and Adyan News, have several times declared Mohammad Ali Taheri guilty of "spreading corruption on earth" before his trial, disregarding the presumption of innocence which is a fundamental part of the right to fair trial. Iran's National Prosecutor General, Hojjat al-Eslam Ebrahim Raisi, referred to Mohammad Ali Taheri as a "Corrupter on Earth" (*mofsed fel arz*) on 21 November 2014, while denying press reports that he had visited Mohammad Ali Taheri while Taheri was in hospital as a result of another hunger strike. In August 2011, Channel Two of the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting aired Mohammad Ali Taheri's televised "confessions" in which he denounced his own teachings and called on his followers to refrain from disseminating his audio and written materials.

Mohammad Ali Taheri has also been declared an "apostate" (*mortad*) in some press reports, based on several "religious edicts" (*fatawa*) from high-ranking clerics, that have ruled his beliefs and teachings fall in the category of "misleading sects" and Muslims would be committing "apostasy" (*ertedad*) if they promoted them knowingly. Mohammad Ali Taheri's lawyer has said that these rulings have not been based on accurate information, as his client does not reject the main tenets of Islam. Apostasy is not a defined offence in Iran's Penal Code but judges are allowed under Article 167 Constitution and Article 220 of the Penal Code to impose the death penalty on anyone convicted of "apostasy" based on Islamic sources and authentic *fatawa*. Article 286 of Iran's revised Penal Code includes the vaguely worded offence of "spreading corruption on earth" which is open to wide interpretation by judges, in breach of the principle of legality.

Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Iran is a party, protects "the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion". This right includes freedom to have or adopt a belief of one's choice. It also includes freedom to manifest the belief in observance, practice and teaching, either individually or in community with others in public or private.

Mohammad Ali Taheri introduced the spiritual doctrine of *Erfan-e Halgheh* after 13 years of receiving what he claims were "spiritual inspirations" that empowered him to connect with a larger "Cosmic Consciousness". He lawfully opened a cultural and educational institute, also called *Erfan-e Halgheh*, in Tehran in 2006 to develop and disseminate his newly found spiritual beliefs, and practice them with his followers, in "healing sessions" apparently focused on alternative non-medicinal treatments. The three offices of the institute in Tehran were shut down in August 2010: Mohammad Ali Taheri had been arrested on 18 April 2010 and detained for over two months. According to the state-sponsored Fars News Agency, at least 30 *Erfan-e Halgheh* teachers have received prison sentences ranging from one to five years for "insulting Islamic sanctities".

Name: Mohammad Ali Taheri
Gender m/f: m

Further information on UA: 212/14 Index: MDE 13/1637/2015 Issue Date: 13 May 2015