

URGENT ACTION

TRADE UNIONIST IN NEED OF MEDICAL CARE

Iranian trade unionist Reza Shahabi was forced to return to prison on 9 August, prompting him to go on hunger strike in protest. After over 40 days on hunger strike, his health has seriously deteriorated and he is in need of urgent specialized medical care. He is a prisoner of conscience and must be released immediately and unconditionally.

Reza Shahabi, the treasurer and board member of the Syndicate of the Workers of Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company, a trade union for workers employed by the United Bus Company of Tehran (Sherkat-e Vahed), has been on hunger strike since 9 August when he was forced to return to Karaj's Raja'i Shahr prison near Tehran. He is protesting against his unjust imprisonment, and his health has since deteriorated. He is experiencing severe headaches and dizziness, drops in his blood pressure, worsening numbness on the left side of his body, burning sensations in his stomach and digestive problems. He is also believed to have lost about 13 kg. He was taken to the prison medical clinic on 31 August but did not receive the specialized medical care that he requires.

Reza Shahabi was first arrested in June 2010. He then served the next four years in prison, during which he said he was subjected to torture and other ill-treatment, including through the deliberate denial of adequate medical care and beatings that resulted in a chronic back condition. He was released on medical leave from prison on 6 October 2014. However, in November 2016, he began to face pressure to return to prison to complete the remainder of his sentence, which the prosecution authorities first claimed was three months and then five months. This culminated in his imprisonment in August 2017. This contradicted the authorities' own statement in a written letter dated 9 September 2015 and shown to Reza Shahabi by an official at Raja'i Shahr prison, which confirmed his six-year sentence had been completed considering time spent on medical leave. Once in prison, the authorities told him that he also had to serve a further one-year sentence from a separate 2015 case. In this case, Branch 26 of the Revolutionary Court in Tehran convicted him of "spreading propaganda against the system" for his vocal complaints against the abuses that he and his fellow cellmates endured during a violent raid on section 350 of Tehran's Evin prison in April 2014.

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

- Calling on the Iranian authorities to release Reza Shahabi immediately and unconditionally as he is a prisoner of conscience, detained solely for the peaceful exercise of his human rights through his trade union activism;
- Calling on them to ensure he has access to the specialized medical care he needs, if necessary in a medical facility outside of prison, in compliance with medical ethics, including the principles of confidentiality, autonomy and informed consent;
- Calling on them to respect and protect the right of everyone to form and join the trade union of their choice, which is guaranteed under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, both of which Iran has ratified.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 30 OCTOBER 2017 TO:

Head of the Judiciary
Ayatollah Sadegh Larijani
c/o Public Relations Office
Number 4, 2 Aziz Street Intersection
Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran
Salutation: Your Excellency

Prosecutor General of Tehran
Abbas Ja'fari Dolat Abadi
Office of the Prosecutor
Corner (Nabsh-e) of 15 Khordad Square
Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran
Salutation: Mr.

And copies to:
Deputy for Human Rights and
International Affairs, Ministry of Justice
Mahmoud Abbasi
Number 1638, Below Vali Asr Square
Vali Asr Avenue
Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran
Email: dr.abbasi@sbm.ac.ir

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 second update of UA 306/13. Further information:

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/029/2014/en/>

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Reza Shahabi is held in section 10 of Raja'i Shahr prison where conditions are described as dire. Prisoners say the windows are covered by metal sheets and there is no air ventilation system. They are forced to sleep on the ground while the authorities deprive them of access to adequate food, safe drinking water and telephone contact with their families. On 30 July 2017, more than a dozen prisoners detained for political reasons in section 10 of the prison went on a prolonged hunger strike in protest at the cruel and inhuman conditions they have been forced to endure. Reza Shahabi joined this group of hunger strikers on 9 August, when he was re-imprisoned. In reprisal, the head of the prison has instructed prison doctors to not provide any additional medical care or monitoring for those taking part in the hunger strike and transferred some to solitary confinement for several days. On 23 August 2017, the Prosecutor General of Tehran said: "we declare to prisoners who resort to hunger strikes ... that such actions are bound to fail and the judiciary does not capitulate to them." He added, "Prisoners' sentences must be implemented fully and we shall not be influenced by the actions of prisoners including their hunger strikes."

With respect to Reza Shahabi's situation, the Prosecutor General of Tehran said in a press conference on 3 September 2017, "The mentioned individual has been convicted of national security crimes". In response, on 5 September, Reza Shahabi's wife Robabeh Rezaie stated during a peaceful protest in front of Parliament: "We should ask the judicial authorities how he has endangered the security of the country? Is it against national security to support the drivers who want to have bread and housing and practice the right to freely support their own established organization? Reza Shahabi has committed no crime other than acting in support of workers' rights. His place is not in the prison!"

Reza Shahabi was first arrested by Ministry of Intelligence officials on 12 June 2010 and held for 19 months in solitary confinement in Section 209 of Evin prison without access to a lawyer. He has said that during this time, he was tortured and otherwise ill-treated, including through beatings which resulted in chronic severe back and neck pain, and left the left side of his body temporarily paralyzed. In April 2012, following an unfair trial before Branch 15 of the Revolutionary Court in Tehran, he was convicted of "gathering and colluding against state security" and "spreading propaganda against the system" for his peaceful trade union activities and sentenced to six years' imprisonment. For the next four years, he was held in prison where his health further declined due to the denial of adequate medical care and poor prison conditions. He went on several hunger strikes during this period in protest at his imprisonment and the denial of specialized medical care by the authorities. He was ultimately released on medical leave on 6 October 2014, after a lengthy hunger strike in protest at the authorities' refusal to provide him with adequate medical care. Several months after his release, he was summoned by Ministry of Intelligence officials and interrogated about his vocal complaints while in prison, against a violent raid that security officials carried on 17 April 2014 in Section 350 of Evin Prison, subjecting him and other prisoners of conscience held there to sustained brutality and assaults. He was later put on trial in relation to this and sentenced to one year's imprisonment in 2015.

The Syndicate of the Workers of Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company (SWTSBC) was banned after the 1979 Revolution, but re-established in 2004 after many bus workers had not been paid for months. The authorities have never granted the union official registration. The authorities have consistently harassed, intimidated and prosecuted SWTSBC members, particularly board members, under bogus national security charges stemming solely from their peaceful activism, including organizing and participating in strikes. Amnesty International considers trade unionists to be human rights defenders as they strive to ensure the right of everyone to form and join trade unions and enjoy just and favourable conditions of employment, social security, and an adequate standard of living. For more information, see Chapter 7 of Amnesty International's report: *Caught in a web of state repression: Iran's human rights defenders under attack*, 2 August 2017:

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/6446/2017/en/>

Name: Reza Shahabi

Gender m/f: m

Further information on UA: 306/13 Index: MDE 13/7104/2017 Issue Date: 18 September 2017