

IRAN Akbar Ganji, journalist

Journalist Akbar Ganji was interrogated and arrested on 22 April. Amnesty International fears he may be ill-treated and possibly tortured, and considers him a prisoner of conscience.

He faces 10 charges relating to articles he wrote implicating senior Iranian political figures including Hojjatoleslam Rafsanjani in the 1998 murders of a number of intellectuals and writers, and statements he made at a conference on "Iran after the elections" held in Berlin on 7-9 April. The conference has received enormous publicity within Iran, and some religious figures have accused some of those who attended of apostasy, or turning away from Islam.

Akbar Ganji was questioned the Tehran Press Court and later taken to Evin prison. Bail will be set in the next few days and a trial is expected soon.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Akbar Ganji's arrest comes during a clampdown on freedom of expression in Iran. The publisher and editor of the now-banned newspaper *Neshat* (Joy), Latif Safari and Mashallah Shamsolvaezin, have recently been imprisoned in connection with articles questioning the death penalty. Other journalists, including Asr-e Azadegan contributor, Emadeddin Baqi have also recently been interrogated. Publisher Abdollah Nouri was imprisoned in November 1999 in connection with articles in the now banned newspaper *Khordad*.

These arrests and the closure of 13 newspapers in Iran, including *Fatth* (Victory), *Asr-e Azadegan* (Ear of the Free) and *Iran-e Farda* (Iran of Tomorrow) mark a serious escalation in the attack on freedom of expression. The papers were closed by judicial authorities under a previously unused article in the constitution, rather than the methods previously employed to suspend or close newspapers. In July 1999, the closure of the newspaper *Salam* led to country-wide protests and widespread human rights abuses, including torture, incommunicado detention and numerous unfair trials, at which four death sentences were reportedly handed down.

A warrant for the arrest of popular cleric, Hojjatoleslam Yousefi Eshkevari has also been issued in connection with statements he is alleged to have made at the Berlin conference.

Attacks on the press and journalists have been condemned by the Secretary of the government-approved Islamic Human Rights Commission, Mohammad Hassan Zia'i-Far.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/faxes/express/airmail letters in English, French or your own language:

- urging that Akbar Ganji be released immediately and unconditionally, as he is a prisoner of conscience;
- seeking urgent clarification of the charges Akbar Ganji is facing;
- seeking assurances that he will be granted immediate access to his family;
- seeking guarantees from the authorities that Akbar Ganji will be treated humanely in detention.

APPEALS TO:

1) Leader of the Islamic Republic

His Excellency Ayatollah Sayed 'Ali Khamenei,
The Presidency, Palestine Avenue,
Azerbaijan Intersection, Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran
Telegrams: Ayatollah Khamenei, Tehran, Iran
Salutation: Your Excellency

2)President

His Excellency Hojjatoleslam val Moslemin Sayed Mohammad Khatami
The Presidency, Palestine Avenue
Azerbaijan Intersection, Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran
Telegrams: President Khatami, Tehran, Iran
Salutation: Your Excellency

3)Head of Judiciary

His Excellency Ayatollah Mahmoud Hashemi-Shahrudi
Ministry of Justice, Park-e Shahr,
Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran
Telegrams: Head of the Judiciary, Tehran, Iran
Salutation: Your Excellency

COPIES TO:

Minister of Foreign Affairs,
His Excellency Kamal Kharrazi
Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Sheikh Abdolmajid Keshk-e Mesri Avenue
Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran

Mr Mohammad Hassan Zia'i-Far
Secretary, Islamic Human Rights Commission
PO Box 13165-137, Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran
Faxes: + 98 21 204 0541

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 23 May 2000.