

PUBLIC

AI Index: MDE 13/029/2006

23 March 2006

Further Information on UA 164/05 (MDE 13/025/2005, 14 June 2005) and follow-ups (MDE 13/034/2005, 14 July 2005; MDE 13/037/2005, 19 July 2005; MDE 13/044/2005, 23 August 2005) - Medical Concern/Prisoner of Conscience/Incommunicado detention

IRAN

Akbar Ganji (m) aged 46, journalist

Prisoner of conscience Akbar Ganji was released from Evin Prison on 17 March 2006.

The following day, his wife, Massoumeh Shafii, is reported as saying: "To my surprise, prison officials brought him home at 10pm last night. I did not expect it as the papers said he would not be released before 30 March. I am extremely happy...I have asked him not to talk because I am very worried and do not want the same thing to happen again." She said that he was physically very weak, with his weight having sunk to 49kg.

Akbar Ganji was arrested in April 2000, together with 17 other Iranian journalists and intellectuals who had taken part in a cultural conference in Berlin. He was sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment, which was reduced on appeal to six months, for "taking part in an attempt against national security" and "propaganda against the Islamic system" (For details see EXTRA 43/00, MDE 13/07/00, 25 April 2000, and follow-ups). In July 2001 he was tried on charges of "collecting confidential state documents to jeopardize state security" and "spreading propaganda", and was sentenced to six years' imprisonment. In 2000 he wrote a series of articles, which were later published as a book, in which he implicated several high-ranking officials in the 1998 murders of several prominent writers and political activists, in what became known as the "serial murders" case. Among those implicated by the articles was former President, Ali-Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani.

Akbar Ganji undertook a two-month hunger strike in 2005 in protest at being denied access to medical care for chronic asthma, despite specialist recommendation that he be treated outside prison. After 37 days, he was taken to Tehran's Milad Hospital where he continued his hunger strike, eventually ending it after almost 70 days, during which he reportedly lost over 30kg.

A statement by the judiciary said Akbar Ganji had been freed on leave for Nowruz, the Persian New Year holiday which extends until 3 April. The statement said that his prison sentence officially ends on 30 March 2006.

No further action is required. Many thanks to all those who sent appeals.