

PUBLIC

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UA 86/06 Incommunicado detention/ Fear of torture and ill-treatment/ Possible prisoners of conscience

IRAN Maharam Kamrani, (m) medical doctor and editor
Ebrahim Rashidi (m), engineer

The two men named above are held in incommunicado detention, where they are at risk of torture and ill-treatment. They are possible prisoners of conscience, who may be detained solely on account of their peaceful activism for the rights of the Azeri Turk minority community in Iran.

Maharam Kamrani is a medical doctor and has been editor of *Oyanish* journal (meaning 'awakening' in Turkish) since he was a student. He was previously been arrested in June 2005 along with his brother Saleh Kamrani who is a lawyer and Human Rights Defender (HRD). Both were detained for three days before being released without charge. Ebrahim Rashidi was the publisher of another activist journal called *Bakush*, which was subsequently closed by the authorities.

Maharam Kamrani and Ebrahim Rashidi were arrested at one o'clock in the morning at a bus station in the city of Ahar in Azerbaijan province on 30 March. The day before, they along with other Azeri Turk activists had contacted the authorities in order to obtain a permit to hold a commemorative event on 31 March, which was denied. After they failed to return home, the men's families tried to find them. Intelligence agency officials (*Ettelaat*) confirmed that they had detained the men. Maharam Kamrani's younger brother Arsalan was ordered to attend the Intelligence agency office to present his brother's birth certificate. He too was arrested before being released on 31 March.

Saleh Kamrani presented himself at the Intelligence Agency office and submitted a visitation request and written request to represent his brother and Ebrahim Rashidi. He was threatened with imprisonment if he pursued his requests. Two other Azeri activists, Asgar Nouri and Jaber Mosavi, who went to the office of the Intelligence agency to enquire about Maharam Kamrani and Ebrahim Rashidi whereabouts were also arrested, but have since been released.

Maharam Kamrani and Ebrahim Rashidi have not had access to their family or lawyer since their arrest. The families have visited their place of detention on a daily basis asking to see them, but have been repeatedly threatened with arrest. On one occasion, Arsalan Kamrani caught a brief glimpse of the men in the courtyard, as they were being transferred to another detention facility. The men were chained together and handcuffed. On or around 2 April, the men were reportedly transferred from Ahar to Tabriz, to another detention facility run by the Intelligence agency. It is believed that they have not been charged.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Iranian Azeri Turks, who are mainly Shi'a Muslims, are the largest minority in Iran, believed to constitute between 25-30 per cent of the population. They are located mainly in the north and north-west of Iran. As Shi'a, they are not subject to the same kinds of discrimination as minorities of other religions, and are well-integrated into the economy, but there is a growing demand for greater cultural and linguistic rights, including implementation of their constitutional right to education through the medium of Turkish. A small minority advocate secession of Iranian Azerbaijan from the Islamic Republic of Iran and union with the Republic of Azerbaijan. Those who seek to promote Azeri Turkish cultural identity are viewed with suspicion by the Iranian authorities, who often accuse them of vague charges such as "promoting pan-Turkism".

At the end of June 2005, scores of Iranian Azeri Turks participating in an annual cultural gathering at Babek Castle in Kalayber were arrested. At least 21 were later sentenced to prison terms of between three months and one year, some of which were suspended, reportedly after conviction of charges such as "spreading propaganda against the system" and "establishing organizations against the system". Some were also banned from entering Kalayber for a period of 10 years. On 31 March 2006, scores were reportedly arrested after holding an annual commemorative demonstration in the city of Tabriz. Although some of the participants have been released, many are still detained without charge, or access to family and lawyer.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of Maharam Kamrani and Ebrahim Rashidi who are reportedly held in incommunicado detention at an Intelligence agency facility in city of Tabriz;
- calling for them to be given immediate access to lawyers of their choice and their family;
- seeking assurances that they are not being tortured or ill-treated in detention;
- expressing concern that the men appear to have been detained solely in connection with their peaceful activities for the rights of the Azeri Turk minority community;
- calling on the authorities to release the men immediately and unconditionally unless they are promptly charged with a recognizably criminal offence.

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

His Excellency
Ayatollah Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi
Ministry of Justice, Park-e Shahr,
Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran
Email: via Judiciary website at Iranjudiciary.org/feedback_en.html
Fax: + 98 21 6 640 4018 / 6 640 4019
Salutation: Your Excellency

COPIES TO:

Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic
His Excellency Ayatollah Sayed 'Ali Khamenei
The Office of the Supreme Leader
Shoahada Street, Qom, Islamic Republic of Iran
Fax: +98 251 7 774 2228 (mark "FAO the Office of His Excellency, Ayatollah al Udhma Khamenei")
Email: info@leader.ir or istiftaa@wilayah.org

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 24 May 2006.