

PUBLIC

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UA 137/07 Fear of torture or ill-treatment/ possible prisoner of conscience

IRAN Sa'id Metinpour (m), Azerbaijani cultural rights activist

Sa'id Metinpour, an advocate of linguistic and cultural rights for Iranians of Azerbaijani ethnicity, including their right to be educated in the Azerbaijani Turkic language, has not been seen since 25 May. He may be at risk of torture or ill-treatment. If he is detained, Amnesty International believes that he is a prisoner of conscience, detained solely for the peaceful expression of his beliefs.

A report on the Iranian Azerbaijani website *Haqqimiz* (Our Rights) stated that Sa'id Metinpour was detained in the city of Zenjan in western Iran around midnight on 25 May. A further report in Advar News, an online news service, indicated that Sa'id Metinpour and his wife, Atiye Taheri, were returning to their home when they were stopped by plain-clothed officials from the Ministry of Intelligence, who told them that they had arrest warrants for the couple. The officials reportedly showed Sa'id Metinpour and Atiye Taheri an arrest warrant which was not officially stamped and signed by a relevant official from the judiciary. The couple were then forced into a vehicle and blindfolded. They were apparently driven to an unknown location, where Sa'id Metinpour was taken out of the vehicle. Atiye Taheri was then driven to their home, accompanied by Ministry of Intelligence officials. On arrival at their home, the officials reportedly spent almost five hours searching through the couple's belongings, removing notebooks, cassette tapes and albums of family photographs. They then searched the home of Sa'id Metinpour's father, located in a flat above Sa'id Metinpour and Atiye Taheri's home. It is not known if they took anything from his home.

No further information about the apparent detention of Sa'id Metinpour is available to Amnesty International. Atiye Taheri has reportedly sought information about his whereabouts from the state prosecution and judiciary but was told by both that they are unaware of his case.

A statement issued by the National Movement of Azerbaijan – Zenjan (*Harakat-e Melli-ye Azerbaijan – Zenjan*) on 2 June claims that the authorities are putting pressure on local newspapers not to publicize information about the alleged arrest of Sa'id Metinpour and others (see update to UA 61/07, MDE 13/067/2007, 7 June 2007).

In February 2007, Sa'id Metinpour was detained for 10 days in connection with his participation in peaceful demonstrations commemorating International Mother Language Day, an annual event initiated by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) on 21 February. He was said to have had blood on his face when he was taken away, raising concern that he may have been assaulted by police. For more information, see: *Iran: Ethnic minorities facing new wave of human rights violations*, (MDE 13/020/2007, 26 February 2007): <http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engMDE130202007?open&of=eng-IRN>

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Iranian Azerbaijanis speak a Turkic language and are mainly Shi'a Muslims. The largest minority in Iran, they are believed to constitute between 25-30 per cent of the population and are located mainly in the north and north-west of Iran and in the capital, Tehran. There is a growing demand for greater cultural and linguistic rights in Iranian Azerbaijan, including implementation of their constitutional right to education through the medium of Azerbaijani Turkic. Those who seek to promote Azerbaijani Turkic cultural identity and linguistic rights are viewed with suspicion by the Iranian authorities.

Throughout May 2007, Iranian Azerbaijanis demonstrated to mark the first anniversary of protests against the publication in a national newspaper of a cartoon which was offensive to many Iranian Azerbaijanis. In the course of the May 2006 demonstrations, up to 19 individuals were reportedly killed and hundreds arrested.

During the May 2007 demonstrations, which asserted Azerbaijani linguistic and cultural rights, demonstrators shouted slogans such as “*Türk dilinde medrese olmalıdır her kese*” (Schooling in Azerbaijani Turkic for all). The events resulted in a considerable increase in tension in a range of the areas where Iranian Azerbaijanis live. The authorities have increased the security presence in mainly Azerbaijani cities and Amnesty International has received reports of scores of arrests, harassment of demonstrators and passers-by in cities such as Tabriz. According to the Committee for the Defence of Azerbaijani Political Prisoners (Azerbaycan Siyasi Mahpuslarını Müdafaası Komitesi, ASMEK) website, more than 500 political activists have been detained or have been the victims of enforced disappearance in recent weeks. On 7 May, the Minister of the Interior was summoned to parliament to respond to concerns over the use of force and violence against demonstrators, expressed by parliamentarians from Azerbaijani regions.

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

- expressing concern at the apparent enforced disappearance of Sa'id Metinpour;
- calling on the authorities to reveal his whereabouts immediately, and, if he is in custody, to grant him immediate and regular access to family members, to a lawyer of his choice, and to any medical treatment he may require;
- calling for assurances that he is being treated humanely and is not being tortured or ill-treated;
- stating that if Sa'id Metinpour is being detained solely as a result of the expression of his conscientiously held beliefs, he is a prisoner of conscience, who should be released immediately and unconditionally.

APPEALS TO:

Leader of the Islamic Republic

His Excellency Ayatollah Sayed 'Ali Khamenei, The Office of the Supreme Leader
Shoahada Street, Qom, Islamic Republic of Iran

Email: info@leader.ir, istiftaa@wilayah.org

Fax: +98 251 774 2228 (mark FAO Office of His Excellency Ayatollah al Udhma Khamenei)

Salutation: Your Excellency

President

His Excellency Mahmoud Ahmadinejad
The Presidency, Palestine Avenue, Azerbaijan Intersection, Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran

Email: dr-ahmadinejad@president.ir

via website: www.president.ir/email

Salutation: Your Excellency

COPIES TO:

Speaker of Parliament

His Excellency Gholamali Haddad Adel
Majles-e Shoura-ye Eslami, Baharestan Square, Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran

Fax: +98 21 3355 6408

Email: hadadadel@majlis.ir

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 19 July 2007.